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Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

**Exploring Emotions and Bilingual Identity with Adults
from Türkiye Living in Ireland
through Arts-based Research**

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Ebru Boynueğri



3rd March 2026

Mom, my Mumu... Though I can't see you, I always feel you beside me, sometimes within me.

Doğan and Derin, you may not know it yet, but you mean the world to your Auntie.

Abstract

Exploring Emotions and Bilingual Identity with Adults from Türkiye Living in Ireland through Arts-based Research

This Arts-based Research explores the emotions and bilingual identity of 22 participants, 21 adults from Türkiye living in Ireland who attended a bilingual storytelling performance based on *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and the performing artist. The performance, titled *The Fertile Crescent: Tales from the Orient*, was held on four separate occasions, each followed by a post-performance workshop facilitated by the researcher. The research asked the overarching question “How do individuals who are speakers of English as a second language construct their identities across linguistic, personal, social and cultural dimensions?”, explored through three sub-questions. Data was interpreted using creative data analysis, yielding seven themes. The first three themes focus on emotions: (1) *Barefoot in the biting, yet reviving waters*, (2) *Finding home in the world of the known*, and (3) *Finding home in the universe of the felt*. They address, respectively, (1) emotions as responses to English, (2) emotions as responses to Turkish, and (3) emotions as responses to a *requiem* sung in the play. The fourth and fifth theme focus on bilingual identity: (4) *Fractured selves in English speech* and (5) *Bilingual voices under pressure*. These themes address, respectively, (4) oral fluency and accent anxiety, and (5) translanguaging anxiety. Within the latter, I advance the concept of *Plaza Turkish Anxiety*. The sixth theme, (6) *Selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence*, focuses on sociocultural and personal selves. The seventh theme, (7) *Lotus of the atom, atom of the lotus*, considers *Professional Artist Identity* within sociocultural, personal and bilingual selves. To address the overarching question, these themes were knitted into six threads: language and emotion; language and identity; possible selves as a bilingual speaker; Professional Artist Identity; unlocking the chain ball: from language anxiety to creative empowerment; and identity exploration through Arts-based Research. The findings are further represented through three poems, one per sub-question. The artistic layers of this study are also enriched by its structure, which mirrors *The Epic of Gilgamesh* – a poetic work rich in metaphor. Some concepts are encapsulated through metaphors, such as bilingualism compared to Humbaba, a character from the epic, the awe-inspiring guardian of the Cedar Forest, a figure whose presence inspires both fear and wonder, anxiety and empowerment. The study also suggests that fear and anxiety related to bilingualism can be reimaged by the perceived creative use of language.

Summary

This PhD research investigates emotions and bilingual identity with a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland. The study employs Arts-based Research (AbR) in data construction, alongside Research-based Theatre, Language Portraits, focus groups and individual interviews. In her bilingual storytelling performance, the artist weaves together *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, an ancient myth, with her own personal anecdotes. The myth consists of eleven chapters and an appendix. Similarly, the thesis mirrors this structure by using the tablets as analogies for introduction of each chapter. The theoretical frameworks guiding this research include bilingualism with a particular attention to the relationship between emotions and identity (Dewaele, 2008; Garcia & Li Wei, 2014; Kramsch, 2009), Eisner's (1997) principles of Arts-based Research, and Brown's (2021) emotions' groupings. Within this framework, the study deeply examines emotions, both conscious and unconscious ones. The findings are articulated in seven themes; constructed through creative data analysis, complemented by poetic inquiry, and represented through three poems. The research conceptualises two novel terms: *Plaza Turkish Anxiety*, a form of translanguaging anxiety, and *Professional Artist Identity*, an identity positioned within the multiple dynamics a performing artist negotiates in her professional practice. Poetic Inquiry and Research-based Theatre also inform the dissemination phase, with the crafted poems to be performed, alongside the Afterword.

The study recommends the strategic use of listeners' first language, which can empower individuals who navigate an additional language in daily interactions or learning environments. Furthermore, it highlights the affordances of the arts in both facilitating communication and deepening understanding of complex psychological phenomena. Employing Language Portraits as a tool for post-performance exploration offers a novel contribution to the literature, particularly by enabling the examination of immediate emotional experiences. Likewise, facilitating a bilingual storytelling theatre performance as a pretext (O'Neill, 1995) for understanding emotions and identity, and eliciting responses through multiple art forms, further enriches the field.

Acknowledgements



This photo shows my desk in the Long Room Hub, TCD. On it sits a beautiful plant – once tiny and fragile when I first found it on my desk – in the small pot shown in the photo. Its new, lovely home was originally a gift from Yağmur Duran and once held a poinsettia, known in Turkish as the Atatürk flower, named in honour of the great founder of the Republic of Türkiye. When I found the plant, I had no idea it would evolve into such a gorgeous specimen. As I watered it, I watched it flourish. During my absences – whether for a few days or even a year – my friends Nemo Castelli, S.J. and Mnemosyne Rice lovingly cared for it. When pests appeared, Dr Alastair Daly placed small stones at the bottom of the pot. I owe its beauty to the collective care of these wonderful people. As the plant grew taller and began to lean, I supported it with a pencil. It has now more than doubled in size since this photo, thriving in a much bigger pot in my study room at home, with its babies already finding new homes.

This plant is akin to my thesis. My project emerged unexpectedly, beginning as a tentative, fleeting idea. Since then, it has blossomed and come to life with the guidance of many remarkable people, who have assisted me in many ways. Thanks to their contributions, it has grown, gaining strength and depth with each step forward. Just as the baby plants now thrive in new homes, my PhD journey is ready to extend its reach to others.

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List of Abbreviations

AbR	Arts-based Research
AH	Arts and Humanities
ELT	English Language Teaching
L1	First language
LP	Language Portraits
LX	Additional language
p	Perceived
PAI	Professional Artist Identity
PTA	Plaza Turkish Anxiety
RbT	Research-based Theatre
SEC	Stimulus Evaluation Checks
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TL	Translanguaging
UL	University of Limerick

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Foreword

[...] This is showing me weak. I hate it. There's an inherent power dynamic with him and me when I am speaking English, my voice goes even weaker. The tension in this power distance, my romantic interest in him, my panic in speaking English, especially feeling messed up in "appropriateness", practicality and whatever it is in a quick chat...[...] When he said "sorry" about it, I just started rambling. I couldn't just say "not at all!" It was all! With my weak voice I rambled. He didn't understand, asked me to repeat. Second round of weak rambles. Humiliating myself. Awww ☹

[...] He heard me talking to my therapist today [in Turkish], I noticed, he paid attention. Saw the different woman. Now he must know I'm not that unconfident, insecure, weak girl. He knows I have a different voice. I'm not the one when I'm speaking English unconfidently. You know Mike had already noticed it, although I was way more comfortable talking with him. Mike said I sounded like a totally different woman when I was singing in Turkish.

Ebru Boynueğri, July 2024

The two excerpts above, drawn from my personal diary on separate days, were written toward the submission of this thesis. They reflect my thoughts as I contemplated my romantic aspirations during this period. I found myself drawn to my own linguistic journey, in the realm of bilingual identity. This exploration was not an outcome of having insights about the issue through the end of my PhD journey, but rather a deeply ingrained curiosity that had been with me for a significant period. The complexities and nuances of navigating multiple languages, especially as a late bilingual individual, resonate profoundly with my own encounters and interactions in various contexts. As I embarked on my PhD research journey, I grappled with the notion that our academic pursuits often reflect our personal struggles and unanswered questions. This concept is not unfamiliar to me, having observed a recurring pattern in my previous academic endeavours. From examining cross-cultural refusal strategies (Boynueğri, 2018a), to delving into the complexities of identity formation and acculturation in young adults (Boynueğri, 2018b; Boynueğri & Şener, 2021), each study seemed to mirror aspects of my own internal conflicts and growth. Now, as I explore emotions and bilingual identity, I find myself not only engaging with external narratives but also embarking on a journey of self-discovery – examining my own meanings, deeply informed by my background as a researcher, as discussed below.

My Background as a Researcher

This PhD research is rooted in my diverse academic background, experience personal aspirations. With a bachelor's and master's degrees in English Language Teaching (ELT), I specialised in applied linguistics, particularly in pragmatics, through my master's thesis in ELT (Boynueğri, 2018a). My second master's degree in Educational Psychology focusing on acculturation and identity, provided insights into the psychological dimensions central to being a migrant student in a new country (Boynueğri, 2018b; Boynueğri & Şener, 2021). Additionally, my training in Drama in Education underscores my commitment to arts-based educational methodologies and their application in research contexts.

Beyond academic credentials, my personal journey as a woman from Türkiye, now living in Ireland, profoundly influences my research interests. I am attuned to the sophisticated processes of identity construction, deconstruction reconstruction in bilingual and multicultural environments. This awareness manifests in everyday situations, when I speak English or Turkish, when others react to my appearance or accent in moments like overhearing Turkish spoken unexpectedly. Teaching English at a language centre in Dublin also brings out these facets of identity, with Turkish students calling me *Hocam** or questions of my colleagues or students about the cultural practices and politics in my country.

My name, *Ebru*, holds particular significance in this narrative. Every time its meaning is asked, my identity springs forth. *Ebru* is the Turkish art of marbling, where the artist sprinkles paints on a container of dense water, transforming them into mesmerising patterns before transferring them onto paper. Therefore, *Ebru* is a transformation: sprinkles turning into patterns, patterns being transferred to a paper, fluid evolving into concrete. Similarly, my identity evolves through interactions and adaptations. In the same vein, my PhD

* In Turkish, *Hoca* traditionally refers to a teacher, religious scholar or a wise individual, particularly in Islamic contexts. In modern usage, it commonly denotes a respected educator, professor or mentor, especially in academic or teaching settings.

research aims to explore how bilingual individuals navigate their fluid identities in bilingual contexts.

And emotions... My sister bears the name *Duygu* – the very word for *emotion* itself in Turkish. From the very start, her presence has been a gentle current of feeling that surrounded me – sometimes as an equal, since she is only one year older, but more often as a much older sister whose care felt almost maternal. In my family, *Ebru* and *Duygu* were ever-present forces: the art of transformation and the pulse of emotion – spoken, felt lived dozens, if not hundreds, of times a day – shaping the contours of my self.

Amidst these prenatal influences, this thesis comes into being. In the following chapters, I unpack every detail, beginning with Introduction.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This PhD project embarks on an exploration of emotions and bilingual identity among 22 adults from Türkiye living in Ireland, through Arts-based Research (Eisner, 2004; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2020). The research delves into the emotions evoked by a bilingual storytelling performance, *The Fertile Crescent: Tales from the Orient*, and illuminates insights into emotions and bilingual identity construction. This arts-based approach also finds its echoes in the structure of the thesis. The dissertation is structured around a central metaphor, using *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to shape both the overall structure and its various strands, such as being used as an analogy to each chapter. Just as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* artistically opens with the description of a powerful yet complex king, a “magnificent and terrible” divine and human (George, 2000, p. 2), this introductory chapter presents the complex layers of the thesis.

In Tablet I of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh is introduced as a great and tyrant king who is a two-thirds divine and one-third human. The citizens cry out to the gods for relief. In response, the sky god Anu creates a counterpart to Gilgamesh: Enkidu, a wild man of animal strength. Enkidu is discovered by a hunter who is frightened by his wild power and seeks help from his father, who advises to seek Shamhat, a temple prostitute,* to deal with Enkidu. Shamhat seduces Enkidu after a prolonged sexual encounter lasting six days and seven nights, he loses his wildness, being tamed. Then the animals reject him he becomes self-aware. Later on, Shamhat teaches him how to eat bread, drink beer dress like a human.

*Although the epic refers to Shamhat as a temple prostitute, the modern understanding of this term differs significantly. In many ancient cultures predating modern religions, sexual intimacy was often seen not as taboo but as a divine and sacred act. Shamhat, while taking away some of the powers Enkidu had, also taught him intimacy and connection, transforming him to his better self, through this divine act (George, 2000).

She also speaks to him of Gilgamesh's tyranny and invites him to Uruk, suggesting that Enkidu could challenge the king.

In the epic, Enkidu is created by the gods in response to the people's pleas: wild, strong untamed. Likewise, the methodological and epistemological approaches of this thesis, namely Arts-based Research (AbR) and interpretivism, are introduced here as sources of strength, sometimes carrying their own productive wildness. By embedding the research within these approaches, the thesis creates space for nuanced engagement with emotional experience and bilingual identity.

Like Shamhat transforms Enkidu, initiating his journey from wilderness to self-awareness, this chapter outlines the analogies and metaphors that guide a transformation in Western approaches in data interpretation and presentation, as well as the deliberate linguistic choices that shape the thesis. These choices not only resonate with AbR principles but also reflects my own quest as a writer for meaning, expression deeper understanding. More importantly, they also consciously resist the expectations of dominant Western ideologies, echoing Enkidu's own will to challenge the tyrant Gilgamesh. Moreover, this framework aligns with translanguaging theory (Canagarajah, 2011; Lee, 2022; Li Wei, 2020), which underpins the study's conceptual foundation by resisting monolingual assumptions and embracing the fluid, complex nature of bilingualism, once again embodying both transformation and resistance, much like Enkidu's journey. On this fertile ground for exploration and presentation, the storytelling theatre piece *The Fertile Crescent: Tales from the Orient* is the backbone of the study. The features of the performance are discussed below.

1.2 The Fertile Crescent

This research centres on a storytelling theatre performance titled *The Fertile Crescent: Tales from the Orient*, a 75-minute piece based on *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000), a narrative poem considered as one of the oldest literary works in human history. The piece was performed by a professional artist, Dr Senem Donatan Mohan, from Türkiye. In this show Senem narrates the ancient myth, intertwining it with her personal anecdotes. A scene from the performance is shown in Figure 1.1, which includes an embedded link in

the caption to the video recording on Senem's YouTube channel, reproduced in full with her permission. The reader may want to watch the full performance, [here](#).

In 2021, I discovered *The Fertile Crescent* through a post by Senem to invite audience to her performance, in a WhatsApp group called *İrlanda'daki Kadınlar* (Women in Ireland), created specifically to connect Turkish-speaking women living in Ireland. My supervisor, Dr Erika Piazzoli, and I attended the performance at the Mermaid Arts Centre in Bray, Dublin. Experiencing it live ultimately brought this research to life.



Figure 1.1. *The Fertile Crescent performance* from Senem's YouTube Channel.

Using this performance as a springboard, I elicited responses from the audience member research participants through post-performance workshops and individual interviews to address the research aims and questions, as shared below.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

In this research, I aimed to explore emotions and bilingual identity in adults from Türkiye living in Ireland. I was curious to understand how the participants constructed their bilingual identities within their personal, social, cultural realms, through a qualitative, Arts-

based Research methodology (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2020). Building on these foundations, the study asks:

How do individuals who are speakers of English as a second language construct their identities across linguistic, personal, social and cultural dimensions?

This was operationalised through three sub-questions:

1. How did a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland emotionally respond to the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent*?
2. What aspects of identity were revealed in a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland engaging with the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent*?
3. How does *The Fertile Crescent*'s storyteller artist construct her identity through her performances?

These questions were addressed by inviting the audience of *The Fertile Crescent* to a post-performance workshop, conducted immediately after the performance. The research methods employed during the post-performance workshops included Language Portraits (LPs), drawings used to visualise the languages spoken by participants (analysed in Chapter Six); role plays, based on participants' significant moments in the theatre (analysed in Chapter Seven); and focus group reflections, including discussions on the LPs and role plays. Additionally, participants took part in individual interviews, conducted approximately two months after the performance. The underlying methodological and epistemological foundations are discussed in the following section.

1.4 Methodological Approach

This transdisciplinary study encompasses applied linguistics, psychology, semiotics and the arts. I addressed the questions through an Arts-based Research framework (Eisner, 1997, 2004; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Greenwood, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2019; Leavy, 2017, 2020; Piazzoli, 2024), specifically drawing upon Research-based Theatre (Belliveau & Lea, 2011; Conrad, 2012; Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008; Lea & Belliveau, 2023) and Poetic Inquiry (Faulkner, 2019; Prendergast, 2009). I interpreted the data through an interpretivist paradigm (Geertz, 1973; Given, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Haberman,

1971; Heidegger, 1962; Lichterman, 2017), which acknowledges multiple realities, while making it imperative to practise reflexivity and maintain transparency. Reflexivity involves not only positional reflexivity – attending to personal characteristics such as race, age, culture or gender, but also interpretative reflexivity, concerning theoretical or conceptual biases (Lichterman, 2017). Thus, achieving reflexivity is not straightforward (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002).

This was especially true for me regarding positional reflexivity, which I initially found particularly challenging. My insider role occasionally led me to overlook details I assumed were obvious, revealing blind spots I had not intended. However, as the study progressed, my engagement with the data through analogies, metaphors and the arts became a reflexive lens, as discussed in Chapters Four and Ten. The analogies and metaphors used in the thesis echo those in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which also finds a parallel here through the thesis's very structure. These are presented in the following section.

1.5 Analogies and Metaphors in the Thesis

I structured this thesis around analogies and organised the themes through metaphors. At the start of each chapter, the introduction draws on themes from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* as analogies to signpost the key points that will be explored throughout the chapter. This approach aims not only to add artistic layers that goes beyond a conventional thesis format but also to invite readers to engage with the material on a deeper level, fostering more profound meaning-making. This structural strategy is detailed in detail in Section 1.7 of this chapter.

Moreover, mirroring *The Epic of Gilgamesh*'s profound and layered use of metaphors, this thesis employs metaphors to represent the central themes developed through the research. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* – one of humanity's oldest known works of literature – weaves together journeys, trials and transformations, each laden with symbolic meanings that continue to resonate as universal aspects of human existence. In a similar way, this thesis traces a journey through lived experience, emotion and identity, using metaphor to illuminate complexities that literal language alone may not fully convey. As such, thesis

presents its themes through a series metaphors. Moreover, some concepts are encapsulates through metaphorical characters in the Gilgamesh myth, such as bilingualism compared to Humbaba, the awe-inspiring guardian of the distant Cedar Forest, a figure whose presence inspires both fear and wonder. Like Humbaba, inspiring both fear and wonder, the study positions bilingualism as a phenomenon bringing both anxiety and empowerment.

1.6 Language of the Thesis

In this study, I aim to be mindful of my language, echoing the sensitivity required in Arts-based Research (AbR). This approach also aligns with the concept of translanguaging, which challenges traditional negative labels associated with language (Lee, 2022). Similar to how translanguaging rejects terms such as ‘native-like’ ‘proficient,’ and ‘competent’, I intentionally avoid using these labels throughout my research. The only exception occurs when participants explicitly use terms like ‘competent’ or ‘incompetent’ in their reflections. In such cases, I retain these terms in verbatim translations and later refer to them in discussions as ‘*perceived* incompetence.’ Instead, I describe participants’ relationships with the language as ‘highly experienced’, ‘experienced’ or ‘less experienced’ users of English.

I use the term ‘first language’, as the alternative terms ‘native language’ can imply a monolingual perspective; ‘native language’ might carry assumptions about one’s native land being Türkiye, also may reinforce monolingual bias; ‘heritage language’ often evokes notions of ancestry and cultural legacy, alongside the concerns about preservation; ‘language of origin’ emphasises roots at the expense of inclusivity; ‘home language’ may suggest that home is an origin to be departed from rather than a space of belonging; and ‘mother tongue’ introduces gender-based assumptions and again a monolingual viewpoint. Likewise, I use ‘additional language’ when referring to English, as alternatives such as ‘second language’ may assume a fixed sequence and hierarchy that position the first language as primary and dominant; ‘foreign language’ implies distance or non-belonging; ‘target language’ frames the language in a goal-oriented, mechanical space; ‘majority language’ foregrounds societal dominance rather than individual experience; and ‘primary

language’ may shift the focus to linguistic domination, altering nature of multilingual practice.

Furthermore, it is important to clarify that references to emotions such as fear, anxiety, worry, shyness, embarrassment or distress in this study are not intended to signify clinical diagnoses. The experiences shared by participants reflect everyday emotional responses that subtly shaped their choices, attitudes and perceptions at particular moments. Although these responses occasionally influenced routines, they were neither described nor interpreted as causing marked or lasting disruption to daily functioning. However, these reflections indicate that such emotional patterns are persistent rather than isolated, suggesting the possibility of longer-term, more serious effects if they become more entrenched.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

Structurally, this thesis mirrors *The Epic of Gilgamesh*’s eleven tablets, comprising eleven chapters, each representing a distinct facet of the inquiry process and an Afterword, mirroring Tablet XII, the Appendix of the myth.

In Tablet I of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000), the main characters and setting are introduced, laying the foundation for the epic journey ahead. Similarly, in this first chapter I introduced the core of this study by briefly sharing its aim and questions, methodological approach, analogies and metaphors, language and structure.

In the upcoming chapter, Chapter Two, I discuss key concepts of this study through a literature review delving into emotions, identity and storytelling, by expanding on specific elements in each concept. In Chapter Three, I explore the theoretical framework grounded in key literature on emotions, identity and Arts-based Research (AbR) that underpins this study. I begin by presenting Brené Brown’s (2021) grouping of emotions, with particular focus on those observed in the data. Next, I examine identity construction within the context of migration, drawing on pivotal concepts discussed in Chapter Two. Following this, I introduce Elliot Eisner’s (1997, 1998, 2002, 2004) insights into AbR which informed this

study. I close by providing a synthesis of these elements, considering Brown's (2021) work in relation to bilingual identity and storytelling.

In Chapter Four, I detail the methodology employed in the research, starting with interpretivist paradigm, qualitative research and AbR. I then present the participants and data construction methods, with a specific focus on Research-based Theatre and Poetic Inquiry. Later, I expand the discussion on ethics and sensitive research, followed by a detailed section on data analysis and interpretation. In Chapter Five, I introduce the artist and the performance, situating them within the cultural meanings drawn from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. I also outline the plot and describe the venues that possibly shaped how Senem's story was experienced.

I present the findings in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. In Chapter Six, I address the first sub-question, focusing on the participants' drawings (Language Portraits), as responses to the bilingual storytelling performance. The chapter also discusses an unexpected mode of communication that emerged in the focus groups as a universal language, a *requiem* sung by the storyteller. In Chapter Seven, I address the second sub-question by presenting findings on the bilingual, sociocultural and personal identities. I first explore the bilingual identity constructed amid oral fluency anxiety, accent anxiety and translanguaging anxiety, along with the accompanying avoidance behaviours associated with each type of anxiety. I then discuss the evidence of sociocultural and personal selves, as portrayed in the role plays created by the participants. Chapter Eight delves into the third sub-question, centring on professional artist identity. In this chapter, I share insights gleaned from the interview with Senem, the performing artist, illuminating the key themes that emerged during our discussion.

In Chapter Nine, I bring together the themes and knit them together into six threads, which elicits as a response to the overarching question. I also revisit the two seminal concepts advanced in the study, *Turkish Plaza Anxiety* and *Professional Artist Identity*. Chapter Ten provides a Reflexive Coda, where I reflect on the artistic forms of presentation I used, which became both a reflexive tool and a creative way to interpret the data. In Chapter

Eleven, I summarise key findings and discuss implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.

The thesis closes with an Afterword, where I move beyond the conventional boundaries of academic writing to explore the reflective space where life and research intertwine. References and Appendices close the dissertation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the literature that underpins this study. The main areas of focus include an exploration of emotions, identity and storytelling. The discussion of emotions covers their structures and functions, while identity is first examined through social and cultural dimensions, which are closely linked to bilingual identity. After expanding on bilingual identity and its connections to translanguaging and emotions (Dewaele & Li Wei, 2014; Kramsch, 2006; Kramsch & Zhang 2018; Pavlenko, 2006, 2012), I introduce the notion of ‘possible selves’ (Gregg, 2011; Elder, 1980; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Horowitz, 2023; Shaalan, 2024; Smorti, 2011). The final key construct explored in this chapter is storytelling, examined through its functions, aesthetics and role as a collective craft and a medium for identity exploration.

Tablet II of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000) tells of the moment when two powerful figures meet, clash and transform. As Enkidu approaches Uruk with Shamhat, he learns of Gilgamesh’s abuses of power, including his intent to exercise the ‘right of the first night’ with a bride. Enraged, Enkidu blocks the palace doors and the two men engage in a fierce battle that shakes the city’s walls. Though Gilgamesh prevails, he is moved by Enkidu’s strength and courage. The confrontation gives way to mutual respect and the two form an unbreakable bond, bound by shared ambition.

Humbaba, the awe-inspiring guardian of the distant Cedar Forest and loyal servant of the god Enlil, is a figure whose presence inspires both fear and wonder. Seeking to prove their strength and win everlasting renown, the two heroes vow to journey to the Cedar Forest and challenge him in a contest that will test their courage and define their legacy. This marks the beginning of their first great quest together – a journey woven from themes of friendship, glory and the inevitable shadow of fear and mortality.

Like the progression from initial sharp boundaries between Gilgamesh and Enkidu to alliance, this literature review discusses theories from psychology, bilingualism and the arts. Rather than treating them as separate entities, these theories can be framed as intertwined forces shaped by personal histories, cultural contexts and linguistic practices. And just as Enkidu comes to admire Gilgamesh's complexity, research on identity and bilingualism recognises the richness of complex linguistic, social, cultural and personal backgrounds, fertile ground for transformation, especially when considered through the lens of 'possible selves' (Gregg, 2011; Elder, 1980; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Horowitz, 2023; Shaalan, 2024; Smorti, 2011) in the context of migration. On this basis, emotions are ignited, negotiated and reshaped, continuously shaping the evolving sense of self through dynamic interaction with past experiences, present circumstances and future aspirations, all influenced by versatile forces, echoing the fight at Uruk's gates: points of friction that hold the potential for synthesis and growth. Among these forces, emotions hold a particularly profound place, so I shall start from here.

2.2 Emotions

Emotions are complex. Defining them is challenging due to their multifaceted nature, encompassing psychological, cultural, social and personal dimensions. Gross (2002) conceptualises emotions as multi-componential processes that unfold over time, each possessing distinct structures and functions (Izard, 2010; Sampson, 2023). Emotions may operate consciously or unconsciously, influencing well-being in both cases and are always embedded within sociocultural contexts. This complexity becomes even more pronounced in bilingual communication, where linguistic, social, cultural and personal factors intersect in intricate ways. Understanding the structures (how emotions are formed) and functions (how they regulate experience and convey meaning) is therefore essential to grasp the richness of human life. The following sections examines these structures and functions in detail.

2.2.1 Structures of Emotions

Emotions have structures, referring to interconnected yet distinct systems that organise emotional experiences. Izard (2010) identifies six such structures: neural systems, response systems, feelings and feeling states, expressive behaviour and signalling, cognitive appraisal and cognitive interpretation of feeling states. Some of these structures are closely interrelated: response systems, neural systems and feelings influence one another, as emotions can both generate and be generated by neural responses and feelings arise from emotional experiences. Similarly, cognitive appraisal and cognitive interpretation are linked, since appraisal provides the context that shapes how feelings are interpreted, guiding understanding and behavioural responses. Because of these functional interconnections, the discussion below considers neural systems, response systems and feelings together, as well as cognitive appraisal and interpretation together. Expressive behaviour and signalling, however, is treated separately, as it primarily reflects the outward manifestation of emotion rather than the internal processing described by the other structures.

2.2.1.1 Response Systems, Including Neural Responses and Feelings

Neural systems include structures such as the amygdala and prefrontal cortex, which serve as the key biological foundations for both activating and regulating emotional processing (LeDoux, 1998; Morawetz et al., 2019). These neural systems interact with response systems, which shape cognitive, emotional, physiological and behavioural responses, highlighting the need to distinguish these systems while recognising their interconnections (Campbell & Ehlert, 2012). Similarly, feelings and feeling states differ: feelings refer to discrete, consciously experienced emotions in response to specific conditions, while feeling states represent the overall emotional context shaped by multiple immediate factors (Iversen et al., 2000). Within feeling states, the proto-self – a foundational, pre-conscious, moment-by-moment self-representation – responds to changing stimuli, laying the groundwork for personal identity (Damasio, 1999). This understanding of the proto-self and its responsiveness sets the stage for examining expressive behaviour and signalling, which is discussed in the following section.

2.2.1.2 Expressive Behaviour and Signalling

Within the internal experiences discussed above, there is an outward display of emotions: expressive behaviour and signalling. In the structure of emotions, expressive behaviour refers to the physical expressions, such as facial expressions, body language and use of voice, which facilitates communication by sending visible emotional information about oneself (Argyle, 2013). This is not to simply say emotions are first expressed internally, then lead to a bodily change; the direction can be otherwise, simultaneous or complementary (Barrett & Lindquist, 2008). This dual process is present also in Stimulus Evaluation Checks (SEC) – cognitive processes that assess environmental stimuli, initiating specific activity patterns in various bodily subsystems (Leventhal & Scherer, 1987). These SEC patterns, in relation to cognitive appraisal and cognitive interpretation of feelings are discussed below.

2.2.1.3 Cognitive Appraisal and Cognitive Interpretation of Feelings

Cognitive appraisal is the main determinant of the processes through which the significance and meaning of a situation is assessed and emotions are shaped by this evaluation, influencing how individuals respond to their experiences (Lazarus, 1991). Clore and Ortony (2000) argue that cognitive appraisal is fundamental and is always involved in emotional responses. However, cognitive appraisal at a conscious level is not always predominant or even present in emotional responses. In other words, there are instances where automatic or latent emotional responses emerge without conscious cognitive involvement, particularly in survival situations. For example, in his seminal work Paul Ekman (1992) discusses basic emotions as universal, evolutionarily rooted, biological and innate reactions originally developed to ensure survival when faced with threats, which later evolved to function in social interactions. Focusing on fear, an essential response and basic emotion for survival, LeDoux (1998) argues that sensory information can trigger a rapid response, without involvement of a cognitive process, such as conscious awareness or reflection. These reactions can even reach to physical and/or physiological levels, such as jumping upon seeing a snake. These automatic, reflex emotional responses can be suppressed with

conscious cognition, in the example of first perceiving a shadow as a fear-inducing phenomenon, but before running away, processing the 'shadow' through conscious cognition, which eventually helps to mitigate fear (Iversen et al., 2020). In the first example, appraisal is not conscious, as the rapid response to sensory information bypasses cognitive processing and results in an instinctual reaction, while in the second example, appraisal involves conscious cognition.

In conscious appraisal, which involves a deliberate assessment of stimuli, individuals actively reflect on the stimuli's significance and potential outcomes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Conscious appraisal plays a crucial role in the formation of feelings and corresponding feeling states because it involves the active interpretation of a situation or the object, which is later consciously experienced as an emotional reaction (Lazarus, 1991; Shuman & Scherer, 2014). This feeling and the resulting feeling state represent immediate and conscious emotional experiences. These experiences are distinct from broader and longer-term emotional states (Lindquist et al., 2012), which are described as the affective experiences resulting from an individual's appraisal of their circumstances, influenced by social-psychological and personality factors (Smith & Lazarus, 1990).

The distinction between unconscious and conscious aspects may contribute to the broader and deeper nature of emotional states compared to feelings states, as the latter are more immediately perceptible and surface-level. Emotional states often require deeper self-exploration, whereas feelings states are more directly experienced and expressed. However, appraisal of the construal in the evaluation their significance for personal well-being, have direct causal impact on the emotional state (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). When the appraisal of a situation is positive, it can foster the building of resources in an individual with resilience, optimism and adaptive coping strategies, enhancing their ability to manage future challenges effectively (Fredrickson, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2003).

A negative appraisal, on the other hand, can trigger a fight-or-flight response (Sapolsky, 2004; Scheff, 2007; Shuman & Scherer, 2014). If a person repeatedly appraises a stimulus as threatening, whether consciously or unconsciously, an emotional or feeling state of

anxiety can be experienced (Bargh, 2014). Because unconscious appraisals are deeply rooted and operate outside of conscious awareness, their negative impact on emotional states can be more difficult to reverse. In contrast, negative conscious appraisals are generally easier to modify through deliberate reflection and cognitive interventions (Gross, 1998). Whether in the feeling state or emotional state, anxiety can lead to avoidance, where the higher anxiety may correspond to higher avoidance (Bardeen et al, 2014; Doherty-Torstrick et al., 2016).

In addition to the structures discussed in this section, emotions serve functional roles, some of which are closely linked to the structures described above. These functions are examined in detail in the following section.

2.2.2 Functions of Emotions

Emotions have functions that are evident within the structures discussed in Section 2.2.1 above. For example, they recruit response systems, motivate cognition and action, organise and coordinate responses, monitor or assess the significance of events, provide information and regulate behaviour (Izard, 2010). Emotions also serve critical cultural functions, which can vary across cultural contexts (Izard, 2010; Sampson, 2023), as well as social functions, since culture is inherently social.

Although emotions are universal, culture can determine the goals while the individual is reflecting and reinforcing cultural norms in social and physical environments (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). Experiences within a cultural context create perceptual expectations, known as *perceptual sets*, and these influence how a person interprets sensory information, making certain interpretations more likely and efficient (Krumov & Larsen, 2013). These sets can differ across cultural groups, leading to distinct sensory and perceptual patterns (Krumov & Larsen, 2013). Similarly, emotions are shaped by cultural norms and values, guiding how people respond to different situations and interact with others (Krumov & Larsen, 2013; Leonard et al., 2022). As individuals learn to focus on culturally relevant stimuli and develop preferences for certain sensory experiences, culture deeply influences how we perceive the world and emotionally respond to it (Shiraev & Levy, 2020). Among these

culturally shaped emotional responses, below I particularly focus on shame and guilt as they are related to anxiety, which is observed extensively in bilingual identity research, as well as in this study.

2.2.2.1 Cross-cultural Meanings of Shame and Guilt

The cultural dimension of emotions is evident in many cross-cultural studies (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992; Mesquita, 2022; Shaver & Schwartz, 1992; Shiraev & Levy, 2020; Scherer et al., 1986; Travaglino & Moon, 2021). Particularly shame and guilt, two pivotal emotions in anxiety, are experienced differently across cultures, reflecting varying social norms and values. In individualistic cultures, where autonomy and independence of the individuals are prioritised over group cohesion (Hofstede, 1980), shame is primarily related to personal exposure and the fear of judgment by others, emphasising the importance of maintaining a positive self-image and personal reputation (Wallbott & Scherer, 1995). Here, shame arises from concerns about how one's actions reflect on oneself as an individual, rather than on the group, highlighting the personal focus of social evaluation. Conversely, in collectivist cultures, where group bonds and interests are more important than personal goals or preferences (Hofstede, 1980), shame extends beyond individual failings to include the impact on significant in-groups, such as family or community. This type of shame involves a sense of failing to meet collective expectations and dishonouring the group, reflecting a deeper concern with maintaining group cohesion and honour (Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Lin & Yamaguchi, 2011).

There is ongoing discussion about the origins of the feeling of shame (Brown, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2021; Daniels & Robinson, 2019). It is debated whether shame arises when an individual perceives they have failed to meet a standard in front of actual, socially visible people or through an imagined, generalised other that represents broader collective social judgment (Leary, 2007). In this context, the term *collective* refers to shared social standards or judgments that influence an individual's emotional experience. It highlights how societal or cultural norms shape one's perception of failure or deviation from expected behaviour, particularly contributing to the experience of shame in collectivist cultures. Like shame, guilt is experienced differently across cultures. In individualistic cultures, guilt often arises

from a perceived violation of personal moral standards, regardless of public recognition (Tangney & Dearing, 2003). However, in collectivist cultures, guilt can be associated with a failure to fulfil duties or expectations towards the group, reflecting the interconnectedness of personal actions and group responsibilities (Tangney et al., 2007). As a result, experiencing shame and guilt varies significantly across cultural contexts, influencing anxiety in different ways.

In individualistic cultures, shame often heightens social anxiety by increasing fears of personal judgment and rejection (Leary, 2007). Conversely, in collectivist cultures, guilt can lead to anxiety through concerns about failing to meet communal expectations and persistent rumination on moral transgressions (Tangney et al., 2007). Given the impact of shame and guilt on anxiety (Brown, 2021; Gilbert, 2010) understanding these cross-cultural differences and recognising emotional norms become important. The emotional norms across cultures are discussed below.

2.2.2.2 Emotional Norms Across Cultures

In addition to the cross-cultural meanings attached to emotions, norms, in other words culturally specific rules, shape individual emotional experiences (Eid & Diener, 2001). Social expectations also govern emotions, such as the norm of ‘being sad at a funeral’ (Hochschild, 1979). Associations tied to emotions can likewise differ across cultures, for example, the perception of anger as a weakness in some Western contexts (Smith et al., 2016). In many individualistic cultures, emotions like pride and happiness are highly valued and openly expressed as markers of personal success and fulfilment. By contrast, Eastern collectivist cultures may view pride with ambivalence, encouraging humility and valuing emotional expressions that foster social harmony, such as shared happiness or restrained joy (Kitayama et al., 2000; Uchida et al., 2004).

Similarly, sadness is expressed differently across cultures. For example, while it may be publicly displayed and ritualised in Mediterranean and West Asian cultures, Northern European cultures often emphasise emotional restraint, leading to more private expressions of sadness (Eid & Diener, 2001; Rosenblatt, 2011). The expression of fear also varies across

cultures: Latin American cultures tend to acknowledge fear more openly as a way to seek support, while many Asian cultures may discourage overt displays of fear to preserve social standing (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). Moreover, romantic love, celebrated and idealised in Western cultures, is often expressed more privately in traditional Indian and South Asian contexts, where it is intertwined with familial duty and social expectations (Hatfield & Rapson, 2011; Roland, 1988). Lastly, while shame is a powerful social emotion in both Western and Asian cultures, it is more closely tied to collective identity and societal expectations in East Asian cultures, as discussed in the previous section, where public shaming serves as a tool for social control (Liem, 1997; Tangney & Dearing, 2003).

Distinction between discrete and simultaneous experiences of pleasant and unpleasant feelings can also vary across cultures. Shiraev and Levy (2020) suggest that Western cultures tend to experience emotions as discrete and short-lived, while in Eastern cultures, pleasant and unpleasant feelings can coexist in a mutually dependent and balanced manner. This observation aligns with the emphasis on individual independence in individualistic cultures and the central role of harmonious coexistence with others in collectivist cultures. Lastly, the cross-cultural meanings of shame and guilt discussed above illustrate how social norms shape emotional experience. In collectivist cultures, the shared expectation of maintaining group harmony determines both the feeling and its display, such as showing shame or guilt when social norms are violated. In contrast, in individualistic cultures, these emotions are often regulated internally, grounded in personal moral standards rather than direct social enforcement. These dynamics are highly relevant to educational settings, as discussed in the following section.

2.2.2.3 Emotions in Cross-cultural Educational Settings

Similar to cross-cultural differences observed across societies, classrooms, as smaller social groups within those societies, can reflect diverse emotional meanings and norms. Emotional states within these settings are embedded in collaborative learning environments and are shaped by interactions and reciprocal responses among group members (Järvenoja & Järvelä, 2013). In Western classrooms, particularly in individualistic cultures like those

of the United States, pride in personal achievement and open displays of happiness or frustration are often accepted, if not encouraged, as individual success is appreciated in those cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In contrast, classrooms in collectivist cultures, such as those in East Asia, often emphasise emotional restraint and group harmony and students might be less likely to express emotions like frustration or pride openly, as such expressions could disrupt the collective harmony or could be perceived as drawing undue attention to oneself (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Instead, emotions are regulated in a way that maintains group cohesion and respects social hierarchies, with an emphasis on modesty and respect for others (Kitayama et al., 2000). This can manifest in students' behaviours, such as downplaying personal achievements or avoiding overt expressions of frustration, to conform to the cultural expectation of maintaining group cohesion (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Moreover, the way emotions are managed in classrooms can impact learning, as well as interpersonal relationships in these contexts. In collectivist cultures, the regulation of emotions in educational settings is often seen as a shared responsibility, embedded in the collaborative learning context where group members' reactions to one another play a significant role in the emotional dynamics of the classroom (Järvenoja & Järvelä, 2013). This contrasts with the more individual-focused emotional regulation seen in Western classrooms, where students may be encouraged to manage their emotions independently to enhance personal learning outcomes (Gross, 2002).

Research also indicates that anxiety in educational settings can be significantly influenced by cultural values, with collectivist cultures often contributing to heightened levels of anxiety among students (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2022). In collectivist cultures, where there is a strong emphasis on meeting collective expectations and maintaining group harmony, students may experience increased academic stress and anxiety (Choi & Chentsova-Dutton, 2017; Järvenoja & Järvelä, 2013; Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). Related to this, Yoon and Jepsen (2008) suggests that international students from collectivist cultures often face heightened academic stress due to the pressure to meet high expectations. Similarly, Choi and Chentsova-Dutton (2017) show how cultural norms in collectivist societies can affect the

regulation and expression of anxiety and depression. Järvenoja and Järvelä (2013) highlight how emotional and social processes within collectivist learning environments contribute to anxiety, with students often feeling pressure to conform to group norms. Additionally, Shiraev and Levy (2020) suggest that cultural differences can significantly impact students' experiences of anxiety, with collectivist values potentially intensifying these feelings. Hofmann and colleagues (2020) further support this idea by noting that anxiety levels in Chinese culture, a society high in collectivism, tend to be higher compared to individualistic United States society, largely due to the heightened influence of shame.

The cultural dimension of emotions does not mean that they lack a personal aspect. On the contrary, the personal dimension does shape an individual's sensations and perceptions, thereby influence one's overall emotional state (Krumov & Larsen, 2013). In other words, individuals experience and interpret their emotions based on their unique psychological makeup, personal beliefs and life experiences (Lazarus, 2006). This perspective underscores that emotional responses are deeply subjective and shaped by self-perception (Lazarus, 2006). Emotional regulation strategies, which vary greatly among individuals, also play a crucial role in how emotions are experienced and expressed (Gross, 2002). Within these complexities, emotions in learning environments can neither be reduced to isolated phenomena nor fully separated from their immediate social context or intrapersonal states (Pavlenko, 2013). The dynamics discussed in this section are inherently linked to identity, examined in depth in the following section.

2.3 Identity

Identity is a complex (Hays, 2001) and even problematic concept (Du Gay & Hall, 1996). Some of its complexities and challenges stem from its diverse applications across different contexts (Hays, 2001) and its varied interpretations (Morsünbül & Atak, 2013). Identity is inherently personal, distinguishing one person from another (Buckingham, 2008). When Erikson (1959) initially introduced the term, it was seen as a significant aspect of adolescence, with its successful formation regarded as a developmental milestone during this period. Erikson (1959, 1968) proposed that upon achieving a well-formed identity, the choices and decisions made during adolescence would lead to a more defined self-concept.

Consequently, viewed through Erikson's framework, identity is considered relatively stable once firmly established; however, this is not always the case, particularly in light of the very questions Erikson (1968) raises regarding identity development.

According to Erikson (1968), the process of identity formation begins with the fundamental question, 'Who am I?' This inquiry extends into various aspects of social and familial relationships, gender and sexuality, occupation, religion and political affiliations (Erikson, 1959, 1968). The search for answers to this question involves not only individual introspection but also consideration of one's group memberships, because individuals are influenced by their social contexts (Crocetti et al., 2018). As a result, the responses to this question are intertwined with the acceptance and validation individuals receive from their surroundings, highlighting the socially constructed nature of identity (Fearon, 1999; Fischer & Burton, 2014; Morsünbül et al., 2016). In this regard, feedback from the environment and a sense of group belonging play a significant role in identity development. Questions such as 'what do others think of me?' (Williams & Downing, 1998) and 'to which group do I belong?' (Sam & Berry, 2010) contribute to the construction of social identity.

Whether constructed with personal or social influences, Erikson (1959) emphasises the importance of having choices during adolescence – a period characterised by the developmental task of achieving identity cohesion – as these choices pave the way for mature decision-making in young adulthood. However, Arnett (2000) introduces the concept of *emerging adulthood*, a transitional phase marked by extended education and delayed life commitments, where individuals grapple with opportunities and uncertainties, leading to prolonged identity formation. As most scholars agree, regardless of the life stage, identity formation hinges on choices and commitments (La Guardia, 2009; Lutfey & Mortimer, 2003; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Based on choices and commitments dimensions, Marcia (1966) proposes four identity statuses: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure and diffusion. According to him, an individual who explores options and subsequently commits is said to have *achieved identity*, while those who continue to explore without committing are in a state of *moratorium*. Conversely,

individuals in *foreclosure* make commitments without thorough exploration, often influenced by external expectations, while those in *diffusion* neither explore nor commit.

This PhD study draws upon identity theories, emphasising the culturally and socially constructed nature of identity. However, it diverges from focusing on specific developmental stages outlined in traditional theories. Instead, it adopts the perspective that identity formation is an ongoing process influenced by evolving self-awareness, perceptions, beliefs and emotional experiences (Schutz et al., 2007). The participants in this study are adults from Türkiye who have migrated to Ireland; the experience of migration is recognised as a significant life event that presents both opportunities and challenges for shaping individuals' self-awareness, perceptions and beliefs, potentially contributing to identity construction regardless of developmental stage. Although bilingual identity is central to this thesis, changing social and cultural dynamics are likely to influence migrants' identities profoundly. Accordingly, the following sections examine social and cultural identities, providing a broader context for the subsequent discussion of bilingual identity.

2.3.1 Social Identity

Social identity refers to an individual's recognition and emotional attachment to their membership within a social group (Tajfel, 1974, 1981). This concept forms the foundation of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), which posits that belonging to a group enriches one's self-concept by fostering a sense of belonging and thereby contributes to identity construction. Membership in a group also positively influences two key components of self-concept: self-image (Murray et al., 2022; Rogers, 1959) and self-esteem (Casino-Garcia et al., 2021; Rosenberg, 1979). Social Identity Theory proposes that self-concept can be enhanced through comparisons between one's own group (in-group) and other groups (out-groups) to maintain a positive self-image (Tajfel, 1981). However, these comparisons can be biased, often favouring the in-group (Tajfel et al., 1971). When the in-group bias occurs collectively within a group, it elevates the perceived status of the in-group, consequently boosting self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An individual can have a sense of belonging to various social categories and identify

themselves with them simultaneously, such as gender, political parties, sport teams, nationality or culture (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). Identity is constructed in between these social groups, not within the particular group (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020; Crenshaw, 2013). The multiple identities in the various groups interact and intersect and this interplay impacts the person's experiences and perceptions (Crenshaw, 2013). In the context of migration, not only different categories in social identity intersect but also different groups in the same category can interact, bringing more complexity to these dynamics. Among them, cultural identity and bilingual identity can be influential in this intersection, as they are the ones who are constantly tapped into in the migrant's daily conversations.

2.3.2 Cultural Identity

From the outset, I would like to emphasise my preference for using *cultural* identity instead of *ethnic* identity, as found in some studies (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Firstly, I personally do not endorse distinctions based on ethnicity. Secondly, the term cultural identity encompasses elements found in ethnic identity, such as shared language, values, beliefs and traditions, without specifically focusing on notions of blood or lineage. Thirdly, individuals from diverse backgrounds can still share a cultural identity if they speak the same language, engage in similar cultural practices, hold common beliefs and enjoy similar tastes in cuisine, music or dance in their daily lives, irrespective of shared ethnicity.

With this understanding, cultural identity is the sense of belonging related to being a member of a cultural group that the individual shares collective elements such as language, values, beliefs, practices, preferences and/or traditions (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Cultural identity becomes prominent when different groups interact: Cultural identity gains significance only when multiple cultural groups interact (Phinney, 1990). As a result, cultural identity is a dynamic and multidimensional concept that is related to an individual's sense of self in their membership to a cultural group (Phinney, 2003). With migration, cultural identity becomes more pronounced, because the individual starts to live with a group that has different attributes. Being aware of the differences, the individual has to find a position for themselves within the culture of the mainstream society and their society of origin (Sam & Berry, 2010). This position does not have to be a decision between two

cultures, but can be an interplay between the two cultures as if they were on a continuum. No matter what their decision is, changes or shifts in identity are likely to occur during this interplay (Caprara et al., 2013). Hence, finding a position between cultures leads to cultural identity construction, whether that position lies at either end or embraces or rejects both. Within this broader challenge, language becomes another point of contact – and at times a significant obstacle – in a migrant’s identity construction. This specific dimension, referred to as *bilingual identity*, as discussed in the following section.

2.3.3 Bilingual Identity

Bilingual identity, the focal point of this study, encompasses the use of multiple languages in daily life, with the speaker experiencing a sense of belonging to both language groups (Li Wei, 2020). Bilingualism involves navigating between different languages in a way that reflects personal identity and social norms (Liebkind, 1995). In this vein, identifying as a bilingual signifies a bilingual identity, constructed through awareness of one’s bilingualism (Liebkind, 1995). From cultural identity perspective, belonging to and identifying with a cultural group can shape attitudes towards bilingualism. Norton (1997) suggests that bilingual identity is closely intertwined with an individual’s relationship with languages. However, the use of different languages within a single act of communication is not always a conscious choice (Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Garcia & Lin, 2017; Li Wei, 2018). This makes exploring bilingual identity particularly complex, as it often involves subtle, embodied or unspoken dimensions that cannot be fully captured through spoken or written language alone (Block, 2007). Furthermore, this relationship between language and different identities is shifting and multi-layered (Hall & Nlepp, 2015; Tabouret-Keller, 2017). As Auer (2005) reminds, “[s]imple and seemingly straightforward links between language and ethnicity (speaking Turkish – being Turkish) may fail [...]. Language alternation can be void of identity-relevant meaning in some contexts and yet in others extremely rich in the identity-work it accomplishes” (p. 409, parenthesis in the original). Although the complex relationship between language and identity has been widely studied, with language recognised as a fundamental means of constructing and expressing identity (Holmes, 1997; Li Wei, 2011, 2018), research in additional language teaching has largely focused on language anxiety (discussed in Section 2.3.5), leaving other dynamic emotional

dimensions underexplored (Dewaele, 2021). Exploring these dimensions often requires multimodal approaches to capture the diverse ways speakers perform and negotiate their linguistic identities, including visible, audible and unconscious aspects (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Norris, 2011; Li Wei, 2018). Within bilingualism research, whether through multimodal approaches or not, this negotiation has been conceptualised in various ways, with particular attention given to concepts such as *code-switching* and *translanguaging*, which serve to describe how speakers dynamically draw on their linguistic resources. These concepts are discussed in the following section.

2.3.4 Identity in Code-switching and Translanguaging

The term code-switching was introduced in the 1950s, with the purpose to explain use of different languages in a single speech due to various factors, including identity negotiation. Although its novelty, the early perspectives on code-switching often carried negative connotations, viewing it as a consequence of deficient language skills (Grosjean, 1982; MacSwan, 2000). Haugen (1953, 1956) was among the first scholars to examine language switching, initially considering it a form of interference rather than a distinct linguistic process. While he hinted at code-switching in 1956, his exploration was limited, leaving later scholars to develop the concept into a central topic in bilingualism research. In the initial viewpoint, code-switching was conceptualised as the selective use of different linguistic codes or dialects intentionally or unintentionally by bilingual individuals in communication. It was posited that bilinguals maintained separate linguistic systems in their minds, with the choice of code influenced by factors such as code status or linguistic norms. Unintentional code-switching typically involves word selection, often attributed to lower proficiency in one of the linguistic systems, whereas intentional code-switching could stem from psychological, linguistic or social motivations (Mackey, 1962). Auer's (2020) concept of preference-related code-switching aligns closely with intentional code-switching, as it refers to a structured, conversation-analytic phenomenon driven by considerations of competence or social dynamics.

However, within a decade of its emergence, the perception of languages as codes began to evolve towards languages as carriers of social meaning. Mackey (1962) notably

emphasised that bilingualism was not inherent to language itself but rather manifested in its usage, defining it as a psychological, linguistic and social phenomenon. In alignment with this perspective, scholars in the 1960s increasingly focused on the social dimensions of language use, recognising that attributing specific meanings to code-switching might oversimplify its dynamics. This shift towards a more socially engaged linguistics reflected a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in code-switching, acknowledging that speakers' intentions and listener perceptions contribute to its multifaceted nature (Nilep, 2006; Li Wei, 2005). Over time, scholars' initial view that languages were separate, isolated entities moved to a more dynamic view of languages, *translanguaging*.

Translanguaging refers to the phenomenon where individuals fluidly communicate across more than one language, with their identity and meaning-making shaped by the different languages they use (Garcia & Lin, 2017; Li Wei, 2018). The term translanguaging was first introduced by Cen Williams (1994) in a pedagogical context in Welsh-English classrooms, where *trawsieithu* (the Welsh term for translanguaging) was used to draw on learners' and teachers' linguistic resources for both receptive and productive purposes. Williams' early conceptualisation still treated languages as separate systems within the named-language framework, but sought to soften the rigid boundaries between them (Garcia & Lin, 2017; Turnbull, 2019). Later, translanguaging evolved to describe not just the use of separate named languages, but the construction and deployment of complex, interrelated discursive practices that together form speakers' complete linguistic repertoires (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014). Alternation of linguistic elements started to be conceptualised as an indicator of experience in languages (Creese & Blackledge, 2015) instead of laziness or deficit (Nguyen, 2019).

In this view, translanguaging involves not only the blending of languages, but also the orchestration of multiple communicative modes (García & Otheguy, 2020). It emphasises process over outcome (Lewis et al., 2012) by highlighting how speakers draw on different resources simultaneously, rather than investigating the reasons for the use of a specific language or focusing solely on the final product. Here, "which language is being used becomes an uninteresting and insignificant question" (Li Wei, 2018, p. 26). For this reason,

translanguaging does not concentrate on fixed language ‘codes’ but instead foregrounds dynamic modes of meaning-making that maximise communicative potential (García & Li Wei 2014; Li Wei 2018). It therefore goes beyond simply filling linguistic gaps within monolingual frameworks; instead, it integrates language and thought, reflecting the modularity of the mind (Li Wei, 2018; Vogel & García, 2017), where all semiotic resources, including non-verbal elements, are emphasised as parts of a unified system (Li Wei, 2018, p. 26). Thus, it offers a flexible means of self-expression that allows bilinguals to draw on their full linguistic repertoires (Vogel & García, 2017).

Since semiotic resources and non-verbal elements are culture-specific, translanguaging is closely intertwined with identity. Through translanguaging practices, individuals construct sociocultural identities by critically and creatively responding to both historical and contemporary conditions (García & Li Wei, 2014). Translanguaging also encompasses “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (García, 2009, p. 45). This sense-making process is inherently linked to identity construction (Cross & Cross, 2008; Ward, 1996). At the same time, translanguaging acknowledges that identities rooted in languages, whether in structural or sociopolitical terms, become relevant only when deliberately manipulated by the speaker (Li Wei, 2018). When such use is not deliberate, however, unconscious factors may be at play.

Moreover, by framing the unified repertoire as a new set that disrupts the original boundaries of languages, translanguaging enables the reconstruction and transformation of perceived power relations between semiotic resources (García & Li Wei, 2022; Li et al., 2020; Vogel & García, 2017). This reconfiguration of power relations plays a crucial role in identity, particularly in relation to status markers. As a result, translanguaging enhances communication in bilingual contexts, supports learning objectives in educational settings and contributes to bilingual creativity and identity formation (Beghetto, 2007; Cahyani et al., 2018; Kharkhurin & Li Wei, 2015; Nilep, 2006; Nguyen, 2019). In educational contexts, it facilitates deeper content understanding and support the development of

emerging languages alongside commonly used ones, providing more effective teaching strategies through cross-language semantic remapping (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014).

However, translanguaging is not a criticism-free approach. While staying positive to some aspects in conceptualisation of translanguaging, MacSwan (2017) is critical of what he terms the Unitary Translanguaging Theory – a label he uses to describe the view that multilinguals possess a single, undifferentiated linguistic system. While García and Li Wei (2014) do not themselves use the term “unitary”, the position MacSwan critiques reflects the essence of their argument: that multilingual speakers draw from one integrated repertoire rather than from discrete language systems. In response, MacSwan developed the Integrated Multilingual Model, which combines elements of both separate and unitary perspectives. In this model, multilinguals’ linguistic systems are partly shared yet partly distinct, especially in grammatical structures. He accepts the idea of a single linguistic repertoire in some respects, “but not an internally undifferentiated unitary grammar” (p. 172), and argues that multilingualism is in fact universal, as “each of us, even so-called monolinguals, has multiple overlapping rule systems acquired through our participation in divergent speech communities” (p. 179). Within these suggestions, he partially critiques unitary perspective to bilingualism. However, Cummins (2021) advances a more comprehensive critique and rejects a unitary system, building on his own earlier work as well as that of scholars such as Grin (2018) and MacSwan (2017). Using three evaluative criteria – empirical adequacy, logical coherence and consequential validity – Cummins (2021) challenges the Unitary Translanguaging Theory for lacking empirical evidence and for its logical inconsistencies, particularly its rejection of named languages while still framing discussions around them. Furthermore, Cummins (2021) finds the theory insufficient, even flawed, in offering clear pedagogical guidance and also questions MacSwan’s partial endorsement of a unitary repertoire.

Although these critiques are substantial, the current study adopts translanguaging for its positive stance on bilingualism and identity. In this research context, I have no particular concern over whether the underlying linguistic system is integrated or unitary or fully separated, as its focus lies on the emotions and identity construction of bilingual speakers

rather than on proving one structural model over another. Within this focus, bilingual identity, translanguaging and emotions as interconnected experiences are discussed below.

2.3.5 Bilingual Identity, Translanguaging and Emotions

Simultaneous use of different languages in a single communication is influenced by various sociocultural, personal and cognitive factors. Emotions, experienced in these domains, hold a significant role in the interplay between individual meanings and sociocultural contexts when an individual is speaking different languages. According to a cultural perspective, emotional responses are construed as situated cultural artifacts that convey sociocultural messages. This view emphasises that emotions are not merely internal states, but rather shaped as a result of communication, interaction and other processes in a specific cultural context (Zembylas, 2007). In this perspective, emotional responses are linked to the social domain, serving as vehicles for sociocultural messages. It is important to recognise that cultural and social aspects of emotions are inherently intertwined and cannot be separated. On a personal level, emotions are often regarded as individual and private phenomena (Zembylas, 2014). However, emotional expression is also mediated by linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For example, research on bilingual emotional expression suggests that the language chosen for emotionally charged utterances is shaped by more than linguistic competence alone. Kokaliari et al. (2013), in their study of bilingual psychotherapy, show that the first language can carry particular emotional and relational significance, especially when speakers articulate intimate or affectively loaded experiences. In a related line of research, Dewaele (2004) demonstrates that swearwords are often experienced as having greater emotional force in the first language than in additionally acquired languages. Together, these studies suggest that emotional expression in bilingual speakers is mediated by personal history, affective attachment and sociocultural experience, rather than by communicative ease alone.

Conversely, participants who chose to swear in the LX often did so due to perceptions of lower-class behaviour, reflecting complex sociocultural dynamics within their homelands (Kokaliari et al., 2013). In the same vein, the emotional experiences of bilinguals extend beyond swearing to other emotionally charged expressions, such as words pertaining to

intimacy and love. Dewaele (2008) notes that expressing love in one's L1 can carry unique nuances and greater emotional depth, underscoring the role of linguistic and cultural elements in shaping affectionate sentiments. Examples such as swearwords and love words, though not limited to these, illustrate that the emotions bilinguals experience across different languages are complex and multilayered.

Furthermore, while engaged in a translanguaging act, the intensity or satisfaction of expression may not be the same for bilinguals when they are speaking in their L1 and LX, even if the expression is not emotionally charged (Dewaele, 2008; Kramsch, 2009; Pavlenko, 2007). A speaker can feel restricted when speaking a specific language, yet another language can make them feel free (Kramsch, 2009). For late bilinguals in particular, not being able to use an LX as fluently or confidently as L1 may create a barrier. However, the opposite can also be true. To illustrate, because of the conventional signs that are deeply rooted in the L1, after learning an LX a bilingual can feel released from being 'trapped' in their L1 (Kramsch, 2009). Such perceived restrictions and emotional connections influence which language a speaker prefers to use and, in turn, shape their identity. If the bilingual speaker feels under the threat of being mocked and perceiving a lower status, their identity can be negatively influenced, mainly with the lower confidence experienced (Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018). When this is the case, with the fear of losing face or facing public humiliation because of the language use, the speaker can experience language apprehension (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004) or its more intense form, language anxiety. In its long accepted definition, language anxiety is recognised as both an emotion (Gray, 1982) and a cognitive-affective response to an unpleasant emotional state or condition (Leary, 1982). It is characterised by feelings of tension, nervousness and worry, specifically related to the speaker's use of language (Spielberger, 1972). These challenging emotions often arise in response to environmental factors, such as parental pressure (Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018) or correction by L1 speakers of the language (Sevinç, 2016). When this kind of emotions are experienced at heightened levels, language anxiety can even lead to panic (Kramsch, 2009).

Although there are different forms of language anxiety, for the purpose of this review, I limit the discussion to three forms of language anxiety: a) LX anxiety b) L1 anxiety and c) translanguaging anxiety.

- a) LX anxiety refers to speakers' anxiety about using a language they are learning, primarily studied in classroom contexts (Gatcho & Hajan, 2019; Horwitz et al., 1986; Pavlenko, 2002; Von Worde, 2003). It is frequently linked to apprehension about being negatively evaluated by listeners in the classroom (Gatcho & Hajan, 2019; Miller, 2016). One of the most widely used scales for assessing LX anxiety includes items related to speaking in the presence of an L1 speaker and other students, as well as items addressing evaluation by the teacher. This applies to both the original scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) and its adapted version (Gatcho & Hajan, 2019). In this regard, although extensive research in language classrooms links anxiety to teaching and learning, the concept carries the broader legacy of fear associated with potential negative evaluation, not only by teachers, but also by other L1 and LX speakers. From this perspective, the fear of being negatively assessed can extend beyond the classroom to any context in which potential 'assessors' are present. This anxiety may persist even among experienced LX users, as linguistic knowledge does not always guarantee rapid selection of appropriate words in diverse social and emotional contexts, which can result in 'self-silencing' (Greenwood, 2012).
- b) L1 anxiety refers to the anxiety generated in situations whenever an individual's L1 is not the primary language used in daily interactions, leading to diminished fluency due to the daily use of an LX (Seliger & Vago, 1991). Such loss in the L1 can trigger L1 anxiety, particularly when met with negative reactions from family members, or members of the community (Sevinç & Backus, 2017). In environments where bilingual individuals are expected to speak both languages 'perfectly', encounters with criticism from both L1 and LX communities can evoke feelings of incompetence and heighten anxiety related to bilingualism (Sevinç & Backus, 2017).

- c) Translanguaging anxiety is a form of anxiety associated with translanguaging. The term recently emerged as part of a research study on translanguaging by Turnbull, Yazan, Uzum and Akayoglu (2025). Their study sought to challenge American teacher candidates' monolingualistic orientations through collaboration with Turkish peers, while also exploring how they defined and experienced translanguaging. To this end, teachers from the United States worked with teachers from Türkiye to create multilingual classroom resources. Findings indicate that although the collaboration exposed the American participants to a translingual contact zone where they negotiated meaning through translation, gesture, and intercultural interaction, their conceptualisations of translanguaging tended to align more closely with code-switching or translation than with a fluid, repertoire-based practice. *Translanguaging anxiety* is one of the eight categories presented in the study's findings. The expression itself derives from two teacher participants' reflections on translanguaging, linked to nervousness when encountering challenging expressions in a language they did not understand. Again, such nervousness seems to be rooted in the beliefs that a language should be spoken 'perfectly,' as the literature above suggests.

The idea of speaking a language 'perfectly' is particularly important to this study. It is rooted in 'purist' language ideologies, which can be defined as beliefs or approaches in language use that aim to preserve a language in a 'pure' or 'untainted' form (Woolard, 2020). Supporters of purism highlight its protective role in certain sociocultural and political contexts. In nationalist projects and processes of nation-building, purist efforts have historically been seen as crucial to safeguarding collective identity and resisting external domination (Thomas, 1991).

Similarly, in contexts of language revitalisation, some activists view purism as a necessary measure to defend endangered languages from the encroachment of dominant ones, offering a sense of authenticity and continuity with ancestral traditions (Hornberger, 1998). Others defend purism on aesthetic or moral grounds, framing it as a form of 'linguistic

hygiene’ that ensures clarity, discipline and even beauty in expression (Cameron, 1995). Thus, while purism is often problematised as restrictive, it can also be interpreted as a strategy of empowerment, protection or resistance depending on the sociopolitical lens through which it is examined. However, these views, by rejecting perceived foreign influences, hybrid forms or non-standard variations, often prioritise linguistic purity at the cost of restricting natural language variation, speakers’ comfort and creativity, therefore negatively influencing identity (Woolard, 2020). They are connected to notions of authenticity and authority in language, where ‘pure’ forms are often equated with correctness, legitimacy and moral value (Irvine & Gal, 2000; Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Yet, scholars have long problematised the concept of linguistic purity, arguing that all languages are shaped by histories of contact, mobility and change (García, 2009; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). From this perspective, purism reflects a social and political project, often tied to nationalism, colonial standardisation or anxieties about cultural integrity (Bauman & Briggs, 2003). Moreover, critical sociolinguistics highlights how purist perspectives marginalise migrants and speakers of non-standard varieties by framing their practices as ‘corrupt’ or ‘deficient,’ while overlooking the creativity and adaptability inherent in translanguaging and linguistic hybridity (García & Li Wei, 2014). Thus, in this study, I reject the notion of linguistic ‘perfection’; while purist ideologies position it as the absence of mixing, a translanguaging approach views hybridity as a positive, productive condition of language itself.

Within these multilayered aspects of language, emotions and ideologies, translanguaging paves a transformative path, allowing individuals to “defy monolingual and monocultural identities” and generate new forms of identification (Kramsch & Zhu, 2020, p. 6). New identifications may encompass not only current ones, but also possible future selves, as discussed below.

2.3.6 Possible Selves

A foundational work for understanding the complexities of identity is the concept of *possible selves*, originally developed by Markus and Nurius (1986). Possible selves

represent cognitively and affectively charged images of what individuals hope to become or fear becoming. These act as a motivational bridge, linking the present self-concept – the individual's understanding of who they are now – with future-oriented goals, fears, hopes and threats. Importantly, these future selves are not abstract or disconnected fantasies; they emerge from the interplay of memory, current experience and cultural-historical context, anchoring identity construction in a dynamic tension between past, present and future (Gregg, 2011; Elder, 1980; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Horowitz 2023; Shaalan, 2024; Smorti, 2011). The possible selves framework acknowledges that identity is responsive to changing circumstances. This includes the new social, cultural and linguistic contexts that migrants encounter. These imagined futures provide concrete targets that motivate individuals to act in ways aligned with their hopes or aimed at avoiding feared outcomes (Erikson, 2007; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Poppi, 2025; Stryker, 1987). The motivational force of possible selves is one of its defining features and this motivation is deeply emotional: having a positive possible self can inspire confidence, hope and proactive engagement, whereas a negative possible self can elicit shame, anxiety or self-doubt (Erikson, 2007; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Migration, which brings profound changes across linguistic, social and cultural dimensions, can give rise to multiple possible selves; some to aspire to, others to fear. In this sense, the working self-concept is context-sensitive and responsive to shifting moods, interactions and cultural cues, as migrants may activate different facets of their identities depending on the audience or situation, drawing on past selves anchored in their country of origin or activating future selves oriented toward integration and belonging in the host society (Erikson, 2007; Turner, 1978; Poppi, 2025; Schutz, 1967). Moreover, social surroundings, media representations, interpersonal interactions and broader cultural narratives provide models and symbols that both enable and constrain the range of conceivable futures (Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Stryker, 1987). Consequently, the possible selves migrants imagine are not purely personal constructions but fundamentally social products, embedded within the collective meanings of the communities they inhabit or aspire to join.

Bilingual identity construction is inseparable from possible selves in the context of migration, because these emotionally charged possibilities shape how migrants interpret their experiences and regulate their behaviours, influencing domains ranging from sociocultural engagement to language learning and use. Positive possible selves, such as being ‘a confident English speaker,’ serve as motivational incentives for language acquisition and social adaptation (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Conversely, negative possible selves – such as ‘the outsider’ or ‘the incompetent speaker’ – may elicit anxiety, social withdrawal or diminished self-esteem (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Related with these, Norton’s (1997) seminal work introduced the notion of ‘investment’ in language learning, illustrating how migrants’ emotional engagement with their additional language (LX) is tied to their desire for social mobility and belonging. Furthermore, Creese and Blackledge (2018) argue that bilingual identity development is deeply intersectional, influenced by factors such as race, gender and migration status, which mediate how migrants envision and enact their possible selves. This fluidity allows migrants to navigate the often contradictory demands of maintaining sociocultural identities while adapting to new cultural norms and bilingual practices (Colomer, 2017; Mohyeddin, 2024). Translanguaging, in particular, enables bilingual migrants to enact hybrid identities, which can be empowering when used to resist static categorisations (García & Li Wei, 2014). Similarly, Norton’s (2019) work highlights how migrants’ investment in language learning and identity construction is intertwined with power relations and social positioning, revealing that possible selves are shaped by experiences of inclusion and exclusion in host societies. This perspective underscores that possible selves are culturally situated and responsive to social inequalities (Norton, 2019; Pavlenko, 2014). In these ways, linguistic strategies both reflect and reinforce the multiplicity of possible selves, allowing migrants to bridge their past and future identities in ways that feel authentic and empowering.

Moreover, possible selves are inherently narrative in nature. They are stories that individuals construct about their potential futures, past and current behaviours, social roles and anticipated outcomes (Bruner, 1995; Erikson, 2007). For migrants, these narratives are co-constructed through interaction with others and situated within particular social contexts and audiences (De Fina, 2015). They provide a sense of coherence and continuity in the

face of cultural relocation, acting as scaffolds for negotiating new roles, relationships and social identities. In this sense, the concept of possible selves naturally aligns with the act of narrating the self, therefore also with the art of storytelling. The next section examines storytelling as an artistry, attending to its various dimensions.

2.4 Storytelling

The arts, in many cultures, can be understood as forms of expression that convey insights and create spaces for reflection (Eisner, 1987). Culture carries historical meanings embedded in symbols, which function as systems of inherited conceptions for communication, perpetuation and the development of knowledge and attitudes, often transmitted through the arts (Geertz, 1973). These reflective, communicative and knowledge-building characteristics of the arts are particularly prominent in storytelling – an art form that requires a creative exchange between the storyteller and the audience. The storyteller’s artistic performance is “an aesthetic way of communication, which happen[s] for the audience in a bounded time and space” (İnam, 2017, p. 3). Like all art forms, storytelling can affect the audience and move to action (Grant & Holmes, 2010; Plecka, 2021). The storyteller provides opportunities for the audience to engage in their imagination (İnam, 2017); hence, “the art also happens in the mind of the audience since they enter the world of visuali[s]ations” (İnam, 2017, p.23). Within those opportunities, stories serve several functions, as discussed below.

2.4.1 Functions of Storytelling

In the ‘world of visualisations’ (to borrow İnam’s words above) the audience enters when they listen to a story, they can become one with the fiction, as the story and their subjective realities intersect. Here, it can be argued, the story becomes unique to each listener, because in that place of intersection, every single member of the audience lives the story differently. They sometimes lose and sometimes find themselves in the story. When a story resonates with the audience, the audience responds to it and, on occasion, the audience *grows* with the story. This growth brings a function to the storytelling: storytelling as nourishment for the audience. However, storytelling not only nourishes the listener but also the culture it is grown into.

Storytelling is a cultural product but in addition to growing out of a culture, it also transfers the culture (Fog et al., 2005; Goody, 2006). As a form of art, storytelling can be a way of processing, recording and transferring significant information (Greenwood, 2019). Furthermore, the culture not only lives in the story, but it is remade continuously in it (O'Toole, 2003). However, although oral stories may change over generations, the cultural elements are always present in them. Through stories, younger generations may learn about older generations' traditions, values, rituals, routines, behaviours, perceptions and other elements of culture that they may have never witnessed in their real worlds. This transfer through story nurtures the culture and brings storytelling another function: nourishment for culture. While nourishing both the audience and the culture, storytelling also becomes “a language tool that is well known for transferring morals and values from generation to generation” (Nasir & Inayah, 2019, p. 77).

Moreover, storytelling takes on the qualities of a language in its own right – a language that members of the culture can fully understand as they are the ones to grasp the specific cultural references. Thus, storytelling is not only a medium of narration, but also a cultural language in itself. Storytelling as a language tool conveys both myth (Nausieda, 2014) and realities – either objective or subjective. Because of these functions, among other merits, storytelling has long been a popular form of performance art, sometimes incorporating elements from theatre, as discussed in the following section.

2.4.2 Elements of Theatre in the Storytelling

Storytelling in the form of theatre dates back to ancient times. The ancient Greeks not only saw storytelling as an art, but also recognised its function in purgation of pity and fear:

[K]*atharsis* [...] comes about, [Aristotle] explains, whenever the dramatic imitation of certain actions arouses pity and fear in order to provide an outlet for pity and fear. The recounting of experience through the formal medium of plot, fiction or spectacle permits us to repeat the past forward so to speak. And this very act of creative repetition allows for a certain kind of pleasure or release. In the play of narrative re-creation we are invited to revisit our lives - through the actions and

personas of others - so as to live them otherwise. We discover a way to give a future to the past. (Kearney, 2007, p. 51, italics in the original)

Because of these functions, among other merits, storytelling has long been a popular form of performance art, incorporating elements of theatre and offering catharsis – a purging or release of strong emotions for both performer and audience. Furthermore, storytelling is not only the act of telling, but performing dramatic imitations, similar to theatre. Therefore, storytelling is a performance, whether in the roaring of a parent when they are telling a bedtime story to their child or theatrically narrating a story on a stage. In addition, storytelling theatre can take the form of Aristotle's tragedy, featuring five major elements (Heath, 1997, p.xivii): plot, character, thought, spectacle and music. These elements are discussed below.

The first element of tragedy, plot, is related to a sequence of actions, with a focus on individuals and their experiences (Heath, 1997). In a tragedy, as an emotional experience, fear and pity of the audience are the ultimate aims. Fear and pity arise from success and failure, which depend on the character's actions. Therefore, action is the most important aspect in tragedy (Heath, 1997). As the sequences of actions make the plot, plot becomes crucial in Aristotle's theatre. By the second element, character, Aristotle refers to moral disposition of an agent (Heath, 1997). The third element, thought, is the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances (Butcher & Gassner, 1951). Spectacle, the fourth element, includes everything visible on the stage (Heath, 1997). Finally, music is another important element in tragedy because it not only helps evoke emotions but also has a calming effect (Heath, 1997). Altogether, these elements may work to achieve catharsis – the purging or cleansing of fear and pity – which Aristotle saw as the ultimate purpose of tragedy (Heath, 1997).

Aristotelian elements can also be found in storytelling theatre, a genre within the performing arts. By harnessing the power of storytelling, allowing the audience to actively participate in creating the dramatic illusion, thus enriching the experience for all involved (Winston, 2022), storytelling theatre can immerse the audience in a vivid world where narratives come to life in their imagination. Plot may change and fear and pity may not be

the target emotions to be evoked, but theatre always aims at heightening emotions. Music may or may not be included in a storytelling theatre, but there is usually singing, melody or rhythm. These elements are crucial in storytelling theatre; however, the concept is not limited to them.

2.4.3 Storytelling Theatre

Storytelling theatre genre embraces the narrative art of storytelling with the performing art of theatre. In storytelling theatre, one performer can play various characters, sometimes addressing the audience directly. In this way, the story's dramatic world comes alive in the audience's imagination, where they become co-creators of the dramatic illusion, picking up emotional signals from the third-person narrative voice (Winston, 2022). This process helps to establish locale – the imagined spatial and temporal setting of the story – and mood – the emotional atmosphere conveyed to the audience – both of which are central to engaging the audience and shaping their responses (Aristotle, c. 335 BCE/1996). Aristotle (c. 335 BCE/1996), in *Poetics*, emphasises the importance of these elements in creating a compelling dramatic experience, noting that the unity of action, setting and emotional tone is crucial for eliciting the intended emotional effects. Indeed, storytelling theatre originates from an attempt “to strip the art form of unnecessary clutter and so recapture its purest and most essential energies” (Winston, 2022, p. 175). In a performance that draws on storytelling as an oral tradition, minimalism often strengthens these effects, as the performer's gestures, voice and narrative cues guide the audience's imagination more directly (Alfreds, 2007).

However, the storyteller's performance can be enriched by the set or scenery, when used carefully, purposefully and minimally to facilitate engagement (Winston, 2022). Fostering communication between the performer and the audience contributes to engagement, when the artist breaks the fourth wall, by addressing the audience directly. The set provides a platform for the artist to convey the play's intent, interpret the character and amplify the story's believability through devices that elevate imagination or illusion (Malloy, 2022).

Through aesthetic experience, where imagination is stimulated, the audience can subconsciously pick up on emotional cues (Winston, 2022). Within these emotions, identity can be constructed or revealed, making storytelling theatre a fruitful site for aesthetic exploration.

2.4.4 Aesthetics

The term *aesthetic* is derived from the Greek word *aisthetikos*, meaning “as regards to sensing” (Stelter, 2007, p. 193). *Aistheticosis* itself comes from the word *aisthanomai*, meaning “I perceive, feel, sense” (Hayles, 2014, p. 158). In Eaves’ (2014) definition, *aisthetikos* is perceptible through senses, both visual and bodily, navigating responses at individual and cultural interpretative levels. When a phenomenon is experienced on these levels, it can create an aesthetic experience, which is defined by Maxine Greene (1995) as transformative moments where individuals engage deeply with art, literature or creative expression, enabling them to perceive the world not just as it is, but as it could be. This engagement fosters expanded consciousness, encourages empathy and promotes social awareness, making it a vital component of education and personal growth (Greene, 1995). As Dewey (1934) emphasises, the aesthetic arises when everyday experiences are transformed through attentive, reflective participation that heightens awareness. Similarly, Eisner (2002) underscores that such experiences gain meaning when they evoke emotions that prompt deeper reflections. Bringing together these definitions, the aesthetic is grounded in the senses: a scent, an image, music, a texture or a flavour can evoke a range of emotional responses in artistic creation and may be aesthetically experienced. However, the encounter culminates in aesthetic engagement only when it involves both emotion and cognition, sparking layers of reflection that lead to heightened awareness.

Bundy (2003) identifies three core qualities of aesthetic engagement: animation, connection and heightened awareness. Animation, in Bundy’s definition, is the feeling of invigoration and alertness, while connection emerges when individuals engage with an idea evoked by the art work, shaped through the interplay between the work and their prior experiences. Heightened awareness arises when animation and connection occur together, allowing individuals to gain new insights into humanity that have not been consciously

considered before. According to Bundy (2003), aesthetic engagement can be facilitated through structured creative processes offered by educators or artists through understanding participants personally, fostering exploration and attending to the symbolic and metaphoric dimensions of the work. These qualities also align closely with Eisner's (2002) notion of aesthetic knowing, in which perception, emotion and cognition are intertwined to provide a distinctive form of understanding that cannot be fully captured through factual or analytical knowledge. Aesthetic knowing, as Eisner holds, lies at the heart of both artistic practice and Arts-based Research. Within storytelling, this reflective and transformative dimension becomes a powerful site for identity work, because when individuals and communities engage aesthetically with stories, they do not simply recount events but actively negotiate, reshape and reimagine their own identities.

2.4.5 Storytelling and Identity

Identity is intrinsic to storytelling, as it is constructed, understood and articulated through narrative (Black, 2008). As a narrative form, storytelling can foster identity construction, exploration and manifestation, because "[it] continually creates, reiterates, challenges, dismantles, and re-creates identity, meaning, and culture" (Scott, 2018, p. 257). Furthermore, storytelling can serve as a sensemaking tool, and different selves can be revealed in the stories (Bird, 2007). Moreover, in storytelling the self is not simply expressed but actively produced: rather than voicing a pre-existing internal view, the act of telling brings a sense of self into being (Pasupathi, 2006). What is constructed is multifaceted, spanning a person's beliefs about their own traits and capacities as well as their deeper convictions about how the world works (ibid). In addition, through storytelling, individuals engage in sense-making, negotiating personal and collective identities in dynamic and collaborative ways (Bird, 2007; Davis, 2005; Weiglhofer, 2015). In this sense, storytelling is not merely reflective but generative, fostering collaborative meaning-making (Pasupathi, 2001).

Bringing these elements together, this research facilitated the meaning-making and sense-making of lived experiences through storytelling theatre, in the context of being a bilingual adult in Ireland coming from Türkiye. Their responses to the theatre were used both

methodologically and theoretically to explore emotions and identity through aesthetic experience. However, using any art form, including storytelling, as a tool to revisit participants' traumatic pasts can inadvertently reaffirm their identities as victims, making it a potentially harmful practice, especially if "mistakenly adopted as a 'cure' to overcome trauma" (Piazzoli & KIR Cullen, 2020, para. 20). Moreover, making migration stories public with the participants' performances can inadvertently render the process unethical (Piazzoli & KIR Cullen, 2020). Nonetheless, if conducted with attention to ethical guidelines, storytelling remains a powerful lens for identity research, as it both constructs and reveals the self in interaction with others (Black, 2008; Bird, 2007; Scott, 2018).

Following Piazzoli and KIR Cullen's (2020) caution, the ethical complexities of using storytelling with potentially vulnerable participants were carefully considered. Storytelling was therefore approached not as an unmediated tool for eliciting personal histories, but as a mediated practice grounded in collective craft and as a pretext (O'Neill, 1995) for self-exploration and reflection that encourages participants to share their stories indirectly and collaboratively.

2.4.6 Storytelling as a Collective Craft and a Medium for Identity Exploration

In its exploration of emotions and identity through storytelling, the current research is extensively informed by using storytelling as a collective craft, as a medium or a pretext. Three key studies that informed each of these facets are addressed as in the unfolding sections.

First, Bird's (2007) exploration of narratives in storytelling highly informed this study. She used action research through an interpretative ethnographic case study to explore the power of narratives in sensemaking. In the study, Bird (2007) used narratives as a tool for sensemaking and she identified the role of storytelling in networking practices. She constructed data from women working at the company that she was serving for five years as an executive sponsor. Research methods encompassed semi-structured interviews, focus groups and more than 120 hours of participant observations based on their informal conversations. She also included document analysis of presentations, meeting notes and

emails. In her analyses, she constructed themes and suggested three key concepts: reliance on collectively constructing stories, using stories “as a coping strategy to deal with ambiguity and anxiety” and using stories “to both construct and regulate their identities within their social network” (pp. 318-319). Bird’s study informed this research by suggesting collective construction of stories for identity exploration. Aligned with this, participants of the current study were encouraged to craft collective stories through creation of role plays.

In a similar vein, Davis (2005) closely examined three self-narratives of 12-14 years old African Americans in the western US. The narratives were from (digital) storytelling and were used to understand the ways which those narratives supported identity. At the beginning of the study, it was hypothesised that a story that is produced by critical reflection and externalised personal narrative that is embodied in an artistic artefact could present a symbolic source. To be able to document the storytelling process and reflections, conversations of the participants were recorded. The interpretation of the recordings showed that the story as creation process, the story in a completed form as an object and presenting the story to others through interaction helped identity construction. Davis’ (2005) study informed this research in several ways. First, the participants in this study were encouraged to create and complete a story, sharing it with other participants through role plays, as a means of exploring identity construction. Second, the stories that the participants developed did not require a first-person narration; instead, they crafted their narratives by adhering to the themes presented in the theatre. This connection gave the theatrical narration a pretext quality. With O’Neill (1995) I define pretext as a source that provides inspiration for a dramatic scenario. This is illustrated by Weiglhofer (2015), the third key study that informed this research in using storytelling to explore identity.

Weiglhofer (2015) used stories both as narratives and mediators in identity exploration. In their study, Weiglhofer investigated the impact and function of storytelling performances in post-peaceaccord in Northern Ireland. The stories of the participants were shared in individual interviews with the artistic director and later to the fellow performers. After the interviews, participants performed their stories collaboratively to an external audience. The

conclusion they drew a lot of insights as to what should be done and what should be avoided in research that touches traumatic experiences:

For most of my interviewees, the quality of a mediator who helped restructure and order their accounts felt empowering and useful for the attribution of meaning to their personal story. For others [...] it posed a challenge. Those difficulties evolve around an awareness of self in front of others and thus around choosing a story that ascribes the teller a 'right' to talk in public. (Weiglhofer, p. 276)

Weiglhofer's (2015) conclusion puts forward how sensitive it is working with individuals who may have experienced traumatic events. When working with these groups, researchers should be extremely careful – and, where possible, avoid – making participants' experiences public. In their conclusion, Weiglhofer (2015) suggests that engaging in storytelling requires certainty about the individual's narrative identity, which can in turn create a life story in a condensed timeframe, while they are representing their self that the "teller is presently still happy with" (p. 276). Finally, Weiglhofer (2015) also suggests that the participants may not be willing to delve into past experiences.

Weiglhofer's (2015) study influenced my research in its suggestions to use a mediator in story creation. Accordingly, my study made use of a professional artist's performance as the impetus for reflection. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to focus solely on the performance and their immediate emotional responses related to the story. Similarly, during the individual interviews, they were primarily prompted to expand on the reflections shared in the workshop, as well as their longer-term reactions to the theatre experience. Deeper insights often emerged naturally, through metaphor, guided by the participants' own initiative.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the key literature underpinning the study, with a focus on emotions, identity and storytelling. The intersections of these constructs were also examined to show how they informed the present research. Building on these elaborations, the next chapter outlines how these theoretical perspectives were integrated into a theoretical framework.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

The framework for this study draws on an integrated set of theoretical perspectives, exploring emotions and bilingual identity. Brené Brown's (2021) grouping of emotions provides the analytical lens, offering a structured way to interpret participants' emotional responses in a data-driven manner. Alongside this, the study incorporates insights from research on bilingualism, with particular attention to the intersections of emotions and identity (Dewaele, 2008; García & Li Wei, 2014; Kramsch, 2009), as well as principles from Arts-Based Research (AbR, Eisner, 1997, 1998, 2002). As such, this chapter first explores Brown's (2021) theory of emotions. It then moves to identity, integrating the theories discussed in the Literature Review chapter in the context of migration. Finally, it shifts the focus to the methodological framework by synthesising Eisner's criteria for AbR with the elements in *The Fertile Crescent*. The chapter then discusses the implications of Brown's theory of emotions in bilingual identity and storytelling, integrating these three conceptual domains.

Tablet III of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000) marks a pivotal moment in the epic's development. Gilgamesh is troubled by a series of symbolic dreams, which foreshadow both the dangers and the possibilities of his quest to confront the fearsome Humbaba in the Cedar Forest. Yet, emboldened by these visions, he announces his plan to the elders of Uruk. The elders, mindful of his duties as king and aware of the risks, urge him to reconsider. Despite their warnings, Gilgamesh remains resolute and turns to his mother, Ninsun, a goddess renowned for her wisdom, for counsel. Ninsun interprets his dreams, omens of both challenge and potential success, offering insight and guidance for the perilous expedition ahead. Ninsun also prays to Shamash, the sun god, asking for protection for her son and his companion, Enkidu, and in a symbolic act of kinship, she adopts Enkidu as her own son, reinforcing the bond between the two heroes. Together, Gilgamesh and Enkidu prepare for their expedition, forging weapons and readying themselves to face Humbaba. The tablet conveys both the tension of anticipation and the

careful preparation required for the journey, highlighting themes of guidance, alliance and the deliberate movement from counsel to decisive action.

This chapter mirrors that same movement from uncertainty to resolve, from counsel to preparation. Just as Gilgamesh sought guidance from elders and from Ninsun before embarking on his quest, this study draws on multiple voices and traditions: Brené Brown's (2021) framework of emotions, research on identity construction in the context of migration and Eisner's principles of AbR. And just as Ninsun's act of adoption binds Enkidu and Gilgamesh into kinship, these perspectives are interwoven into a shared framework that grounds the study. In this way, the conceptual strands function as the weapons and counsel that ready the research for its own journey of analysis, equipping it to face the unknown with both responsibility and the promise of discovery.

3.2 Brené Brown's Emotions as 'Places We Go When...'

Brené Brown (2012, 2015, 2018, 2021) is a social work researcher, a professor and public speaker, widely recognised for her research on vulnerability, shame, courage and empathy. In *Atlas of the Heart*, she offers a comprehensive overview, where she groups 89 emotions, presenting them as 'places we go when...' under certain circumstances (Brown, 2021). Her research is summarised in Figure 3.1, in a chart where groups of emotions are visualised as a colourful wheel.

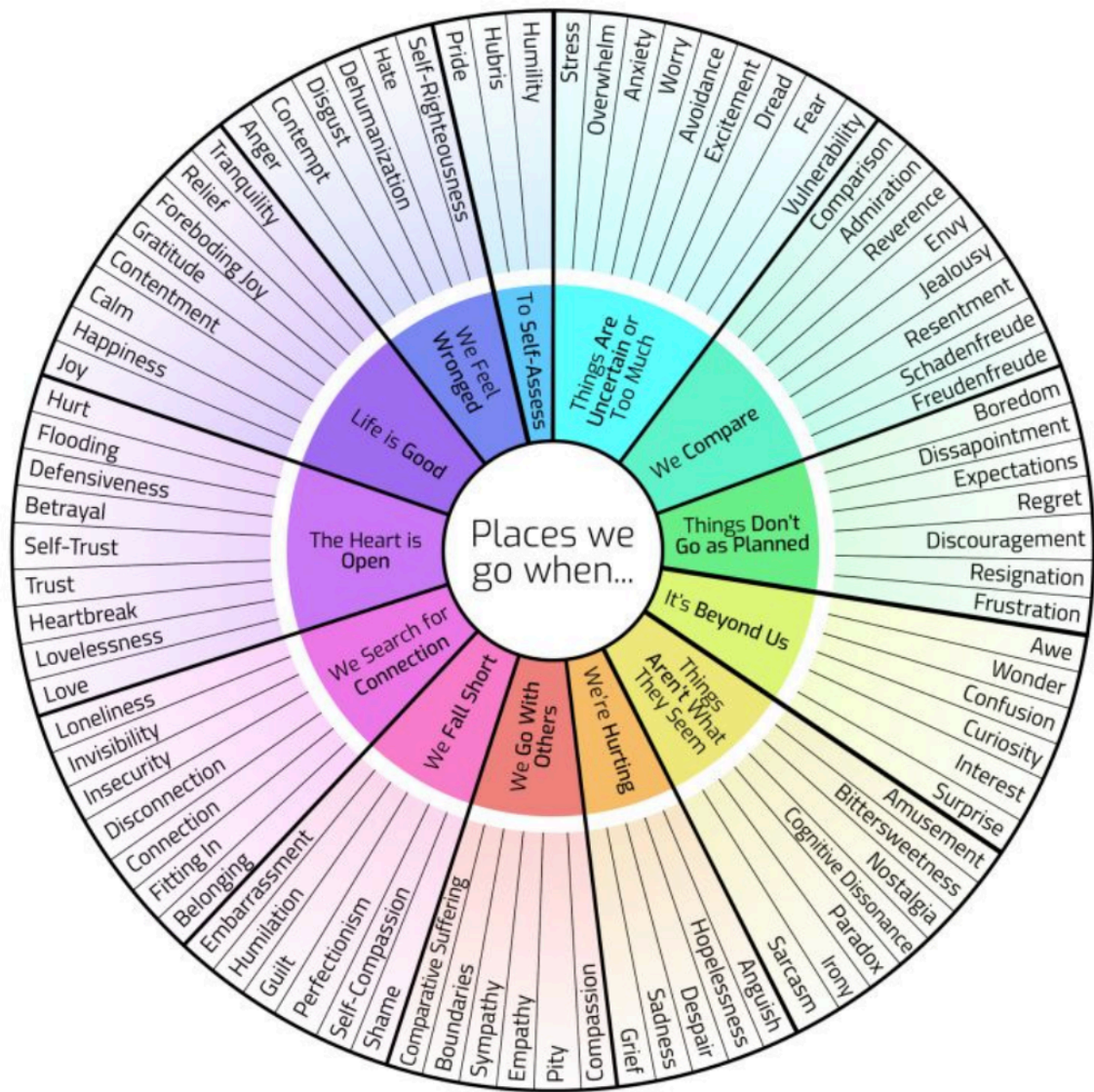


Figure 3.1. Brown's (2021) emotions on a wheel. Illustrated by Tiryaki, 2024, used with permission.

Among the 13 groups of emotions described by Brown (2021), four specific categories are explored in more detail below, as they are particularly relevant to this study:

- Places we go to when things are uncertain or too much;
- Places we go to when we fall short;
- Places we go to when life is good;
- Places we go to when we search for connection.

3.2.1 Places We Go When Things Are Uncertain or Too Much

Brown (2021) suggests stress, overwhelm, anxiety, worry, avoidance, excitement, dread, fear and vulnerability as the places we go when things are uncertain or too much. According to Brown, *stress* is an emotion that arises when external demands placed on an individual exceed their ability to cope. Brown defines *overwhelm* as the escalated version of stress, an extreme, which impairs functioning, sometimes bringing ‘non-doing’. As this state “[...] is not a setup for successful decision making” (2021, p. 34), the ‘non-doing’ Brown defines can be a preferable alternative.

When a person with low tolerance for uncertainty experiences a loss of control and becomes absorbed in worst-case scenarios, *anxiety* often emerges (Brown, 2021; McEwen, 2012). This anxiety can be understood as a response to perceived threats and challenges beyond one’s coping capacity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As a cognitive aspect of anxiety, *worry* can surface as a coping mechanism when the individual ruminates over potential negative outcomes and attempts to exert control over them (Borkovec et al., 2002; Brown, 2021). This process involves excessive thinking about possible threats and potential problems, aiming to manage or mitigate the anxiety. Additionally, anxiety can lead to *avoidance* behaviours, where the person deliberately stays away from stress-inducing situations; however, this avoidance often exacerbates the fear and anxiety rather than alleviating it, as it prevents the individual from confronting and managing their fears (Barlow, 2004). Brown (2021) addresses anxiety and *excitement* as closely related emotions, noting that both can involve stress and unease. She suggests that while the sensations associated with these emotions are similar, individuals label the experience as excitement when it is perceived positively and as anxiety when it is perceived negatively.

When the probability of a negative outcome is high, the persistent sense of fear can create *dread*, which intensifies as the event or condition approaches (Brown, 2021; McEwen, 2012). Dread can become so overwhelming that individuals might prefer experiencing immediate, intense pain over a smaller, delayed discomfort to alleviate the anticipation and anxiety associated with dread (Brown, 2021; Story et al., 2013). When a threat is immediate rather than anticipated, *fear* (a short-lived, high-alert emotion) can be experienced.

Fear is often shaped by past painful experiences, whether physical or emotional, which can influence how people perceive and react to current threats (Ehlers & Clark, 2000; LeDoux, 1998). Within anticipations and ambiguities, risk, emotional exposure and *vulnerability* can come to surface (Brown, 2021). Vulnerability, according to Brown (2012, 2015, 2018, 2021) is not inherently negative; instead, it can serve as the foundation for resilience and courage. Thus, vulnerability is distinct from weakness and can become a source of strength when managed with discipline and self-awareness. Moreover, vulnerability challenges the concept of perfectionism, which is an illusory and harmful belief (Brown, 2012, 2021; Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

3.2.2 Places We Go When We Fall Short

In Brown's (2021) grouping of emotions, shame, perfectionism, guilt, humiliation, embarrassment and self-compassion emerge when people fail to meet expectations and *fall short*.

Brown offers a similar discussion of *stress*, noting that "We feel stressed when we evaluate environmental demand as beyond our ability to cope successfully" (p. 32). Yet, there is a subtle but important distinction between the emotions experienced in moments of falling short, and stress itself. Brown (2021) emphasises 'environmental' demand in her definition of stress (p. 34), presenting it as an emotion more closely related to external factors. In this sense, stress is triggered by external demands, the appraisal and perception of which determine its intensity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It represents a physiological and psychological response that occurs when external stressors exceed an individual's capacity to cope effectively, potentially leading to allostatic load, where chronic exposure to stress contributes to long-term health problems (McEwen, 2007). Thus, she frames stress as the response to external pressure when individuals attempt to prevent an anticipated undesired outcome. When these risks become real and expectations, whether internal or external, are not met, stress can give rise to emotions such as shame, guilt, humiliation, embarrassment and perfectionism, while also creating the possibility for self-compassion.

Shame is defined as a deeply inward-directed emotion that arises when individuals perceive themselves as fundamentally flawed or unworthy (Brown, 2021). It involves intense self-devaluation and a sense of being inherently defective. Unlike other challenging emotions, shame thrives in secrecy and self-criticism, often magnifying feelings of isolation and helplessness. Empathy, however, can mitigate the intensity of shame by fostering understanding and connection, counteracting the sense of being judged or abandoned (Gilbert, 2007). *Perfectionism* often develops as a coping mechanism in response to the fear of shame and judgment. Individuals striving for perfection attempt to secure approval and avoid criticism by setting unrealistically high standards for themselves and others (Brown, 2010, 2021). Paradoxically, this protective strategy reinforces self-doubt and dissatisfaction, as the standards are unattainable. In striving to avoid failure, individuals may limit their curiosity and risk-taking, inhibiting growth and creativity (Brown, 2021; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). *Guilt*, in contrast, is directed toward specific behaviours or actions rather than the self as a whole. When individuals feel guilt, they recognise that they have done something wrong or have failed to act according to their values (Brown, 2021; Tangney & Dearing, 2003). This behavioural focus often motivates corrective action, such as making amends or rectifying mistakes (Brown, 2021), distinguishing guilt from the more pervasive and self-focused experience of shame.

Humiliation is an intensely negative emotional experience that arises when an individual feels devalued or degraded, often through public exposure or interpersonal power dynamics (Brown, 2021). Unlike embarrassment, which is usually fleeting, humiliation carries a profound sense of lost dignity and can deeply undermine one's self-respect and identity (Richardson & Wade, 2010). The psychological consequences of humiliation include feelings of vulnerability, helplessness and in extreme cases, thoughts of harming oneself or others (Gilbert, 2007; Harter et al., 2003). *Embarrassment*, by contrast, is typically experienced in response to minor social mistakes or blunders. It is less intense than shame or humiliation and is often alleviated through humour, social interactions and self-deprecation (Brown, 2021; Keltner & Buswell, 1997). Whereas shame prefers to remain hidden and grows in silence, embarrassment is more manageable and openly addressable, especially with social support.

Amidst these emotions in the moments of ‘falling short’, *self-compassion* is essential for addressing and overcoming the emotional challenges. Brown (2021) emphasises that self-compassion helps mitigate the effects of these moments by fostering a supportive internal dialogue and encouraging a more understanding and resilient approach to personal shortcomings and difficulties (Brown, 2010, 2018, 2021). It encompasses three primary components: self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. *Self-kindness* involves treating one’s self with warmth and understanding during times of failure or inadequacy, rather than engaging in harsh self-judgment (Neff, 2011). This practice helps mitigate negative self-talk and supports a more positive responses to personal shortcomings. *Common humanity*, as discussed by Brown (2021), involves recognising that suffering and imperfection are universal experiences shared by everyone, highlighting that compassion is warranted for all, which can counter the isolating effects of shame by underscoring the shared human experience (Neff, 2011). Complementing this, *mindfulness* involves observing our thoughts and feelings non-judgmentally, which helps prevent being overwhelmed by negative emotions and promotes emotional balance (Germer & Neff, 2013). This mindful awareness supports self-compassion by fostering acceptance rather than avoidance. Research indicates that together, self-compassion and mindfulness contribute significantly to resilience and effective coping with shame (Brown, 2021; Gilbert, 2010).

3.2.3 Places We Go When Life is Good

In Brown’s (2021) conceptualisation, joy, foreboding joy, happiness, calm, contentment, gratitude, relief and tranquillity are the places we go when life is good. *Joy* is defined as a deep sense of pleasure, appreciation and meaningful spiritual connections (Brown, 2021) or deep connections with others (Fredrickson, 2001). Although joy is often seen as a transient emotion (Brown, 2021), engaging in activities that reflect personal values and fostering positive experiences can lead to lasting joy (Seligman, 2011). This emotion frequently inspires playfulness and experimentation, which are crucial for the creative process (Fredrickson, 2001). People who experience joy are more likely to approach challenges with a playful mindset, leading to innovative solutions and creative

breakthroughs (Vygotsky, 1971). Additionally, joy boosts motivation and involvement, which are vital for creative endeavours. When in a joyful state, individuals tend to engage deeply with their tasks and pursue creative projects (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, joy helps reduce mental constraints, enabling more fluid and imaginative thinking (Gawain, 2016). As such, joy can counteract the negative effects of humiliation, which flourishes in isolation and silence, and address perfectionism, which often hinders creativity.

For Brown, joy can become *foreboding* when our tolerance for vulnerability is lost (Brown, 2021). As she suggests, “minimizing vulnerability is best understood as a continuum that runs from “rehearsing tragedy” to [...] “perpetual disappointment.” [...] Softening into the joyful moments of our lives requires vulnerability. [...] We’re [instead] trying to beat vulnerability to the punch.” (Brown, 2012, p. 90). In this sense, it can be suggested that one learns not to let joy elevate the self too high, because the higher the ascent, the harder the fall to the ground. While attempting to reduce vulnerability in situations where loss is possible, there is, in effect, an emotional experience of loss occurring already. This fear of loss is almost universally common (Brown, 2021), and it is not surprising that the English idiom “After laughter comes tears” has a corresponding expression in Turkish: “The one who laughs a lot, cries a lot” in a verbatim translation. Within this complexity, joy resonates with the myth of Icarus, the son of Daedalus, who escapes imprisonment by flying with wings made of feathers and wax. Despite his father’s warnings not to fly too close to the sun, Icarus, overwhelmed by the exhilaration of flight, ascends too high, causing the wax to melt and leading to his plummet into the sea. Like Icarus, who soared with joy at the prospect of flight only to be undone by his own ambition, the experience of joy is often interwoven with the foreboding awareness of its fragility.

Happiness is generally characterised by its stability and enduring nature, often resulting from deliberate effort and engagement in meaningful activities (Brown, 2021). Unlike joy, which tends to be more intense and internally focused, happiness is typically lower in intensity and more oriented toward external circumstances (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Happiness is associated with a sense of control and is influenced by one’s immediate environment and current life situation (Brown, 2021). While both happiness and joy

involve engaging in meaningful activities or relationships, happiness is more closely tied to a cognitive assessment of one's overall life satisfaction (Seligman, 2002). This evaluation includes considering whether one's life is progressing positively and meeting personal expectations and standards (Seligman, 2011). Joy, on the other hand, tends to be more spontaneous and rooted in internal feelings rather than external conditions.

Calm is an emotional state that fosters perspective and mindfulness while regulating emotional responses (Brown, 2021). With these characteristics, it can foster creativity by facilitating divergent thinking, defined as the ability to generate multiple, unique solutions to a problem, emphasising flexibility and originality (Runco & Acar, 2012). Brown (2021) describes calm as an intention that individuals can cultivate. Through this intention, she suggests that anxiety can be alleviated by asking reflective questions such as, 'What do I have to learn?' or 'Will going crazy help?'. *Contentment* is a low-arousal emotion, typically linked with feelings of peace, tranquillity and satisfaction, accompanied by sensation of completeness, appreciation and "enoughness" experienced when our needs are met (Brown, 2021, p. 304). Engaging in activities aligned with personal values and intrinsic motivation contributes to deeper satisfaction and well-being, showcasing that real contentment arises from meaningful experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This view of contentment presents a dilemma: if individuals feel dissatisfied with their lives, should they pursue new experiences and achievements to cultivate contentment, or should they practice gratitude for their existing circumstances to attain a sense of genuine sufficiency and *enoughness*? (Brown, 2021, pp. 309-311).

This contrast highlights the necessity for self-reflection, prompting individuals to consider whether their contentment stems from external successes or from a deeper appreciation for their current situation (Brown, 2021). Given that contentment involves recognising and appreciating what we have, cultivating *gratitude* can significantly enhance feelings of contentment and overall well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Gratitude is framed a practice, rather than merely an attitude (Brown, 2021), connecting us to ourselves and others through a conscious reflection on what we have. This practice not only enhances the capacity of joy, but also fosters creativity both directly, by engaging the aware and

exploratory mind (Fredrickson, 2001) and indirectly, by alleviating stress that hinders creative expression (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Relief is both a physical and emotional relaxation (Brown, 2021), characterised by a sense of satisfaction and closure following a challenging experience (Fredrickson, 2001). This emotional state can foster feelings of happiness and contentment, providing a respite from distress (Seligman, 2011). Relief can be experienced when a stressful situation diminishes, whether through the individual's success or outside of their control, such as changes in circumstances that alleviate anxiety (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman, 2011). Another emotion in this group, *tranquillity* is defined by a profound sense of peace and completeness, accompanied by the absence of demands or pressure (Brown, 2021), allowing individuals to relax and clear their mind (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This state often emerges in natural environments, such as in forests or near large bodies of water (Brown, 2021), fostering the feelings of calmness and serenity (Kaplan & Kaplan, 2011). In contrast, urban settings, typically characterised by noise and activity, can impede tranquillity (Brown, 2021) and contribute to stress (Ulrich, 1983) when individuals perceive the stimuli as exceeding their capacity to cope. Tranquil spaces can support well-being by shaping emotional states, reducing stress and fostering a sense of calm (Sternberg, 2009). With these characteristics, it promotes introspection and creativity, enabling individuals to recharge and reconnect with themselves (Fredrickson, 2001).

3.2.4 Places We Go When Searching for Connection

As Brown (2021) depicts, belonging, fitting in, connection, disconnection, insecurity, invisibility and loneliness are the places we go when searching for connection. Connection is an intrinsic aspect of human nature, deeply embedded in the need to belong and to be accepted as who the person really is (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). *Belonging* is this need that shapes much of the social behaviour, influencing how people interact with other and how they perceive themselves in relation to the world. Yet, the foundation of genuine connection starts with accepting and belonging to the self (Brown, 2021). Belonging is crucial not only for social connection but also for motivation and performance in various

settings, such as work and school, where feelings of belonging can enhance engagement and success (Walton et al., 2017).

As Brown holds, if individuals feel accepted not for who they are, but for who they may pretending to be, they would not be belonging, but *fitting in* (Brown, 2017; 2021). Fitting in, unlike belonging, involves conforming to external pressures, often at the cost of our authenticity (Brown, 2017). This pressure to fit in can lead to feelings of alienation and diminished mental health, while a true sense of belonging fosters well-being and life satisfaction (Leavy, 2010). Therefore, while fitting in may feel like a trap, belonging offers freedom – the freedom to be accepted without changing or pretending (Brown, 2021). In my own interpretation, fitting in may be like wearing beautiful red high heels that pinch our feet, shoes we put on to gain admiration or external validation. Belonging, however, is like slipping into well-worn sneakers; so comfortable that we forget we are even wearing them. When we take off those painful high heels and reveal our blisters, when the people around us accept us, blisters and all, that is when we truly belong. Belonging, therefore, requires vulnerability, as well as the courage to reveal our imperfections to those we trust (Jordan, 2008a).

This vulnerability fosters authentic *connections* (Brown, 2017), because with the perceived understanding, validation and acceptance despite their vulnerabilities, the individual can feel emotionally close (Reis & Shaver, 1988). This closeness and connection are critical to emotional well-being (Brown, 2017). Vulnerability is also a form of self-acceptance, which plays a key role in how we relate to others. The extent to which a person accepts themselves directly influences their sense of belonging and their ability to build meaningful relationships (Brown, 2021). Cultivating authenticity in meaningful relationships leads to a greater sense of belonging and mental health benefits, while hiding one's true self can result in increased loneliness and social isolation (Rivera et al., 2019). Furthermore, individuals who practice self-compassion tend to experience greater social connectedness and less fear of rejection, making it easier to foster genuine belonging (Neff & Knox, 2020). The uncertainty in belonging can be particularly pronounced among individuals from marginalised groups (Brown, 2021). Members of migrant communities, while not always

classified as marginalised, can also experience belonging uncertainty and anxiety due to factors such as limited opportunities and a perceived lack of acceptance. These experiences can lead them to feel excluded, akin to marginalised groups.

The need to belong to a group does not necessarily imply living a collectivist life; when a person lacks meaningful relationships through which they can feel accepted, valued, understood and supported, they may experience isolation (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Isolation is often characterised by a complete absence of these bonds, resulting in a profound sense of solitude. In this regard, isolation, not *disconnection*, can be viewed as the opposite of connection. Brown (2021) suggests that “[d]isconnection is often equated with social rejection, social exclusion, and/or social isolation, and these feelings of disconnection actually share the same neural pathways with feelings of physical pain” (p. 257). Disconnection arises from a lack of strong bonds or relationships but does not necessarily mean the total absence of them (Baumeister & Leary, 2017). In this sense, chronic disconnection and isolation can be closer concepts.

Disconnection can occur when an individual feels a disconnect from a specific person, situation or group, often manifesting in moments of misunderstanding, conflict or differing emotional states (Sanfner et al., 2004). However, isolation represents a more general state where social ties are almost entirely lacking. Moreover, disconnection can be seen as a natural phase within healthy relationships, sometimes even an inevitable part of emotional dynamics (Jordan, 2008b). Jordan (2008b) articulates this notion, suggesting that experiencing disconnection can provide an opportunity for growth, ultimately allowing for a more robust and sound relationship with both others and oneself when reconnection occurs. This cyclical process of disconnection and reconnection can deepen bonds and enhance mutual understanding over time. Whenever people lack meaningful ties, resulting in chronic disconnection, they may feel compelled to hide their vulnerabilities instead of fostering a sense of belonging. In this context, individuals might engage in behaviours that emphasise superficiality, such as ‘wearing their red high heels’, symbolising a willingness to endure pain for acceptance. Perfectionism often comes into play here, acting as both a conscious and unconscious response driven by the desire to fit in, ultimately serving as a

defence mechanism against rejection, exclusion or criticism (Brown, 2021). However, perfectionistic individuals often irritate others with their controlling or overly critical behaviour (Hewitt et al., 2017), creating a vicious cycle, as they simultaneously strive to conceal their flaws and insecurities while simultaneously pushing away those around them (Smith, 2013).

Insecurities can stem from a lack of confidence and can manifest in three distinct types (Brown, 2021). The first type, domain-specific insecurities, relates to concerns in particular areas of life, such as academia or career. The second type occurs in interpersonal relationships, where insecurities may surface in specific interactions or more broadly in social settings. The third type, when insecurities pervade nearly all aspects of life, general or personal insecurity emerges. This broad form of insecurity often arises from being overly critical of oneself in relation to perceived mistakes or weaknesses (Brown, 2021). This type of insecurity is generally a result of a lack of self-compassion, which is closely linked to perfectionism, as individuals striving for perfection frequently struggle to extend kindness and understanding toward themselves (Neff, 2011). When weaknesses are accepted and showed comfortably, self-security can be experienced (Neff, 2011). Self-security can be characterised by a stable sense of confidence while acknowledging our vulnerabilities and letting the esteem to be shaken easily by external evaluations (Huang & Berenbaum, 2017). It provides a consistent sense of emotional stability and trust in oneself, regardless of changing social contexts or external feedback (Brown, 2021).

Security in self can be echoed in security in relationships, allowing the individual to be more supportive, therefore bringing closeness and connection, and eventually predicting the quality of relationships (Huang & Berenbaum, 2017). In a related but distinct concept, *self-esteem* often emerges and fluctuates in social contexts where interactions with others, achievements and feedback play a significant role (Crocker et al., 2003). Self-esteem can be influenced by how one is perceived by others and how well they feel as they are performing in various situations (Brown, 2021). For example, positive social interactions and accomplishments can boost self-esteem, while criticism or failure can lower it. While self-esteem can vary with social interactions and achievements, *self-security* tends to be

more static and internal, representing an enduring quality that reflects an individual's inherent sense of worth and stability. In this sense, it is possible to have high self-esteem while still feeling insecure (Brown, 2021). Conversely, one can possess high self-esteem yet experience low self-security or vice versa, depending on the in specific situations (Huang & Berenbaum, 2017).

Another function of chronic disconnection or isolation is *invisibility*, which involves the ignorance and devaluation of a person or group (Brown, 2021). Interpersonal, group or representational invisibility can manifest depending on the level at which it is experienced (Brown, 2021). Interpersonal invisibility refers to the lack of recognition that individuals may feel in their relationships (Neel & Lassetter, 2019). Group invisibility, on the other hand, describes the neglect and oversight of group members by not acknowledging their existence or contributions (Brown, 2021). Although sometimes invisibility can be explored through the lens of discrimination (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), it is important to note that invisibility is not synonymous with discrimination, in that, discrimination involves negative treatment based on identity, whereas invisibility implies a lack of recognition (Brown, 2021). Chronic disconnection or isolation can also lead to profound feelings of *loneliness* (Brown, 2021). This loneliness is not merely the absence of social interaction; rather, it is an emotional distress that arises from the perception of being isolated from others, even when one is surrounded by social circles (Leary & Baumeister, 1995). Individuals may feel disconnected and unsupported, leading to a sense of alienation and emotional pain (Brown, 2021). Despite having people around them, the lack of meaningful relationships can exacerbate feelings of loneliness, highlighting the importance of genuine connection and emotional bonds, because not every social relationship can be satisfying (see the literature review by Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Ultimately, addressing feelings of loneliness requires fostering deeper interpersonal relationships that go beyond superficial social interactions.

As a result, emotions play a pivotal role in people's lives, particularly shaping identity, often influencing how individuals perceive themselves and make meaning their lived experiences. Furthermore, they open spaces for transformation. For example, emotions

such as shame and fear can initially lead to feelings of inadequacy and isolation; however, these same emotions can serve as catalysts for personal growth and resilience (Brown, 2021). Individuals who confront their feelings of shame may ultimately transform this initial negativity into motivation for change, leading to a strengthened sense of self and greater emotional regulation (Seligman, 2011). This transformation is essential for developing a more cohesive identity, as it encourages individuals to embrace their vulnerabilities and learn from their experiences (Fredrickson, 2001). Ultimately, the journey from initially challenging to nurturing emotions not only fosters resilience but also enriches one's identity, allowing for a more authentic self (Pals, 2006). This dynamic interaction between emotions and identity serves as a major foundation for understanding how individuals transform and redefine themselves in the face of challenges (Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, 2012). Migration, as a significant challenge, adds further complexity to this already multilayered dynamic interaction, particularly through the reflection it inspires on the past, the evaluation of the present and the possibilities for future selves. This nuanced interplay is explored below.

3.3 Identity Construction in the Context of Migration: Past, Present and Future

Identity construction within migration contexts is a multifaceted and evolving process, deeply embedded in the negotiation between past experiences, present social realities and imagined futures. While earlier identity research focused primarily on ethnicity and race, recent scholarship acknowledges the growing complexity of migrant identities, which extend beyond traditional concerns of equity and injustice, to incorporate dynamic narrative and motivational dimensions (Poppi, 2025). These identities intertwine with migrants' life stories, shaping their sense of self in relation to their past and informing how they envision their futures (Gregg, 2011; Smorti, 2011). At the same time, migrant identities enact social actions that interact with situational contexts and audiences, illustrating the performative and relational nature of identity (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; De Fina, 2015).

To encapsulate these dual functions – the deeply personal and the socially enacted – Poppi (2025) employs the concept of *significance*, highlighting how migrant narratives carry meaning not only for self-understanding, but also for social positioning and agency. By

envisioning future scenarios, migrants reclaim a sense of control over their lives, positioning themselves as active agents capable of shaping their destinies rather than as passive victims of circumstances (Poppi, 2025). These narratives can also provide coherence to disrupted biographies, facilitate identity construction and empower migrants to navigate the complexities of new environments. This future-oriented sense of agency is crucial for sustaining motivation in the face of challenges such as language barriers, social exclusion or cultural dislocation. Norton (2013) highlights that experiences of marginalisation and challenges in new linguistic environments often stem from the social contexts that constrain migrants' identities, creating a complex emotional terrain where confidence and anxiety can coexist. This emotional ambivalence is crucial in understanding why bilingual identity is not fixed but ever-changing. Similarly, Pavlenko (2001, 2005, 2007) explores how emotions and memory shape bilingual identities, especially for first-generation migrants who negotiate the loss of their heritage language and culture while learning an LX. Pavlenko's research shows that emotional experiences of shame, guilt or pride are intertwined with language use and identity shifts, illustrating how bilingual identity involves ongoing processes of emotional negotiation amid shifting social and cultural expectations.

Kramersch (2009, 2014) further contributes by emphasising language as a symbolic system that mediates identity and subjectivity. She highlights the self as a fluid and dialogic construct shaped through language learning and interaction in new cultural contexts. Kramersch (2009) argues that language learning is not simply acquiring communication skills, but involves the emotional and symbolic negotiation of multiple identities. Her suggestions offer a framework for understanding how migrants create hybrid identities that transcend binary notions of self and other, belonging and exclusion. This 'third space' enables migrants to reconcile conflicting cultural norms and navigate the emotional complexities of linguistic experiences (Kramersch, 2009). Such symbolic and emotional dimensions may enrich the possible selves concept by foregrounding the cultural meanings embedded in bilingual identity formation. Pennycook (2010) adds to this understanding by emphasising the performative and political dimensions of bilingual identity. They argue that language is not just a communication tool but a resource for identity construction that

migrants use strategically within fluid and contested social spaces. Migrants navigate an evolving social landscape where cultural norms and power dynamics continuously redefine what it means to be ‘competent’ or ‘legitimate’ speakers, leading to continuous identity formation. García’s (2009, 2014) work on translanguaging further articulates how bilingual migrants creatively use multiple linguistic resources to construct hybrid identities that resist static categorisations.

Translanguaging practices enable migrants to express complex selves that bridge heritage and host cultures, reflecting a bilingual identity that is flexible, context-sensitive and emotionally resonant. Here, translanguaging can also become a narrative tool to express and construct bilingual identities, allowing migrants to tell and retell stories that help them make sense of their evolving selves through language. This narrative practice connects directly to the arts as a form of expression, the third pillar of this framework, framed as a as a personal, cultural and collective act.

3.4 Eisner’s Criteria for Arts-based Research

Elliot Eisner (1997; 1998; 2002; 2004) is an influential figure in Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) and Arts-based Research (AbR). His work emphasises that artistic practices and forms of expression can open up perspectives and insights that might remain hidden when using only traditional research methods. In line with this, Barone and Eisner (2012) note that engaging with the arts allows researchers to access aspects of experience that conventional approaches often overlook. By incorporating artistic elements, researchers and participants can explore and express creativity, facilitate their imagination and experience deep emotions, resulting in a more holistic understanding of the subject matter. Eisner’s seminal paper, *What Can Education Learn from the Arts about the Practice of Education?* (2004) highlights that the arts can foster intuition and emotional engagement, while focusing on the process, rather than the product. Informed by Eisner (1997, 1998, 2002) and Barone and Eisner (2012), the use of theatre in this project created a rich, immersive environment that engaged participants on cognitive, emotional and physical levels, providing an extensive field for eliciting creative responses during the subsequent arts-based workshop.

Eisner's (1997) seminal framework posits a number of criteria as guiding paths for AbR:

1. *Bridging the Virtual and Real*: Eisner (1997) suggests that art can bridge the gap between the virtual (intended as *dramatic* or *fictional*) and the real, prompting audiences to connect with personal experiences. The current research seeks to explore emotions and identity, evoked by the storytelling narrated by Senem in *The Fertile Crescent* performance – a fictional, yet real dramatic piece that brings together the imaginative in the epic and real in her personal anecdotes intertwined in the narration.
2. *Imagination and Expressive Language*: Eisner emphasises the importance of gaps in narratives that allow for personal interpretation and imaginative engagement. Similarly, in Senem's expressive narration, with its paradoxes and critical moments, she actively invited participants to think and reflect, stimulating their cognitive processes and creating space for personal meaning-making.
3. *Context and Lived Experiences*: Eisner highlights the power of contextualised and vernacular language in connecting with lived experiences. Senem's narration, with its blend of English and Turkish, use of English with a Turkish accent and use of sexual references and idioms, provided an entry point for participants to engage in a personal and cultural meaning-making process, drawing upon their own experiences and understandings.
4. *Empathy and Perspective Reconstruction*: Eisner argues that empathy can lead to the reconstruction of perspectives. Senem's performance subtly encouraged empathy by sharing her personal journey, including dreams, failures and successes. This approach, which also aligns with Eisner's emphasis on personal signature, potentially prompted a re-evaluation process in the audience, inviting them to reconsider their own perspectives and experiences.

5. *Narrative Structure*: Eisner posits that a well-structured narrative, beginning with a dilemma, building to a climax and occasionally culminating in a transformation, can create a powerful vision and facilitate meaning-making. Senem’s performance enacted this structure both in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and in her personal story. While not starting with a clear-cut dilemma, both stories presented multiple dilemmas throughout, escalated in intensity and concluded with transformation, for both Gilgamesh and Senem (as discussed in Chapter Five). This structure provided a blueprint for participants to re-create their own visions, construct meaning and engage their emotions and intellect.

Senem’s narration, with its diverse elements, effectively created what Eisner (1997) describes as “imaginary problematic life-situations” that can “spotlight the reader’s own” (p. 84). It also stimulated the senses, which Eisner suggests are “our first avenues to consciousness” (2004, p. 2). He argues that, through our senses, a reflex response – an instinctive function – evolves into a gradual search for stimulation, differentiation, exploration and ultimately, meaning. In this vein, Senem’s performance created a lived experience where emotions, senses and cognition were actively stimulated.

Building on these insights, *The Fertile Crescent* created opportunities for meaning-making – individually and also collaboratively, as participants engaged not only with the material, but also with Senem, and with one another. This potential collective engagement created space for a deeper understanding of individual and shared emotions and identities, as explored in this study through Brené Brown’s (2021) grouping of emotions. In the final section of this chapter, I connect Brown’s theory of emotions with bilingual identity and storytelling.

3.5 Extending Brené Brown’s Framework to Bilingual Identity and Storytelling

In the context of migration, diversity, equity and inclusion are key concepts and critical components of belonging (Brown, 2021). Migrants should not be expected to integrate into a new society solely by adopting the host culture’s norms; rather, integration should be understood as a bidirectional process. In other words, the receiving society also has a

responsibility to create spaces that foster mutual understanding, transformation and genuine inclusion. Within this understanding, migration can foster the formation of new groups and open up opportunities for dialogue, growth and the creation of shared meaning through intercultural engagement – both within broader society, including institutions, and among smaller social groups (Philips et al., 2014).

In this sense, as Brown (2021) emphasises, culture is shaped through “representation, co-creation, influence, and that *inextricable, unnamable* [sic], *spiritual connection that is shared humanity*. Anything less is not enough” (p. 257, italics in the original). This insight into culture also highlights why language is such a crucial medium: it is one of the primary ways individuals participate in cultural representation and assert belonging. In the co-creation of immediate environments, positive attitudes toward language and bilingualism become pivotal, enabling people to actively shape spaces that reflect and sustain shared humanity. Furthermore, the migrants are constantly reminded that they do not share the same opportunities as the majority, such as “getting a driver’s license, applying to college or even receiving financial aid” (Brown, 2021, p. 255) – which makes their sense of belonging far more difficult to achieve, because without equality and genuine acceptance, the shared spiritual connection that Brown describes becomes extremely difficult to feel. Under such conditions, identity is likely to be continuously negotiated and reconstructed, as the reality of being ‘not one of them’ is persistently reinforced. Language, again, can heightened this tension. Being marked as ‘the other’ – as a perceived inexperienced user of the mainstream language, with struggles in fluency, accented speech or translanguaging practices – can make it difficult for migrants to escape an acute awareness of their roots and layered identities. As a result, although Brown’s framework does not explicitly focus on bilingualism, her emphasis on vulnerability, belonging, connection and authenticity offers a rich entry point for exploring bilingual and multilingual identities, particularly in the migration context mentioned above.

Brown (2021) makes an important contribution to the present study’s conceptual and methodological framework by highlighting the role of emotions in creative work. She argues that vulnerability is not a weakness, but the “greatest measure of courage” required

to take risks (p. 53). Embracing vulnerability allows individuals to experiment with new ideas, take risks and engage more deeply with creative practices – a concept particularly relevant in the arts, where creativity and vulnerability are deeply intertwined. This insight is especially pertinent to the present research, in which participants were invited to express spontaneous, unfiltered responses through art within a supportive environment that encouraged honest emotional exploration. Sharing this space with individuals from the same cultural background potentially helped cultivate a sense of belonging from the outset.

The use of Turkish in Senem's narration, alongside cultural elements and moments of collective singing, likely strengthened this sense of belonging, enabling participants to express themselves without the pressure to fit in. In this way, belonging and connection arguably removed barriers to creativity, as the conflicting needs to fit in and stand out can act as "creativity killers" by fostering unhelpful comparisons (Brown, 2021, p. 53). The interplay of belonging and free expression offered a fertile ground for eliciting creative responses to the research questions. This creative process prevailed not only in data construction but throughout all phases of the study.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the framework that supports the foundations of this research in alignment with its question and data analysis and interpretation. Specifically, I explored Brown's (2021) grouping of emotions and how concepts Arts-based Research (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Eisner, 2004) have shaped the current framework. I expanded the discussion on identity construction in the context of migration, finally highlighting Brown's (2021) insights' potential application to bilingual identity and storytelling facilitated in this research. This framework has informed the research methodology, as detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the methodology underpinning this thesis. I begin by situating the study within an interpretivist paradigm, foregrounding concepts such as positionality, intersubjectivity, reflexivity and transparency as central to the research. I introduce qualitative research as the overarching methodological framework, which is then narrowed down to Arts-based Research (AbR) as the specific orientation guiding this inquiry. Next, I provide an overview of the participants who made this study possible. Subsequently, I explore the data construction methods, many of which were used iteratively. Following the next section on ethics and sensitive research, I expand the discussion on my approach to data interpretation, through creative data analysis (Kara et al., 2025).

In Tablet IV of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000), Gilgamesh and Enkidu journey to the Cedar Forest, traveling through mountains and open wilderness for several days. At each camp, they offer flour, prepare sacred meals and pray to Shamash for guidance. During the nights, Gilgamesh experiences dreams filled with troubling images – mountains collapsing, wild storms, bolts of lightning and strange creatures falling from the sky. Fear stirs in him, but each morning he recounts the dreams to Enkidu, who interprets them as signs of divine favour and omens of victory. As they continue their journey, the bond between the two deepens: Enkidu's knowledge of the wild and the gods makes him both guide and protector, while Gilgamesh's determination drives them onward. As they approach the Cedar Forest, they hear the terrifying roar of Humbaba, a reminder of the enormity of their quest and the threshold they are about to cross.

This methodology chapter follows a rhythm similar to that of Gilgamesh and Enkidu's journey to Cedar Forest. Just as the heroes alternate between days of travel and nightly camp rituals – offering prayers, preparing meals and reflecting on dreams – this chapter moves through each research method and element in structured stages, pausing to reflect on choices, rationale and emerging insights in the crafted use of different methods. Like

the campfire rituals, these pauses are moments for careful interpretation, ensuring that each stage is both intentional and responsive to what arises in the process. Enkidu's guiding role – listening, interpreting and advising – echoes the dialogic and relational nature of this methodology, where knowledge is co-constructed through trust, honesty and iterative reflection. In this sense, the chapter is a living practice: a series of pitched camps along the research journey, where careful preparation, reflection and openness to new understanding work together to illuminate the path forward, leading toward the culmination of the study much as the heroes' journey builds toward the Cedar Forest.

4.2 Interpretivist Paradigm

In this study, my epistemological stance is informed by interpretivism, a paradigm that attempts to answer the ontological question of existence by examining the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences and their interactions with the world (Heidegger, 1962). The interpretivist paradigm focuses on understanding and interpreting individuals' subjective interpretations rather than being in the pursuit of objective truths (Geertz, 1973). Its focus lies on understanding the meanings they attribute to their own actions and activities (Given, 2008, p. 461). Knowledge, in this perspective, is embedded in specific cognitive interests or activities, reflecting an individual's relationship with the world in the form of their subjective truths (Haberman, 1971). These subjective, hence multiple truths lie at the intersection of the objective pursuit of positive science and the subjective realm of aesthetics, particularly when scientific observations and the interpretivist paradigm are integrated to explore a truth within cultural contexts and symbols (Geertz, 1973). In this domain, interpretivist researchers can construct data and interpret it through a particular lens while maintaining objectivity in process. Within this philosophical approach, scientific principles can be pursued by employing rigorous and systematic methods in non-traditional ways (Morse et al., 2002).

In this research, I applied systematic data construction and interpretation and endeavoured to share them transparently, from the draft coding process (Appendix D) to excerpts from individual interviews (Appendices E-J). Through these practices, I imbued the study with scientific rigour while sustaining its deep philosophical underpinnings. At this juncture, the

knowledge I unearthed reflects the participants' subjective realities, unpacked through my interpretation. I integrated this into the presentation of my findings by blending participants' own words with subtle interpretive additions in the poems I crafted.

Interpretivist research does not seek to address validity issues (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), nor does it aim to establish a scientific reality from a positivist standpoint, recognising the limitations of empirical science in fully understanding perception and judgment (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2013). In an interpretivist research paradigm, the researcher is aware of their values, in terms of their history, culture, presumptions, experiences and realities through which they construct meaning. These elements, in other words values, influence how the researcher perceives and interprets and make sense of their data constructed through their participant's stories and can contribute to the comprehension of the phenomenon when the researcher and the participants situate their knowledge within similar social, cultural, historical and political contexts. In my search for truths, sharing a similar vision with the participants in these respects, in other terms my positionality, may have helped me interpret the participants' truths more accurately while employing reflexivity.

Within this framework, I am a white woman with a Turkish background who migrated to Ireland in 2020. Although I do not always identify myself as a member of the Turkish community, I share the culture, beliefs and history. As an insider to the Turkish culture, I inherently bring my own perspective and values to the research process. I recognise this subjectivity and strive to achieve intersubjectivity by interpreting the data through the lens of my participants and our shared values. However, I remain vigilant about potential biases and regularly engage in reflexivity throughout the research to minimise their influence, which is characterised by "ongoing self-critique and self-appraisal and that the research product can be given shape by the politics of location and positioning" (Koch & Herrington, 1998, p. 888). In this sense, I acknowledge that my interaction with storyteller Dr Senem Donatan Mohan has significantly influenced my perspective. Having watched her story unfold live five times, revisited it multiple times on YouTube and designed a workshop around it, I found myself profoundly affected by its emotional and narrative depth. This sustained engagement has inevitably shaped my interpretations, reinforcing my

positionality as both a researcher and an audience member deeply intertwined with the artistic material, as well as inspiring the structure of the thesis. Artistry also became a reflexive tool, as it will be discussed in Chapter Ten. This discussion is deferred to that chapter for two reasons: first, the meaning of such reflexivity can only be fully appreciated after engaging with the study's findings; and second, that chapter intentionally shifts the focus away from participants' reflections to concentrate more extensively on my own experience of the data.

Another crucial concept in this type of research is trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While the term can serve as a substitute for validity and reliability in the quantitative paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it contributes to the research's scientific robustness. However, it is essential to note that trustworthiness is not synonymous with validation or confirmation of research's reliability. Instead, it pertains to the qualities of the study in delivering trustworthy findings that instil confidence in the reader (Schmidt & Brown, 2024). These qualities include: consistency, applicability, neutrality (Krefting, 1991), credibility, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and vividness (Whitemore et al., 2001). Each quality is briefly discussed below.

In this research, I ensured *consistency* through systematic data construction and interpretation methods as outlined in the unfolding sections of this chapter. *Applicability* was achieved by designing a study that not only aligns with theories and real-life practices but also emerges from lived experiences, therefore applicable to real life situations. *Neutrality* was maintained by prioritising objectivity in data construction and diligently working to eliminate bias and reflexivity. *Credibility* was upheld by accurately representing participants' experiences, remaining faithful to their words, sourcing data from multiple methods and conducting thorough and rigorous interpretation. *Creativity* was demonstrated through the use of a unique research design, analysis, structure, presentation and dissemination of findings, as well as through eliciting creative responses from the participants. *Thoroughness* was achieved by incorporating a wide range of perspectives from the data on the topics under investigation, including both common and unique responses. *Congruence* was maintained by aligning each research step not only with the

research questions but also with the underlying concepts, ensuring harmony between these steps. Finally, *vividness* was enhanced by presenting the findings in depth and by using poetry, analogies and metaphors to offer deeper layers of meaning and engagement.

Within these qualities, this research aimed at understanding emotions and bilingual identity of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland, asking the overarching question:

How do individuals who are speakers of English as a second language construct their identities across linguistic, personal, social and cultural dimensions?

This question was explored through three sub-questions:

1. How did a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland emotionally respond to the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent*?
2. What aspects of identity were revealed in a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland engaging with the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent*?
3. How does *The Fertile Crescent*'s storyteller artist construct her identity through her performances?

The following sections discuss the methodological approaches used to address these questions, namely qualitative research and Arts-based Research.

4.3 Qualitative Transdisciplinary Research

This qualitative research adopts a transdisciplinary approach, deliberately integrating and synthesising theories, methods and practices across the fields of applied linguistics, psychology, semiotics, and the arts - particularly theatre. Here I draw on the definition of transdisciplinary research, as quoted by Caldwell (2015, fifth paragraph): "Transdisciplinarity occurs when two or more discipline perspectives transcend each other to form a new holistic approach. The outcome will be completely different from what one would expect from the addition of the parts". Thus, transdisciplinary research can be understood as the dynamic synergy of multiple disciplines, where the integration of

perspectives, methods and knowledge systems produces outcomes greater than the simple sum of their parts. In this sense, it is not just a collaboration across fields; it is where $2 + 2$ makes more than 4, the collective exchange and co-creation leading to richer, transformative knowledge.

Rather than simply combining disciplines, this study attempts to construct novel methodological and conceptual understandings that could not have been achieved through any single disciplinary lens or by ‘adding’ those lenses to each other. As such, it offers a new knowledge, both in its methodology and findings that transcends beyond the conventional boundaries. By weaving together multiple epistemologies and modes of expression and interpretation, the study creates a holistic and aesthetic understanding of bilingual identity and emotions, demonstrating how creative, embodied and interpretive practices can produce knowledge that is simultaneously scholarly, intuitive and artistic.

Aligned with transdisciplinary research’s aim of offering more holistic ways of generating knowledge, qualitative research is a methodological approach that seeks to explore phenomena to generate rich descriptions, from the participants’ perspectives (Newby, 2014). Qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena through an interpretivist or constructivist paradigm (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). It involves interpretive practices through which the world is made visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach promotes openness in the research process, recognising that unexpected findings can emerge and encouraging researchers to remain flexible, creative and receptive in their interpretations (Finley, 2003). Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to generalise findings and may treat significantly different data points as ‘outliers’, qualitative research delves into the essence of lived experience and prioritises participants’ perspectives (Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Saldaña, 2015). Instead of disregarding divergent voices, qualitative research values them as sources of insight into the complexity of the phenomenon under study (Saldaña, 2015).

Qualitative research also brings creativity to the study, by providing alternatives for forms of evidence (Prosser & Loxley, 2008) and by going beyond current approaches to research in terms of theories, practices and consequences (Fox & Geichman, 2001). There, the

practice may evolve into an arts-based inquiry, at a place where the ‘method meets arts’ (Leavy, 2020). In this vein, the arts can engage individuals in sensory, emotional, cognitive and sometimes at physical levels and open up space for deeper representations of knowledge (Eisner, 2002). Traditional research methods that try to unpack information only at intellectual or cognitive level are likely to fail to reach the information that has not entered conscious awareness. Given that sensory information is largely automatic and unconscious, and only a small portion of it can be processed in working memory, a study such as this, which relies on storytelling as a pretext (O’Neill, 1995) for artistic and aesthetic engagement, may need to go beyond traditional research methodologies (Finley, 2003) to unpack “less definable aesthetic *knowings*” (Greenwood, 2012, p. 3, italics in the original). In this research, I employed a multi-layered arts-based approach to explore aesthetic knowing in both its more definable, consciously articulated aspects and its more elusive, tacit dimensions.

4.3.1 Arts-based Research

This study employed a qualitative Arts-based Research (AbR) methodology. The methodological tools that arts-based researchers can use include data construction, data interpretation and representation of findings (Bresler, 2011; Greenwood, 2012; Leavy, 2020). These tools incorporate principles of the creative arts for a holistic exploration of the phenomenon, integrating theory and practice (Leavy, 2020). Indeed, in AbR, methodology can entail a symbiotic relationship with practice, when practice and research are integrated. While the research may guide the practice at times, it also allows the practice to influence and shape the research process. This approach acknowledges that the outcomes of the research are idiosyncratic and arts researchers embark on their exploration with a keen enthusiasm for what emerges. As Piazzoli (2024) describes, AbR is both leading and flexible in its nature, with each iteration of a single practice can take a different course.

AbR draws on principles from qualitative research but also introduces distinctive concepts and approaches. While it enriches the qualitative research toolkit (Greenwood, 2019), AbR extends beyond by creating space to explore not only intellectual but also latent, emotional and embodied aspects of human experience (Greenwood, 2012, 2016). It regards the arts

not merely as a mode of expression but as a core method of inquiry that uncovers complex, nuanced dimensions of experience and creativity. According to Barone and Eisner (2012), AbR provides a way to engage with the ambiguous and layered qualities of human life through an aesthetic lens. Leavy (2020) extends the foundations of AbR by advocating for the arts as a way to foster empathy, challenge existing narratives and shape new understandings. Leavy's insights are particularly relevant for this research, as she supports the use of theatre as a medium that connects personal and collective experiences, facilitating the exploration of complex emotional themes.

Although AbR does not address validity issues in the manner of the positivist paradigm, its validity can be assessed using three criteria, as outlined by Eisner (1998). Firstly, *referential adequacy* pertains to the study's ability to be verified through evidence beyond mere rhetoric. Secondly, *structural corroboration* concerns the coherence of inferential reasoning based on the evidence. This suggestion aligns with Rolling's (2010) conceptualisation of interpretive validity in AbR, which suggests that multiple readings within a study can serve as a criterion for trustworthiness – a notion discussed in Section 4.2, alongside other methods for ensuring the scientific robustness of interpretative research. Lastly, *consensual validation* involves the potential for interpretations in the research to alter the reader's perspective, reflecting the transformative aim of AbR and its applicability to inquiries (Eisner, 1998). This is also in line with interpretivism, discussed in Section 4.2, as interpretivist paradigm rejects a realist ontology. However, drawing the bottom line on validity concerns, Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue that from an interpretivist perspective, traditional notions of internal and external validity hold little, if any, meaning.

Guided by these principles in AbR and the interpretivist paradigm and strengthened by scientific rigour, the study aimed to understand the participants' subjective experiences. The participants whose experiences were interpreted are discussed below.

4.4 Participants

This study explored its questions *with* the participants of the study, *for* other migrants living away from their country, informed by Gupta (2024). Each of the study's participants

became an important informant in their commitment to the research. The participants of the study were 22 adults from Türkiye, living in Ireland; 21 audience participants who attended the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent: Tales from the Orient*, and Senem, the performing artist. The inclusion criteria for this study required participants to be adults from Türkiye living in Ireland who had attended both the performance and the post-performance workshop, were speakers of Turkish as their first language, and English as an additional language.

Exclusion criteria were defined by the absence of these characteristics. The audience participants were recruited by purposeful sampling, using a poster I designed for the study (Figure 4.1). The first visual item on the poster is copied from the professional advertisement of the original performance. I purposefully utilised translanguaging in the poster, employing Turkish in idiomatic expressions, but keeping English in the core elements. This choice aligns with Senem's translanguaging practice in the performance, as well as the study's perspectives.

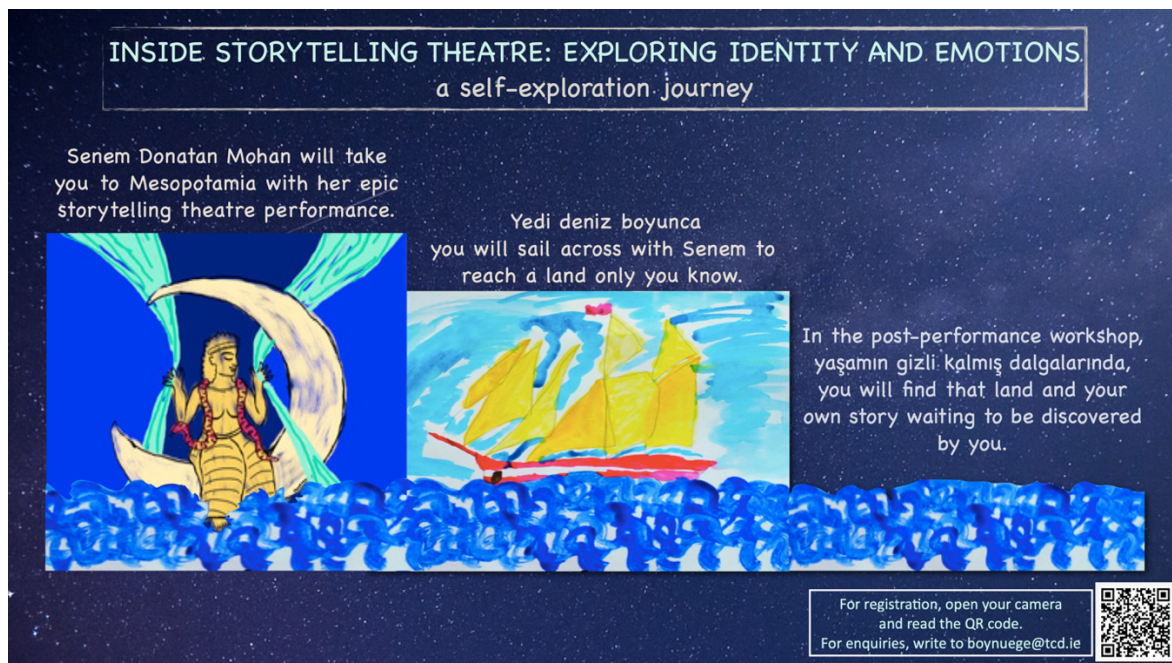


Figure 4.1. *The poster used for participant recruitment.*

Senem, the artist, agreed to perform the theatre piece four times, once in Limerick and three times in Dublin, as part of this project, on voluntary basis. Across these four iterations, data was constructed with varying group sizes:

- Three audience participants in the first performance;
- Six in the second performance;
- Five in the third performance;
- Seven in the fourth performance.

While this study's participants were audience members of Senem's performance, not all audience members took part in the research – only those who attended the post-performance workshop became participants in the study. Although the theatre experience was open to the public, the workshop was exclusive to the study participants. In other words, individuals who did not attend the performance could not participate in the post-performance workshop.

Due to the circumstances related to COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to conduct individual interviews with the participants from the first group in the research. However, in the subsequent groups, five participants from the second group, four from the third, and five from the fourth took part in interviews. The number of participants in each group who contributed to focus groups and individual interviews is summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. *Summary of the audience participants who contributed to the study.*

	Participant Groups			
	1 st Group	2 nd Group	3 rd Group	4 th Group
Number of participants in the post-performance workshop	3	6	5	7

Number of participants				
contributed to individual	0	5	4	5
interviews				

In this thesis, I did not aim to make comparisons between participants’ demographics or other backgrounds, such as their occupation, age, English proficiency or experience living abroad. Therefore, I did not collect any formal background information. This approach aligns with the principles of translanguaging as an inclusive practice, where the focus is on maximising the potential of the languages individuals use and drawing on their lived experiences (García & Lin, 2017; Yilmaz, 2021), rather than relying on predefined categories. Echoing this, my primary aim was to explore emotions as a fundamental aspect of human nature, an approach supported by researchers who emphasise the universality of emotional experience (Barrett, 2017; Panksepp, 2004).

Alongside Li Wei’s (2020) approach, which advocates deliberately blurring the division between researcher and researched to enable deeper exploration, I sought to soften this boundary in my own study by occasionally sharing personal reflections. This practice helped create a more conversational, ‘chat-like’ atmosphere in both the focus groups and the individual interviews. This also parallels participatory research principles, which seek to minimise power distance between researcher and participants and foster more authentic, meaningful interactions (Cahill, 2007). These elements allowed participants’ to shape aspects of the inquiry, creating dialogic spaces that foregrounded their voices and experiences, as a way of empowering them.

While I did not actively asked demographic data, participants’ backgrounds emerged naturally in their reflections. This is consistent with research suggesting that individuals often bring their social and cultural contexts into their narratives, consciously or unconsciously (Bruner, 1991). However, rather than focusing on these elements, my interpretation and presentation of the findings provide a holistic view of the participants. Broadly, their ages ranged from early twenties to mid-forties and all had tertiary education – holding bachelor’s, master’s and/or doctoral degrees. While most were working

professionals, there were also individuals in service roles or studying at language centres, as well as some who were not working at the time. Similar to demographic data, participants' background in English was not collected. In this sense, formal proof of proficiency was not required; rather, it was communicated in advance that the main language of the performance would be English and participants were expected to have sufficient experience to follow the narration.

A few participants who felt less confident contacted me beforehand to ask whether the English used in the theatre would be difficult to understand. As an English teacher well familiar with varying proficiency levels, I reassured them that it would not, noting that a B1–B2 level would be sufficient to comprehend the performance. To further support those less confident, they were encouraged to read a summary of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* beforehand, either in English or Turkish. As a result, data were constructed with 22 participants – 21 audience member participants and Senem – using an arts-based methodology, with the specific data construction methods discussed below.

4.5 Data Construction Methods

In this study, I employed a range of arts-based methods across different phases of the research, combining performance-based, visual and literary approaches. Specifically, the data construction methods included Research-based Theatre, role plays, Language Portraits, focus groups and individual interviews. This multimodal design reflects my commitment to capturing the complexity of emotions and bilingual identity through multi-layered forms.

4.5.1 Research-based Theatre

Research-based Theatre (RbT) served as the skeleton around which other methods formed the flesh of data construction. Theatre is a performance art that opens avenues for exploration (Belliveau & Lea, 2016), fostering productive and creative reflection (Collier, 2012) and providing a platform for self-expression.

RbT as a research practice can be considered a form falling within the spectrum of AbR methodology (Eisner, 2002, Leavy, 2020), illustrated in Chapter Three. RbT draws on strengths of both academic rigours and artistry (Belliveau & Lea, 2011). While doing so, it specifically benefits from theatre by its three-dimensional representations and evoking emotions, in an attempt to specifically understand health and education related phenomena (Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008). Through a carefully designed theatrical experience, the audience can be engaged beyond the intellectual, reaching embodied, emotional and empathetic levels (Conrad, 2012). In this regard, RbT can offer diverse pathways in research in all its phases (Belliveau & Lea, 2011; Lea, 2012; Lea & Belliveau, 2023; Lea et al., 2011).

RbT emerges also as a robust means of disseminating study findings to both academic and non-academic audiences (Lea, 2012; Lea & Belliveau, 2023). Its effectiveness lies in its capacity to bridge communication gaps, especially between academic and non-academic spheres, by translating knowledge into an accessible language for diverse audiences (Rossiter et al., 2008). Given the primary goal of research should be effective communication, extending its impact beyond academic boundaries and resonating within society (Richardson, 2003), opting for a theatrical performance to disseminate results, particularly in the social sciences, not only enhances the research's potential for influencing change but also elevates its value (Gray et al., 2002). When performed, data reaches beyond the territories that other methodologies can go, attaining an empathetic power (Mienczakowski, 2001; Mienczakowski et al., 2001), influencing the way research is presented. This becomes particularly possible with the “emancipatory and cathartic” responses the performance can evoke in the audience, as well as the individual actors (Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008, p. 453).

If the ultimate aim of the research is to effectively disseminate findings of social or human research through catharsis, then the performance should encompass key elements of catharsis, as discussed in Section 2.4.2. These elements facilitate emotional arousal, identification with the story, release and transformation (Ratzlaff, 2020). Therefore, a research aiming to evoke a cathartic effect in the audience should feature artistic and

aesthetic qualities conducive to eliciting such emotions (Haseman, 2006). However, achieving catharsis does not necessarily entail complete immersion in the story; rather, it may require maintaining a certain distance. Striking the right balance allows for engagement “in and of emotions”, ensuring an experience that is transformative without being overwhelmingly distressing (Scheff, 2007, p. 109). Ultimately, RbT proves most effective when it allows its audience moments of respite, enabling them to step back from the immersive atmosphere periodically. This holds true whether RbT is employed during data construction, providing participants with a theatrical platform or facilitating their own theatrical productions or during the dissemination phase. Such breaks are crucial, especially in sensitive research contexts, to safeguard the well-being of participants, who may belong to vulnerable groups.

When preparing scripts and performances for the dissemination phase of an RbT, the balance should be found between artistry and authenticity (Lea & Belliveau, 2023). This means that artistic elements should be incorporated into the scripts to enhance engagement and emotional resonance with the audience. However, it is equally crucial to maintain authenticity in representing the research findings and the experiences of the participants. Finding this balance ensures that the performance effectively communicates the research while also captivating and moving the audience. The composition of the scripts in an RbT may involve different approaches: a collective approach, a playwright-centred approach and a composite approach (Lea, 2012). I summarise these approaches by using the elements in Figure 4.2, which are data (I), development team (II), playwright (III) and script (IV).

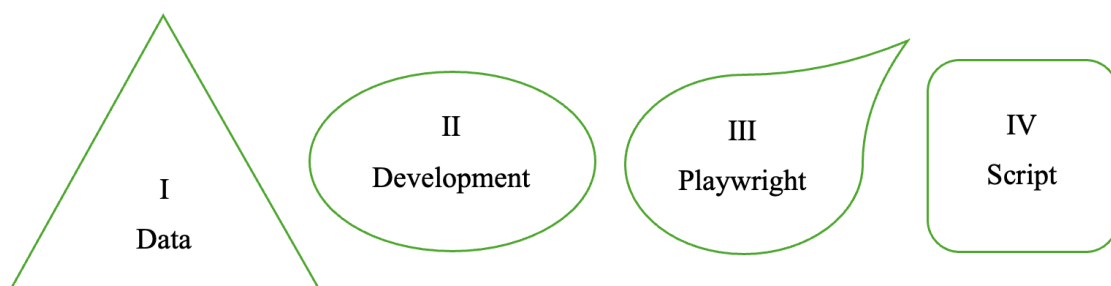


Figure 4.2. *Components in approaches in generating RbT scripts.* (Based on Lea, 2012)

Lea (2012) suggests that the collective approach in RbT involves collaboration with a team throughout various phases of the research process, including data construction, analysis and script writing for dissemination. This approach integrates elements of teamwork (I, II and IV), as the team collectively assumes the role of playwright. Conversely, in a playwright-centred approach, the focus is primarily on data analysis rather than theatricality. In this approach, the researcher, acting as the playwright, independently crafts scripts from the data while remaining open to critical perspectives from other experts. This approach encompasses data analysis (I) through an individual effort (III) and translating them into scripts in the same manner (IV), as there is no collaborative script crafting involved. Here, the theatre can repeat the exact words of the participants to re-tell their stories (Greenwood, 2019). Finally, the composite approach involves initial exploration of data by researchers or theatre artists to identify script materials, which are then passed on to the playwright for script development. As the name suggests, this approach encompasses all four elements (I, II, III and IV).

This study is informed by RbT, though not through the creation of theatre scripts, but poems, one per sub-question, to be performed during the dissemination phase, alongside the Afterword. RbT methods employed in this research also encompass the post-performance workshop, and specifically role plays, as discussed below.

4.5.2 Role Plays

Role plays are one of several ways theatrical methods can be incorporated into research (Saldaña, 2015). Using dramatic strategies to illuminate the lived experiences of individuals, cultures and communities offers an effective means of deepening understanding (Saldaña, 2011). Among these strategies, participant-created role plays can be especially valuable when the aim is to explore a phenomenon from the participants' own perspective. Furthermore, when designed by participants, these performances not only provides a first-hand information but also empower them. Similar to an artist performing on stage to convey research findings through RbT, participants can experience the freedom of authentic and intensive expression. They may feel valued and they can experiment with artistic control over both their story and performance. As they perform, they can travel

through space and time simultaneously, creating and communicating meaning, as described by Belliveau (2015). Through the role plays they create and present, participants can experience deep emotions and uncover significant meanings (Belliveau, 2015). These meanings can be explored in post-performance reflections (Belliveau & Nichols, 2017; Greenwood, 2019; Leavy, 2020; Piazzoli, 2018, 2024; Saldaña, 2011, 2015).

Role plays can also help challenge power dynamics, reveal hierarchies and facilitate the understanding of personal meanings created by participants or students (Saldaña, 2015). Within those role plays – both as a form of performative and performance practice, in the sense of performing identity and engaging in theatrical performance – participants and the researcher alike encounter opportunities for transformation. For the researcher, such interdisciplinary, embodied experiences can offer ways to expand academic discourse, while for participants, they open up spaces to explore new ways of thinking and constructing identity (Pineau, 2002).

Informed by these insights, role plays became one of the most prominent data construction method in this study. They were structured as the final activity of the post-performance workshop, considering that drama-based approaches often require a sense of group cohesion and safety. This stage of data construction differed slightly between the first group and the others, as I realised that the structured format I had initially provided was not as effective as anticipated. In the role plays, participants were divided into groups of three to five, depending on the overall group size. At times, however, role plays could not be created and/or shared due to time constraints. The practical details are outlined below for each group:

- In the first post-performance workshop, the three participants worked together to create a role play as a group. Their task was to create a role play as a response to a scenario I provided (as detailed in Section 7.5.1.1).
- In the second post-performance workshops, I did not provide a scenario, feeling that the structured role play was difficult for the participants in the first group to

understand and work with. Instead, their task was to collectively identify a moment from the performance that had influenced all of them and then to create or recreate that moment in a role play format. In the second workshop, six participants were divided into two groups.

- In the third post-performance workshop I followed the previous model. I did not provide a scenario; instead, I asked participants to identify one themselves. Five participants formed a single group to create their role plays. They created role plays, however, they could not share them as there was insufficient time. Given the circumstances, I encouraged the participants to reflect on the significance of their stories for themselves, transforming the activity into a form of storytelling.
- In the fourth workshop, there was no time for the role play – either to fully create or to share, hindering observation of identities more in-depth.

The role plays aimed to establish a tangible connection between the performance and the participants' own lives, while providing a protective layer to allow them to use a third-person narrative voice, thus distancing themselves from potentially sensitive experiences. After creating their role plays, groups were encouraged to share their creations with the rest of the workshop participants. Subsequently, we engaged in discussions about their feelings related to the moment they depicted in their role play, their emotions about the role play activity itself and their reflections on the overall experience of the theatre and workshop. Both the stories conveyed through the role plays, and the participants' reflections on the role plays provided invaluable insights into how they made sense of their experiences.

In the data interpretation, it became evident that the meanings expressed in the role plays were primarily sociocultural and personal, making it possible to observe the participants' sociocultural and personal identities. However, bilingual identity – the central focus of this study – emerged more strongly through the participants' Language Portraits (LPs) and their reflections on these artefacts, discussed in detail below.

4.5.3 Language Portraits (LPs)

Language Portraits (LPs), also known as plurilingual portraits, is a tool created in the early 2000 from the work of the Research Group *Spracherleben*, at the University of Vienna, which has been widely utilised in applied linguistics (Busch, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2021, 2022; Kusters & De Meulder, 2019). LPs use body silhouette templates that participants colour to express their linguistic identities and experiences. This process allows participants to visually map their emotional and cognitive connections to languages by assigning different parts of the body to the languages they speak or interact with, followed by a reflection. For over two decades, LPs have served as a tool to prompt participants to reflect on their language repertoire and to have them engaged in “metapragmatic reflections” (Busch, 2021, p. 201) related to the bilingual speaker’s communicative resources (Busch, 2021; Kusters & De Mulder, 2019).

The metapragmatic reflection process involves thinking about or beyond the languages by paying attention to its pragmatic use in the social or cultural contexts, such as within family members or at workplace and explore how they navigate between the languages. LPs also make its creators to consciously embody their emotional experiences, revealing their identities. As those identities are also physically intertwined with language (Capra, 2015), these research tools can initiate an embodied social analysis through the critical evaluation of the lived experiences related to language. LPs possess a dual character, encompassing the found object (such as rules, conventions and ideologies) and the subjective or intersubjective experience (Capra, 2015). With this dual character, they become to life once they are completed by the participant (Göksel & KIR Cullen, 2024), telling the experiences of its creator. LPs are subject to change (Busch, 2021), as they are living – living in the lived experiences of their creator.

In this research, I used LP templates, as found on the Heteroglossia website resource (<https://heteroglossia.net/Sprachportraet.123.html>) discussed by Busch (2021). As indicated in Item 38 of the Council of Europe’s toolkit, I explained to the participants that creating an LP was intended as a spontaneous and intuitive activity. Additionally, I encouraged participants to conceptualise ‘languages’ broadly, encompassing dialects, languages that carry emotional resonance even if not fully understood and any other forms

of communication they might use for self-expression or to enhance communicative impact – drawing on the concept of translanguaging. I further clarified that there was no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, nor any ‘creative’ or ‘non-creative’ way to create an LP.

To support their understanding, I offered participants the option to view example LPs (see Appendix A), while emphasising that this was purely optional and that they were free to rely solely on their own imagination. Following this explanation, some participants chose to view the samples, whereas others preferred not to. Additionally, I encouraged participants to conceptualise ‘languages’ broadly, encompassing dialects, languages that carry emotional resonance even if not fully understood and any other forms of communication they might use for self-expression or to enhance communicative impact – drawing on the concept of translanguaging. Having said some part of these instructions were adopted from Council of Europe Toolkit, the body outline that I used was slightly different than the one suggested in the toolkit. Instead Busch’s (2021, see Figure 4.3) body outline is used, defined as in the following:

The body outline is represented schematically – with no gender or other specifications and no clothing but also not ‘naked’ (for example, no toes are visible). The figure does not look too ‘perfect’ to avoid discouraging participants from adding their own elements. Apart from a suggestion of fingers, no details (such as eyes, mouth or ears) are indicated in order to preserve the possibility of completion. (p. 198)



Figure 4.3. *Template of the body outline.* (Retrieved from Busch, 2018, p. 9)

Traditionally, LPs find application in an applied linguistic classroom context. However, in my research, I integrated LPs with a drama-oriented approach, drawing from my background in the performative arts, following recent research in this area (Göksel & KIR Cullen, 2024; Stewart, 2024). The LPs in this study aimed to investigate emotions in bilingual identity and were created immediately after exposure to two languages: English, as the main language of Senem's narration, and Turkish as the first language of the participants, which Senem occasionally used in her performance. The creation of LPs was guided by Senem's performance and followed by a reflection phase, during which participants could build on each other's insights. Using LPs as a post-performance exploration tool is a novel contribution to the literature and employing them to explore a wide range of emotions as responses to an aesthetic experience further enhances this originality. This use of LPs was integrated by the use of focus groups, as outlined in the following section.

4.5.4 Focus Groups

Focus groups can be helpful when a researcher seeks to explore diverse perspectives and varied experiences in relation to their research questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). They emphasise group interaction and discussions (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups can be particularly informative when research holds an “immediate and applied perspective”, making them widely used in Arts-based Research (AbR, Smith et al., 2009, p. 72). When researchers exercise caution regarding participants’ comfort in sharing personal experiences with others, focus groups can be an effective tool to discuss sensitive topics (Roulston, 2010).

In this study, as the participants shared their narratives in the focus groups, reflecting on the theatre they were engaged in, their stories served as “a portal through which a person [entered] the world and by which his or her experience of the world [was] interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). In this sense, the focus groups were utilised to prompt immediate responses from participants engaged in various arts within this applied research. My aim was to facilitate both individual and collective exploration of their experiences related to bilingual identity, allowing participants to build upon each other’s reflections and derive meaning from their own experiences while listening to others. Therefore, I encouraged participants to reflect on specific moments, emotions and meanings using various prompts to guide the discussions and to create role plays. Some prompts used in the focus groups can be found in Appendix B. Throughout these sessions, participants freely took turns, engaged spontaneously, interjected with humour, expressed agreement or disagreement, initiated conversations with each other, sometimes asked questions to each other and took multiple turns in the discussion. I also interjected with clarification questions and contributed to the discussion with my own brief reflections while being careful not to lead the participant. Importantly, prior to each discussion, I reiterated that participants were welcome to share as much or as little as they felt comfortable with.

The first discussion in the focus group was centred around Language Portraits (LPs), a tool discussed above (Section 4.5.3). This process offered an embodied and creative form of

critical and collaborative reflections. Reflecting on their drawing opened up avenues that can be both more thoughtful and honest than those offered by a conventional interview (Greenwood, 2019). On the other hand, although reflections on the LP as an art product that is created by the participants are fertile, the art product itself can also speak, without requiring verbal explanations (Greenwood, 2019). The LPs can also possess rich sources for exploring identity as themselves, independent of the reflections, when the researcher uses them for introspection and deconstructing (Greenwood, 2019).

Following LP creation and reflection, the workshop transitioned to exploring symbols in the *The Fertile Crescent*. Here, participants were encouraged to reflect on the symbols present in the performance that resonated with them. I broadened the concept of symbols to encompass anything metaphorically meaningful to them. Participants were prompted to close their eyes, mentally revisit the storytelling theatre performance and identify the objects that came to mind. They were then asked to consider why those particular objects appeared and what symbolic meaning they possibly held. Participants delved into why these symbols evoked certain emotions and collectively reflected on their significance. Subsequently, they proceeded to the *key moment in the performance* discussion, where they were prompted to identify a pivotal moment in the story that held significance for them. Once again, participants closed their eyes, recalling a moment that stirred strong emotions and contemplated why that moment was significant to them. Similar to symbol discussion, participants shared their chosen significant moment along with the reasons behind its importance. This prompt also laid the groundwork for the final activity, which involved role plays, as shared in Section 4.5.2. Through this approach, the focus groups facilitated deep reflections and insights, aiming to provide a solid foundation of trust and psychological safety.

The focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed. I manually transcribed the data for the first and second groups, while I used the dictation function in MS Word 365 for the automatic transcription of the third and fourth groups, subsequently listening to the recordings to verify accuracy. The parts included in this thesis were then translated into English. The translation process involved my own translations, in addition to translations

from two different software programs, resulting in a finalised version that analysed the differences among all three translations. Building on this groundwork, to further explore emotions and identity I conducted semi-structured individual interviews.

4.5.5 Individual Interviews

I conducted individual interviews approximately two months after the workshop with participants who volunteered to take part (14 out of 22 audience members). Incorporating interviews into data construction offers several advantages (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). In this study, individual interviews were used to elicit deeper and longer responses. While in the focus groups I had used Senem's performance as a medium rather than asking direct questions to create a safe space for participants, I felt more comfortable exploring emotions and identity in the interviews, feeling that I was welcomed in their worlds, still remaining careful and respectful throughout. By adopting a semi-structured approach, the interviews facilitated rapport and openness, as suggested by Roulston (2010).

In the interviews, I not only tried to facilitate deeper responses, but also I followed up to assess any changes and sought clarification or confirmation on aspects discussed in the focus groups, when necessary. I began each session by allowing them to freely initiate a conversation, sometimes not related to the research. After listening to their initial reflections, I posed follow up questions drawn from their responses. Then, I delved into discussions about the Language Portrait (LP) they created. Subsequently, I shared prompts (see Appendix C for some examples) some of which were derived from their reflections in the transcripts of the focus groups. Within this context, I scheduled meetings with the 14 participants at a prearranged time, either on Zoom or in a room booked at Trinity College Dublin, according to the participant's convenience. The shortest interview lasted 34 minutes, while the remaining interviews lasted over one hour, typically between 75 and 90 minutes, with the longest three interviews extending to 102, 104 and 107 minutes. In total, each participant dedicated approximately 270 minutes (180 minutes on the events' day and approximately 90 minutes on average for the individual interview). Additionally, I conducted an in-person individual interview with the artist, Senem Donatan Mohan, which lasted 147 minutes. We met with Senem in a private room at Trinity College Dublin a

couple of weeks after her final performance for this research. The interview began with her creation of a LP, followed by her reflections on it. In the later stages of the interview, the focus shifted to her experiences as a bilingual artist, with many of the questions arising as spontaneous follow-ups to her responses.

The interviews were conducted in Turkish, which was the participants' preferred language. The English translation process consisted of my own translations, as well as translations from two different software programs, culminating in a final version that examined the discrepancies among all three translations. Similar to the process used for the focus group data, I initially transcribed the interviews using MS Word 365 and then verified their accuracy. The sections included in the body of the thesis were later translated into English. In addition, extended excerpts from six individual interviews – with two interviews selected from each of Groups 2, 3 and 4 – are presented in Appendix E. These excerpts were purposefully chosen to illustrate different examples and perspectives.

Throughout the interviews, I occasionally shared relevant experiences or observations, similar to my approach in the focus groups, but limited these contributions to ensure participants had ample opportunity to speak. I also offered comparable experiences to acknowledge and validate their perspectives without steering the conversation. I avoided asking leading questions, preferring instead to let the conversation flow naturally. In fact, most of the time the discussion was so smooth and rich that I rarely referred to my prepared questions, only using them if the conversation stalled and required guidance. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, I refrained from directly asking for specific personal anecdotes or past experiences in the individual interviews, adopting the same approach as in the focus groups. For example, I did not pose questions such as, 'Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your accent?' or 'Do you have a Turkish accent when you speak English? How do you feel about it?' Instead, I asked more open-ended questions – often building on reflections participants had spontaneously shared in the focus group – for example, 'In the focus group, Senem's accent was mentioned by [another participant's name]. They said [...] Do you agree?' This technique helped minimise the

risks commonly associated with sensitive research, in alignment with ethical research principles, which are discussed in detail in the following section.

4.6 Ethics and Sensitive Research

Ethics clearance for the study was obtained from the Research Committee in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, first on 4th February 2022, and for the amended version on 13th May 2022 (Appendix F). However, ethical considerations go beyond institutional ethics and require rigorous efforts. Below, I address some of these ethical considerations.

Given that migrants are often regarded as a potentially vulnerable population, exploring their emotional experiences and identity carries inherent risks of re-traumatisation, especially when past traumas are present. To mitigate this, I deliberately avoided direct, self-focused questioning. Instead, I employed performance as a mediating tool – a filter or protective shield – when addressing emotional topics, as elaborated in earlier sections. This indirect approach not only safeguarded participants' wellbeing but also encouraged immediate, experience-based reflections, thus avoiding the difficulties and potential distress involved in responding to broad or ambiguous retrospective questions. My background in Educational Psychology, with a master's thesis on identity construction, informed a theoretically grounded approach to these sensitive issues. Additionally, as a Turkish adult living in Ireland, I was able to integrate my own lived experience with this theoretical ground. Therefore, drawing on my academic expertise and having a shared cultural and experiential ground with participants, I sought to create a respectful and safe environment for open dialogue.

Within ethical considerations, it is also critical to ensure reciprocity and remain reflexive about the researcher's interpretive position, avoiding fixed meanings, remaining open to the unexpected and acknowledging the subjective nature of arts-based inquiry (de Freitas, 2008). I tried to achieve the ethical reciprocity between myself and each participant, by openly listening to them and the data, without any presumptions or hypothesis. I continually questioned my interpretations, deliberately avoiding predefined deductive categories. In this space, participant engagement and personal contributions were encouraged, allowing

for unexpected interactions, as well as findings and themes. Therefore, while I was inevitably present in constructing themes, I aimed to minimise the imposition of preconceived ideas, allowing the participants' voices and experiences to guide the process. This approach allowed me to cultivate an ethical researcher-participant relationship, emphasising empathy and responsiveness to unanticipated insights. However, I made my presence visible by using first-person language and acknowledging not only cultural but also personal meanings that inevitably influenced my interpretations. Furthermore, during data analysis, I consistently noted that "I interpreted" the data, addressing reflexivity in line with the interpretivist paradigm discussed in Section 4.2 of this thesis.

Nevertheless, from an ethical point of view, I acknowledge that it is not possible to be fully reflexive, as it is not possible to be fully aware of each second of our emotions and cognition, because only a small number of unconscious reach conscious level, as illustrated in the concept of "Freudian iceberg" (Green, 2019, p. 169). On a beautiful note, this does not necessarily indicate a shortcoming, but a profound understanding, as holistic judgments at unconscious levels can be better than conscious levels (Dijksterhuis & Nordgren, 2006). This non-awareness or forgetting, presents a great reference to de Freitas' (2012) Alzheimer Project, as metaphorical Alzheimer of a researcher can be a blessing for the research. Informed by these, the details of the data interpretation are discussed in the next section.

4.7 Data Analysis

In the current study, to construct themes, I began my creative analysis with familiarisation and coding, as these are widely identified in the literature as the first steps in theme construction. My familiarisation began during data construction because I constructed all the dataset myself without collaborators. It deepened during interview preparation, as I reread each participant's materials multiple times to shape interview questions, adding an early layer of interpretation. A further layer occurred during transcription. I manually transcribed the first two groups and used MS Word's transcription function for the final two; however, automated output did not replace familiarisation, as I listened to each recording in full to check and correct the transcript. Together, these steps

enabled sustained immersion and a strong grasp of the dataset before more deliberate interpretation began.

As my interpretations developed, the analytic process gradually evolved into a more creative and intuitive approach. The following section briefly outlines the initial phases of coding, then expands on the creative and intuitive methods, which are the primary approach to data interpretation; and the strategies I employed to address the limitations of this interpretative approach.

4.7.1 Creative Analysis

In data interpretation, I first coded my data, later to be translated into themes. The coding, in its open-ended form, allowed me to identify similarities and differences through a deep reflection and ownership of the data. Contrary to line-by-line coding, I opted for a sentence-by-sentence or paragraph-by-paragraph analysis during this phase. I started with creating two Word documents to organise the data for my research focus. One document was fully data-driven, shaped by the main elements emerging from participants' reflections, while the other focused in advance on the languages used. I began structuring the first document by adding key concepts identified during data familiarisation, such as the *requiem*, connection and openness, where responses related to the *requiem* later developed into a theme, connection became a main category and some instances within openness were translated into vulnerability. The second document was divided into two sections, for Turkish and English, reflecting the initial foci of the study. While I copied excerpts from individual transcripts into these documents, I also analysed each participant's data holistically by creating a separate document for each participant, which included their LP, focus group reflections and individual interview responses.

In the subsequent parts of my data interpretation, my engagement with the data took arts-based forms. I found myself not only listening but also emotionally connecting with and responding to the data through metaphors, visuals and poems. In crafting these elements, I intuitively selected information to construct themes and thematic representations, through interpretation. This process involved transparency, reflexivity and positionality, however,

incorporated a distinctly intuitive element in theme construction, which makes it difficult to explicitly present the analysis, as I listened to my emotional connections, and at times my body (Brown, 2024). Through this creative process, the researcher can develop novel representations that are difficult to trace back, yet remain scientific and broadly applicable, as defined by Brown (2024):

The selection and reshuffling of details represent a creative process that results in new knowledge although the explicit, individual steps for this cannot be retraced. Despite the focus on the specificities of the setting, in which the selection and reshuffling have occurred, this new contextualised knowledge generated in this process is still generally applicable because of how I focus on the quality criteria for Arts-based Research. (p. 100)

Although at times my inquiry took on an embodied form through the methods it employed, I prefer the term ‘creative analysis’, as it encompasses embodied inquiry alongside other methods from which it can draw (Kara et al., 2025). Brown’s (2024) discussion of intuition in relation to Embodied Inquiry can be understood as inherently rendering an analysis creative, whether embodied or not, since intuition itself has a creative force. As Irwin et al. (2018) emphasise, intuition carries a distinct creative power, particularly within self-narrated and performance-based research.

In contrast to dominant academic discourses that often frame emotional engagement as a threat to scholarly rigour, creative and intuitive perspectives in data analysis align with emerging paradigms that recognise the epistemic value of emotion and lived experience. In this sense, Arts-based Research (AbR) values creativity and intuition as a crucial and legitimate way of knowing, standing in stark contrast to the prioritisation of logic and fixed procedures in traditional methodologies. As Leavy (2020) explains, artistic processes enable researchers to work with images, materials and metaphors as pathways to implicit knowledge, allowing feelings and insights to surface beyond straightforward cognitive analysis. This approach fosters discovery through immersion, reflection and embodied engagement with artistic media, making intuition fundamental to AbR, where inquiry unfolds through non-linear, emotional, creative and sensory modes of understanding (Leavy, 2020). Moustakas (1990) describes intuition as the ability to discern hidden truths by noticing patterns, linking clues and recognising meaningful connections among

seemingly unrelated experiences through a process of repeatedly examining evidence until understanding emerges. This perspective aligns with the view that intuition can arise relationally, through engagement with others, materials and aesthetic form, particularly within collaborative arts practices such as storytelling. In such contexts, retelling and creative iteration generate new meanings, offering a vital space for renewal and connection (Irwin et al., 2020).

Intuitiveness becomes visible when artists or researchers respond to creative works through ongoing interaction between perception and contemplation, aiming not for absolute answers but for deeper and expanding comprehension through emotional resonance and imagination. These bring flexibility, openness and responsiveness, which are essential not only for arts-based researchers (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Greene, 1995) but also for artists. In this sense, the creative researcher has to think like an artist. Faulkner (2009) notes that ‘thinking like an artist’ requires both skilful craft and sensitivity to internal signals – those subtle instincts that guide creative exploration. Faulkner’s (2005) emphasis on internal signals and instincts closely relates to this kind of analysis, highlighting the strong interconnection between creative and intuitive explorations. These characteristics also support spontaneity and transformation in the research process. Artistic thinking, which is conceptual, spontaneous, metaphorical and symbolic, enables researchers to balance attention between details and the broader essence of a phenomenon (Leavy, 2011), while offering transformation (2020). This form of researcher identity aligns with broader discussions in qualitative research and AbR, where subjectivity, creativity and intuition are not only acknowledged but embraced as critical components of knowledge production (Brown, 2024). This departure from a traditional research trajectory also signals a commitment to an alternative scholarly approach; one that resists rigid frameworks and instead allows inquiry to be guided by personal resonance, creative expression, intuition and an intrinsic need to explore complex dimensions of identity. In this vein, my data analysis challenges conventional academic norms by embracing a deeply reflective and intentionally creative approach. This echoes the broader methodological and structural choices of this study.

4.7.1.1 Digital Collage

Collage is a powerful, adaptable medium that combines free association, play and creative expression, with its engaging and expressive technique that brings together seemingly unrelated visual elements, offering an enjoyable and approachable path to creativity (Flint et al., 2026). Traditionally combining various real and textured elements such as fabrics, clay or small objects, in today's digital world collages can bring together digital elements such as photographs, text, illustrations and digital patterns. As an art form, with their evocative nature (Digg et al., 2015; Yuen, 2016) collages can facilitate data interpretation and presentation by allowing emotional and spiritual connections (Yuen, 2016). Collage embodies a non-linear process, uncovering both implicit and explicit insights, as well as emerging understandings, throughout various stages of the research (Neal-Stanley, 2025). This process of layering of diverse elements can create a dynamic and multifaceted representation of lived experiences, emotions and identities, making abstract concepts more tangible. With these characteristics, in the context of AbR, digital collage can invite deeper reflection and emotional engagement from the researcher, facilitating a more holistic understanding of the research findings.

As I sought to make sense of my data, I found myself emotionally invested in the process. This led me to create a digital collage of the participants' Language Portraits (LPs), focusing specifically on their responses to English (Figure 4.4). This was not a decision grounded in literature that I was aware of; rather, it was an intuitive choice driven by my role as an arts-based researcher. My emotional and intuitive engagement with the data guided me toward constructing a collage of LPs in an effort to perceive a more holistic picture. Using Keynote software on my MacBook, I merged the participants' drawings:

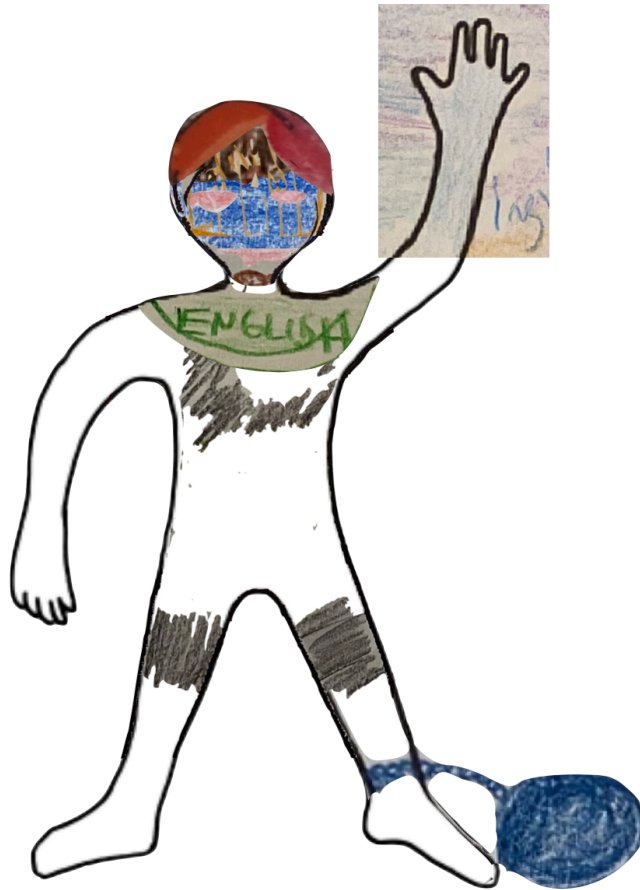


Figure 4.4. *Collage of participants' individual LPs.*

As a digital tool, collage enabled me to create a compact and coherent vision of the visual data, facilitating deeper engagement with it. Although the image itself appeared two-dimensional on the screen, it evoked a three-dimensional quality in my mind, and through repeated readings of the participants' reflections, the experience expanded further, taking on an almost four-dimensional character enriched by the emotions I absorbed from them. The most powerful interpretive moment emerged when I added Senem's, the performing artist's LP, to the collage, though this discussion is reserved for the section on overall findings, in Section 9.3.5, where I foreground the arts as a mode of empowerment. This process closely aligned with the creative analysis I outlined in the previous section.

Echoing the use of digital collage, I articulated my themes through metaphors, which were subsequently translated into digital images. These images functioned as reflexive tools,

engaging me not only intellectually but also on artistic, aesthetic and metaphorical levels. I will resume this discussion in Chapter Ten, since this primarily represent my own artistic interpretation, rather than participants' artifacts. Below, I continue with a discussion of the analogies and metaphors that emerged as creative and intuitive interpretative tools in the analysis of participants' data.

4.7.1.2 Analogies and Metaphors

Throughout the course of this research, my engagement with analogies and metaphors occurred at multiple levels, each contributing to a more nuanced understanding and interpretation of the data. Initially, analogies and metaphors were employed as tools for artistically presenting the findings. At that stage, they helped to frame complex research concepts in a way that was both accessible and meaningful, allowing me to distil abstract ideas into more concrete forms. By using metaphors, I could bridge the gap between participants' experiences and theoretical frameworks, providing a means of articulating insights that were not immediately apparent through direct data interpretation. These figurative tools also offered a way to represent the multifaceted nature of the participants' emotions and identities and their complex, sometimes contradictory, experiences.

However, as the data interpretation progressed, my engagement with analogies and metaphors deepened, becoming essential for interpreting the data at a more emotional and intuitive level. In this phase, metaphors allowed me to probe the deeper, often unspoken, layers of meaning embedded in the participants' narratives. For instance, to address the first sub-question, I initially created the metaphor *sharp gravels in the waters of English* reflecting the extensive struggles and challenges they expressed. A more detailed discussion of the full range of emotional responses to English is reserved for Chapter Six; here, I share this information to help the reader make sense of the role collages played in shaping data interpretation and reflexivity. Over time, I felt that the layers within this metaphor did not fully capture the intended meaning. In the data, English itself emerged as the source of discomfort, yet in the metaphor, English was represented by the waters, not the gravels. Moreover, the abstract image seemed overly harsh and entirely negative. Although 'pain and struggle' were evident in the data, the *sharp gravels* suggested an

excessive focus on suffering and overlooked the more complex and varied emotional reflections participants shared. Following this realisation, I shifted my focus to waters itself and *biting waters* became the metaphor.

Furthermore, the metaphor facilitated a broader consideration of matter both in the challenges and merits, in a context. In doing so, I did not limit myself to picturing the waters alone but also imagined the nature surrounding the river. This broadened perspective later created space for interpreting emotional responses to the multiple languages employed in the theatre as part of a holistic metaphor, rather than as discrete incidents (again, I will return to this discussion in Chapter Six). As a result, the use of metaphors became a vehicle for exploring the connections between language, emotion and identity in ways that transcended traditional analytical insights, enabling me to see the data through a more relational and dynamic lens. This engagement also helped me to go beyond surface-level descriptions, providing a more holistic understanding of how participants navigated their bilingual realities. Ultimately, the analogies and metaphors functioned not merely as tools for representing data but as vital means of interpretation, reflection and communication, capturing the complexity of participants' experiences. At times, I derived deeper meanings by other art forms, namely by poetic inquiry and photography, discussed in the following sections, respectively.

4.7.1.3 Poetic Inquiry

This study is informed Poetic Inquiry as method (Faulkner, 2005; 2009, 2019; Leavy, 2020; McCulliss, 2013; Prendergast, 2004, 2009), as I created three poems, each responding to one of the three sub-questions of the study. Grounded in the expressive potential of language, the poems offer evocative ways of engaging with participants' lived experiences. They afford deeper layers of interpretation and creative representation, opening up alternative routes for meaning-making, reaching beyond the boundaries of conventional qualitative approaches. Poetry's inherent ability to distil and express the core essence of qualitative data makes it a powerful medium for engaging both academic and non-academic audiences (Faulkner, 2019; Leavy, 2020; McCulliss, 2013; Prendergast, 2004, 2009). This capability is particularly valuable in disseminating complex research findings, allowing for

emotional depth and aesthetic engagement that can resonate more deeply than traditional forms of presentation. As Leavy (2020) beautifully notes, poems, surrounded by space and imbued with silence, possess the capability to penetrate the “noise” of information and convey the core of a given topic (p. 131).

In Poetic Inquiry, poems can be classified according to their sources: literature-voiced poems, researcher-voiced poems and participant-voiced poems. On the one hand, literature-voiced poems draw inspiration from theoretical texts or established literary sources (Prendergast, 2009). By selecting and reconstructing phrases from both data and literary texts, researchers can unveil underlying themes and insights that might not emerge through traditional analytical methods. The technique of employing these poems, which are textual poetic pieces drawn from literature, transcripts or the words of participants, adds layers of richness to the qualitative research experience.

On the other hand, researcher-voiced poems reflect the insights, emotions and perspectives of the researcher (Leavy, 2020). In crafting researcher-voiced poems, the researcher’s unique voice and perspective come into play, expressing subjective interpretations and emotions related to the research data (Prendergast, 2009). Such subjectivity is central to poetry, which does not seek to justify a singular truth but instead moves the researcher closer to the data while opening space for pleasure through an alternative way of knowing (Faulkner, 2009), opening gates for creative and intuitive insights. However, a focus on the researcher’s viewpoint may limit the findings, potentially failing to fully represent the diversity of experiences captured in the data (Prendergast, 2009). The researcher’s viewpoint can be minimised with participant-voiced poems or found poetry, as they involve using direct utterances of participants’, extracted from research data, such as interview transcripts, into a poetic form. Faulkner (2019) refers to this method as *poetic transcription*, highlighting its benefits in representation and analysis in research to convey participants’ voices, worldviews and identities more authentically. Researchers often highlight participants’ exact words, arranging them poetically to capture sound, rhythm and sociohistorical context (Butler-Kisber, 2002). This approach can foreground ownership of stories, preserve cultural performance and evoke emotional resonance.

Relatedly, participant-voiced poetry involves crafting poems from existing data, such as interviews media or lists, using poetic devices to generate new insights and honour silenced voices (Bhattacharya, 2013). This method retains the authenticity of the original data while providing a fresh narrative and emotional expression (Faulkner, 2019; Prendergast, 2009). Through these three methods, poetry can transform research findings into constructed poems that provide appreciation, aesthetic engagement and deep communication, rather than merely critical analysis, which may strip away the “pleasurable experience [and] unlabelled appreciation” (Chanmann-Taylor, 2009, p. 14). With its constructive nature, poetry can restore what critical analysis often overlooks: the emotional resonance of the subject matter (Saldaña, 2015). Poetry, in this sense, enlarges understanding, resists overly simplified interpretations and gestures toward the complexity of what it means to be human. Through its distinctive use of language, poetry reveals and conveys the mysteries of human experience, enabling the reader to recognise aspects of themselves within its lines (Faulkner, 2019).

In this study, poetry is used as a tool for rendering qualitative data into evocative expressions, both in academic writing and in Research-based Theatre (RbT). I employed participant-voiced poetry (Prendergast, 2009) to present the findings, which translates participants’ exact words into poetic form, retaining the authenticity of their voices while providing a new emotional layer to the findings. This poetic transformation aimed to enhance the thematic depth and communicative power of the data, as it allows the audience to engage with the research on a more intimate level, whether through the written word or the performance, serving to evoke a deeper, more personal connection with the research, providing an experience that both appreciates and communicates the emotional and intellectual dimensions of the study.

While this approach made it possible for me to artistically express the embedded meanings within participants’ responses constructed from focus groups and individual interviews, my engagement with the poems also helped me to see the core of the data, in other words interpret the data, particularly through the iterative refinement process. At the beginning

serving to mitigate an artistic concern, the process of simplifying and striping poems helped me to see the essences in participants' experiences. Crafting the poems first in Turkish, the translation of the poems into English further enhanced my interpretation of data, as I was drawing from a wide range of synonyms available, while trying to be faithful to the participants' original words, with adjustments made for rhyme and flow. Keeping the original data in the poems, occasionally, I included conjunctions or prepositions to enhance cohesion while making only minor structural changes. Creating several drafts in this structure, I discussed my final drafts with Gustav Parker Hibbett, who is a "Black poet" and essayist whose debut collection was published in 2024. Their work has been widely recognised through fellowships, literary honours and appearances in leading journals. They hold a degree in English and are currently pursuing a PhD in Literary Practice at Trinity College Dublin (Gustav Parker Hibbett, n.d.).

The primary change I made in the poems following Parker's critical evaluation was the removal of repetitions and closely related meanings. After working together on two poems, I applied this approach to all the poems. Also, initially, there were a few rhymes in the poems, but I removed all of them, replacing them with unrhymed synonyms, following Parker's suggestion: "If you want to keep rhymes, they have to be truly powerful and necessary. Otherwise, the focus shifts to the rhyming words rather than the meaning of the full sentence" (Parker, 2024, from my notes, with their consent). I understood that rhyme can steer the reader's attention, dictating what to focus on, feel and think. In this sense, rhyme can become an unnecessary cluster that manipulates the reader, obscuring the poem's essence. By removing repetition of similar words and meanings, the poems' core beauty can shine through more clearly. This idea parallels storytelling theatre, which seeks to eliminate unnecessary elements and distil the core essence, without the authoritarian tone, as discussed in Section 2.4.3.

Furthermore, focusing on the lines Parker appreciated most in my poem drafts, I made similar several refinements in other poems. These include adding more Turkish elements and introducing more sudden twists, particularly through polysemes. This, as Parker noted, allows readers to think, inquire and create their own interpretations: "Readers enjoy poems

that are cleverer than they are.[...] Like a chess game. [...] There should be something bigger than what you immediately grasp” (Parker, 2024, from my notes, with their consent). By transforming raw data into poetry, I created a space for deeper personal connection and emotional resonance, which enriched my understanding of the participants’ lived experiences. As a result, I constructed the three poems, each responding to one of the three sub-questions of the study. Each stanza within these poems relates directly to its corresponding sub-question by connecting the stanzas to the themes constructed through the data interpretation.

In the Viva Voce examination required to fulfil this doctorate, I performed one of the poems I crafted. Prior to this experience, I rehearsed all poems to decide which one I should perform during my examination. These rehearsals enabled a deeper connection to the emotions and themes embedded within the narratives. As I voiced the words aloud, the cadence, rhythm and affective weight of certain phrases became more pronounced, guiding my interpretative process. Going beyond these verbal effects, performing the poems as a storyteller allowed me to experience the data at a bodily level. This echoed Saldaña’s (2015) notion of “poetic reconstructions” (p. 109), where performative elements reveal nuances that may remain dormant in written text alone. Thus, poetry served both an data interpretation tool and a dissemination tool – a critical mechanism for interpreting complex qualitative data, allowing for a richer, more layered exploration of the study’s findings. Similar to poetry becoming a method for data interpretation, the use of photography deepened my engagement with the data, and facilitated my interpretation.

4.7.1.4 Photography

Photography plays a multifaceted role in qualitative and Arts-based Research (AbR), extending beyond mere documentation to become an active method of inquiry, analysis and dissemination (Leavy, 2020). As a visual medium, it captures complex, layered meanings that might be difficult to express through text alone (Greenwood, 2019). Whether used to document lived experiences, represent abstract concepts or evoke emotional responses, photographs provide a way to explore and communicate research findings in a compelling, accessible manner, particularly in research done with migrants (Lenette, 2019). As a result,

photographs offer a tangible sense of reality that can deepen the viewer's engagement with the research findings, which goes beyond graphic illustrations or digitally composed images. The materiality of a real photograph – the physical environment, textures lighting and spatial relationships – grounds relatively abstract ideas in findings in lived experience, making them more relatable and immersive. This sense of authentic representation of findings can be particularly valuable in AbR where emotional dimension of experience, which is highly abstract, is tried to be explored.

Informed by these, in this research I translated the metaphorical representation of the themes I constructed (related to the first sub-question) into photography. Driven by my arts-based researcher identity, my aspirations as a certified amateur photographer and the encouragement of my colleague Nemo Castelli, S.J., I chose to use a real photograph to embody the metaphor that represents my first theme, *Biting yet reviving waters of English*. This approach aimed to communicate the findings on a deeper level and across multiple dimensions by leveraging the expressive capacity of a visual medium.

Furthermore, bodily and emotionally engaging with the metaphor during photoshoot generated an embodied experience that significantly deepened my interpretation of the data. This process transformed the metaphor from a conceptual tool into a lived, sensory encounter. Throughout these methods and processes, I was deeply immersed in the data. Given the inherent subjectivity of this kind of research, my interpretations rendered my role as researcher inevitably significant.

4.7.2 The Researcher's Role in Data Interpretation in AbR

Arts-based Research (AbR) aligns with studies that try to explore a phenomena in the essences of lived experiences, as it centres the lived experiences of the participants at the core (Eisner, 1998; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Through sharing their lived experiences, individuals convey not only their life events but also emotions and interpretations (Atkinson, 2007). However, what is shared may only reveal consciously told stories, leaving undiscovered narratives that the narrator may not be aware of (Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Thus, the narratives shared may only scratch the surface, providing merely a glimpse

of the underlying complexity, akin to the tip of an iceberg. In this context, AbR has the potential to delve deeper and bring what lies underneath to the surface, with the space it provides for exploration and reflection. When delving into open and hidden meanings, the researcher starts to interpret the interpretations of the participants. This rigorous phase of this kind of research draws on the interpretivist paradigm, which was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in Section 4.2.

Within the interpretivist paradigm I embraced in this research, the meanings I made and the artefacts that I presented, such as a collage, poems, photographs, analogies and metaphors, encapsulate the participants' voices while also representing my analytical insights. Therefore, neither in the creation of these art forms, nor in the analysis can I claim objectivity, instead, I embrace the subjectivity inherent in constructing themes, recognising that different researchers may interpret the data and develop varying codes or themes (Saldaña, 2015). However, this approach does not entail abandoning scientific endeavour but rather seeks to balance objectivity and subjectivity judiciously. On this basis, in data interpretation, I employed integrated arts-based methods, which enabled me to view the data and my initial findings from new perspectives, thereby becoming reflexive tools in themselves. Furthermore, transparency was maintained throughout by making the research process visible and traceable, ensuring accountability alongside meaningful artistic outputs. Following Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), supervision functioned as an important form of scholarly feedback, providing critical reflection, alternative perspectives and methodological guidance. The supervision I received offered extensive expert feedback, enhancing both the rigour and interpretive depth of this dissertation.

Having examined my role in the research, , I close this chapter with a summary of the overall methods.

4.8 Summary of Research Methods

This study employed a range of arts-based methods across its various phases. While some of these methods were deliberately planned in advance, others emerged organically as the research progressed. Several methods were iteratively employed across multiple phases,

contributing to data construction, interpretation and presentation. Table 4.3 below provides a summary of the specific methods used and the phases in which they were implemented.

Table 4.2. *Summary of the methods used in the study.*

Arts-based Methods in the study		
<i>Genre in AbR</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Phase of the study</i>
Performance-based methods	RbT	Data construction, dissemination
	Role plays	Data construction
Embodied methods	Embodied Language Portraits	Data construction
	Embodied Focus Group reflections	Data construction
	Physically experienced metaphors	Data interpretation
	Embodied poems	Data interpretation
Visual methods	Digital collage	Data interpretation
	Visualised metaphors	Data interpretation
	Photography	Dissemination
	Digital graphic visuals	Dissemination
Literary-based methods	Poetry	Data interpretation, dissemination
	Analogies and metaphors	Data interpretation
Conventional Methods		
<i>Method</i>	<i>Phase of the Study</i>	
Focus group	Data construction	
Individual interviews	Data construction	
Coding & theme construction	Data analysis	
Academic writing	Dissemination	

The methods outlined in Table 4.3 meet the criteria suggested by Leavy (2020) for guiding AbR methodology: ensuring alignment with research goals, coherence across phases and a holistic approach to data construction, interpretation and dissemination. Reflection,

reflexivity and engagement with theory supported rigorous analysis, while creative translations, such as embodied reflections, visual metaphors and literary representations, enabled nuanced insights into participants' experiences. After exploring the methodology and methods throughout this chapter, the dissertation now moves on to the analysis of the theatrical elements in the performance *The Fertile Crescent*.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology of this thesis, expanding on the interpretivist paradigm, participants of the study, research methods, data construction, ethical considerations and data analysis and interpretation. I also provided a summary of the methods employed in the study in the final section. The following chapter introduces theatrical elements in the performance *The Fertile Crescent*, which was pivotal in data construction phases of this research, setting the stage for the main findings.

Chapter Five: Theatrical Elements in *The Fertile Crescent*

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive analysis of the performance *The Fertile Crescent: Tales from the Orient*, examining its various elements. I begin by discussing the significant elements of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the myth that is at the core of *The Fertile Crescent*. I then turn to the background of the artist, Dr Senem Donatan Mohan, and her unique interpretation of the epic, highlighting key aspects of her narration that arguably evoked emotions and contributed to identity formation among the participants from Türkiye.

In Tablet V of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000), Gilgamesh and Enkidu enter the sacred Cedar Forest to confront Humbaba, the fearsome guardian of the forest. Humbaba roars threats of death, however Gilgamesh receives aid from Shamash, the Sun god, who sends a great wind to bind Humbaba and weaken his power. Enkidu urges Gilgamesh to strike decisively while Humbaba is vulnerable. Gilgamesh hesitates, but ultimately decapitates Humbaba and together with Enkidu, he cuts down the sacred trees. This violent act against a divine servant marks both a triumph and a transgression: by killing a sacred guardian, the heroes offend the gods and set a pattern of defying divine order. Enkidu expresses a wish to craft a grand temple door from the fallen trees.

This chapter resonates with Tablet V of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000). Just as Gilgamesh and Enkidu confront Humbaba with vigilance and courage, I approach the performance *The Fertile Crescent: Tales from the Orient* with vigilance and interpretive courage, informed by my positionality. Similarly, just as the heroes' actions carry implications, the interpretations offered here provide a lens through which the findings in subsequent chapters can be approached. In this sense, engaging with these meanings is like

opening a temple door, a passage into deeper understanding, careful analysis of emotion and identity.

5.2 *The Epic of Gilgamesh in The Fertile Crescent*

The Epic of Gilgamesh, a narrative poem, is considered one of the oldest literary works in human history. This epic holds a significant place in the hearts of people from Türkiye for several reasons. Firstly, there is a prevailing belief in Türkiye that Sumerians are the ancestors of the Turkish population, although this ancestral connection remains a subject of debate. Secondly, Mesopotamia, the land where the myth unfolds, encompasses modern-day Iraq, Kuwait, Türkiye and Syria. Although only a small part of it is located in Türkiye today, for four centuries, the land was under the control of the Ottoman Empire – the former Turkish state that preceded modern Türkiye. The tablets of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* were first discovered when the Ottomans still controlled the land. These tablets were found in the ancient site of Nineveh, known as *Ninova* in Turkish. The term *Ninova* has since been adopted by a wide range of contexts in Türkiye, such as hotels, a publisher, a nanotechnology company, a digital book reading application, a city bus provider and an e-learning centre of an esteemed university. These deliberate choices of names serve to honour the rich cultural heritage associated both with Sumerians and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, due to their connection to the region. Thirdly, although universal in nature, themes in the epic – such as friendship, the role of the mother, heroism and belief in the afterlife – hold a strong place in Turkish culture.

With these elements, while the myth is already culturally significant for audiences from Türkiye, Senem's narration in *The Fertile Crescent* enriches it with details that resonate deeply with her audience, including anecdotes from her own background, vivid descriptions of scenes from the myth and the incorporation of singing, dancing and direct audience interaction. These details, beginning with Senem's background in relation to her performance, are discussed in the following sections.

5.2.2 Senem's Interpretation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Dr Senem Donatan Mohan is a storyteller with over twenty years' experience as a performing artist. She is originally an engineer, who had been involved in various arts projects before voluntarily changing direction to become a professional theatre maker. While pursuing a PhD in engineering and working as a postdoctoral researcher in cancer research in Germany, she realised that she wanted to spend her life on stage rather than in a laboratory. She therefore chose to leave academia and entered a transitional period marked by relying on her savings, grappling with a sense of purposelessness and seeking new opportunities. Following this transition, Senem rebuilt her career as a storyteller, spending two decades in Türkiye and the United States as a performing artist, director and dramaturg. In 2019, she migrated to Ireland, where she has since been actively engaged in live storytelling performances for both children and adults. She is one of the founders of *Seiba Storytelling Centre*, established in 2015 in Türkiye. The mission of this centre is to revive the ancient culture and the narrative traditions of Anatolia, to interpret this culture with modern world perspectives and eventually to introduce Anatolian narration not only to Türkiye but also to the world. Since migrating to Ireland, in 2019, Senem has performed live in theatre spaces and community hubs.

In the Fertile Crescent, Senem delivers a unique interpretation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Rather than portraying Gilgamesh as the central character, she places herself, as an individual, at the forefront, greeting the audience at the outset, both in Turkish and English. This gesture not only honours the audience, but also transcends traditional theatre, transforming it into a storytelling experience akin to Winston's (2022) description of the genre as 'storytelling theatre' (discussed in Section 2.4.3). Additionally, Senem interacts with the audience spontaneously and strategically (details are shared in Section 5.2.3.2), starting from the initial moments, both in English and Turkish. These moments add to her performance's immersive atmosphere. Throughout the story, Senem features numerous paradoxes, such as life and death, war and peace, enmity and friendship, success and failure, as well as fear and courage. She also shares her journey of transitioning from an engineer to a storyteller, reflecting on how the setbacks she experienced shaped her growth into a successful performer.

One of her most vulnerable moments in the narration comes when she recounts being dismissed from a theatre production of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, after abandoning a promising scientific career to participate. Senem shares with the audience a difficult decision at the time: choosing between pursuing a scientific career at a prestigious university in the United States, and performing one of her favourite myths (Gilgamesh) with her theatre ensemble in Türkiye. Despite the secure future offered by the former and her own doubts about her ‘abilities’ in the latter, she ultimately declined the university offer in the States – only to be excluded from the Gilgamesh theatre production by the theatre director.

Senem begins her narration with a personal anecdote, seamlessly turning to Turkish in the second sentence, deepening engagement with the Turkish-speaking audience. She mentions the rivers Dicle and Fırat, which hold significance in Turkish culture and mythology, as names she considered for her children. Although she later translates these terms into English, Senem predominantly maintains the flow by providing contextual meaning in subsequent English sentences. Through this rich layering of personal narrative, cultural references and bilingual storytelling, Senem not only reinterprets *The Epic of Gilgamesh* but also reimagines the whole epic, starting from the city of Uruk, where the myth unfolds. Senem’s unique interpretation of the City of Uruk is discussed below.

5.2.3.1 *The City of Uruk*

Senem skilfully brings the epic to life with vivid depictions of the city of Uruk. Her narration incorporates rich sensory details, including elements deeply rooted in Turkish culture, such as:

- The aroma of fried garlic;
- Fresh bread;
- Burnt sage;
- Human sweat;
- Watermelon.

As senses are a crucial component of aesthetic engagement, each sensory detail is briefly contextualised below.

Garlic, cherished in Turkish cuisine, often evokes memories of its distinct flavour and aroma. Garlic plays a crucial role in many traditional Turkish dishes, with *mantı* – Turkish dumplings filled with minced meat and served with a garlic yoghurt sauce – being a prime example. The rich aroma of garlic often fills kitchens, reminding many of comforting meals shared with family and friends. Similarly, bread holds deep significance in Türkiye; it is not just cherished but sacred, as it can be similar in many other cultures. In the same vein, in many cultures, the aroma of freshly baked bread is often associated with memories of home. Traditionally in Turkish culture, bread is something that should never be thrown in the bin. If it must be discarded, one is expected to kiss it and place it on their forehead, demonstrating the utmost respect akin to the reverence shown towards the hands of elders. This act is so important that it is repeated three times for the bread. Moreover, bread often represents living expenses in general. We have sayings such as ‘Bread is in the lion’s stomach’, indicating that earning a living is quite difficult. Another expression, ‘money for bread,’ refers to the money needed to sustain life. Historically in Türkiye, individuals in need would use this phrase when requesting money. Another traditional belief holds that one should never step on bread or let crumbs fall, lest they be condemned to hell. In these and other ways, garlic and bread are integral to Turkish culinary heritage, evoking memories and cultural practices that reflect their significance in Turkish life.

Likewise, the aroma of sage is familiar to many in Türkiye, as it is commonly used in herbal teas. Its fragrance is one of the most recognisable scents in herb shops, places frequented by locals seeking herbs and other herbal products. Furthermore, the mention of human sweat may carry a cultural significance for people from Türkiye. In Turkish culture, sweat represents hard work and dedication, as reflected in the saying ‘not inherited, but [earned through] sweat on the forehead.’ This perspective highlights the value placed on diligence and effort in Turkish society, further deepening the audience’s connection to the narrative. However, human sweat may also evoke unpleasant memories, as it becomes particularly noticeable during the hot summers experienced across many regions of Türkiye. Although

comprehensive studies on personal hygiene in Türkiye are lacking, some research indicates that rates of poor personal hygiene were not low among various groups (see Altun et al., 2013; Arikan et al., 2014; Hançer-Aydemir, 2020).

Whether evoking pleasant or unpleasant memories, the mention of human sweat is likely to create emotions and, in both cases, connect individuals to their identity. Following this initial description of the city, Senem employs the analogy of a watermelon to illustrate the essence of the city of Uruk. Watermelon, again, holds significant cultural importance in Türkiye, even featuring in many proverbs such as ‘skin of watermelon falls into the sea’ to describe the beginning of summer or in the tradition of hosts persuading guests to stay longer with the phrase ‘Where are you going? We haven’t cut the watermelon yet’. The analogy of the watermelon in Senem’s performance serves a dual purpose. It not only highlights the beloved status of watermelon in Turkish culture, suggesting that it is a fruit not to be missed but also underscores the traditional Turkish value of hospitality. In Turkish culture, guests are highly esteemed and hosts make every effort to ensure their guests leave content and satisfied. These elements, starting from the outset, I argue, add depth to Senem’s narrative and potentially resonate with audiences from Türkiye, serving as specific anchors to cultural experiences. Through this nuanced portrayal, Senem fosters a deeper connection with her audience, enriching their understanding of the narrative.

Senem continues to utilise translinguaging in Turkish in the second minute, this time at sentence-level, incorporating two Turkish sentences into her narration without translation, in the visualisations of the city. She smoothly transitions into the myth, describing the temples and introducing the Inanna, one of the figures in the myth. She indulges in erotic descriptions of Inanna. Although the scenes she narrates are not in the original epic, they serve to engage the audience’s erotic imagination. Later, she connects this sensual imagery to the song *Aşk* (Love), inviting the audience into a deeper emotional experience. She further encourages them to sing along, creating a sense of collective engagement, though her interaction with the audience extends beyond this song. *Aşk* and other instances of Senem’s audience engagement are explored in detail in the following section.

5.2.3.2 Audience Interaction

Senem's audience interaction starts with playfully welcoming the latecomers. Throughout her performance, she asks questions and invites the audience to guess the next sentence from her gestures. In the fourth minute of the performance, Senem enthralls the audience by singing and dancing a Turkish song, *Aşk*, encouraging the Turkish-speaking audience to join in singing. This moment is depicted in Figure 5.1, which is taken during her first performance in Dublin carried out for this study. This collective singing continues until the sixth minute, fostering active audience participation.



Figure 5.1. *Senem singing and dancing the song *Aşk*.* All images used with permission.

Senem's narration throughout the performance encompasses further layers of audience interaction. She engages directly with the audience through eye contact, playful remarks, unexpected invitations to sing and shared moments of silence that invite everyone into a collective atmosphere. Her translanguaging into Turkish not only bridges cultural and linguistic spaces but also adds an intimate dimension for Turkish-speaking audience members, making them feel seen and included in the storytelling experience. She also weaves in vivid and erotic descriptions that awaken the audience's imagination and

emotions, inviting them to visualise scenes that go beyond the original text. Audience interaction can also be conceptualised as extending beyond direct verbal exchanges: she incorporates rich sensory elements – gestures, facial expressions, shifts in tone, symbolic props – that activate the audience’s senses and encourage deeper mental imagery, as some research participants noted in the post-performance workshop. These elements have the potential to transform her narration into an embodied experience that is felt rather than merely heard.

In the final moments of her performance, Senem once again honours the audience, recognising them not as passive spectators but as fellow travellers and co-creators on her journey through the ancient myth and her personal memories. With these multifaceted techniques, coupled with the emotional tension drawn from both the myth and her own lived experience, Senem skilfully sustains the audience’s attention and emotional investment throughout her 65-minute performance. Additionally, she fosters a sense of belonging and cultural connection, particularly among Turkish speakers, through her strategic language choices and references to shared cultural symbols woven into the story. By bringing together belonging and migration, playfulness and solemnity, myth and autobiography, sensuality and vulnerability, Senem gives new life to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, transforming it from an ancient tale into a living, breathing narrative that connects people across time, place and language. This connection reaches an even greater intensity during another song performed later in the performance as a *requiem*, which is discussed in the short section below.

5.2.3.3 *The Requiem*

The *Fertile Crescent* performance contains a particularly poignant moment: a *requiem*, sung by Senem in the role as Gilgamesh, following the loss of Enkidu. Here, the *requiem* is a chant that originated among Indigenous and Black Americans while picking cotton and was later adopted by the Catholic Church as a ceremonial chant for funerals. It is in an unknown language (Gibberish) to the audience. This moment of singing is particularly important because the *requiem* was mentioned by several participants in the workshop and individual interviews. After the *requiem* concludes, Senem, in role as Gilgamesh, remains

silent for a couple of seconds, her eyes closed, face reflecting the pain of the protagonist, Gilgamesh, following the loss of her brother-like friend, Enkidu. This scene is shared in the Figure 5.2, retrieved from the video of her first performance.



Figure 5.2. *Senem, keeping silent after Gilgamesh's mourning for Enkidu.*

Senem's characterisations extends beyond Gilgamesh; she takes on the roles of various characters from the epic, including Enkidu, antagonists, goddesses, snakes and more, using theatrical elements to embody each one in her performance. Among these figures, the goddess mother of Gilgamesh, along with other feminine references, assumes a pivotal role in the performance, resonating with *fertile* in the title, as discussed in the following section.

5.2.3.4 Fertility beyond the Crescent?

True to its title, Senem's interpretation of the myth also engages with the theme of fertility. During her performance, Senem notably highlights the role of the Goddess Inanna, echoing the important role of women, particularly mothers, in Sumerians (Rohrlich, 1980). This implies a celebration of female agency and creative power – both in literal and symbolic means. Furthermore, both at the beginning and at the end of her performance, Senem shares her desire to give birth to a child. It is important to pause here to say she does not say “to

have children” but uses “give birth”, which aligns with the first word of the title of her performance: *fertile*.

At the end of her performance, she shares that she has not given birth to her children “yet”, linking *The Fertile Crescent* to her own fertility again. By explicitly expressing her personal desires, values and beliefs related to fertility, Senem not only presents herself as an artist but also as a woman, symbolically linked to *The Fertile Crescent*. Senem concludes the epic at a pivotal moment, where Gilgamesh shares a dream with his mother, Ninsun, marking another significant connection to motherhood. Drawing inspiration from this mother-son bond, Senem intertwines her own personal story for the last time, beginning with a dream she had long before, which planted the seeds for this performance. She shares how consulting with her homeopath, related to a thrilling dream she had about having a baby, further shaped her journey in her decision to perform Gilgamesh, adding another layer to her strength as she openly discusses her beliefs and practices.

As a result, throughout the performance, Senem conveys fertility both through epic narrative and her own life anecdotes, with candour and sometimes even humour. Her openness in revealing her aspirations and vulnerabilities as a woman fosters a subtle, unspoken interaction between her stories and the audience’s inner worlds, particularly considering that her audience was mainly female. Similar nuanced messages were also evident in the venues where the performances for this research took place, as well as in their set designs, as discussed in the following section.

5.2.3.5 Venues and Sets

Within this research study, *The Fertile Crescent* performance was repeated four times, once in Limerick and three times in Dublin, between April 2022 and December 2022. In all the performances, the set design featured a number of items common in Turkish culture, such as rug, throws and ornaments. Colour red is significant in Turkish culture, coming from Turkish flag that compromises only red and a star and crescent, symbolising the reflection of the sky in the blood of martyrs during the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923). The colour was prominently featured on the stage, with both a throw and the Senem’s dress.

The first performance and workshop took place at The Irish World Academy of Music & Dance, University of Limerick, on 2nd April, 2022, while the latter three were held in Innovation Academy, Trinity College Dublin, on 30th June, 2022, on 29th September, 2022 and 6th December, 2022. The first venue featured a professional performance hall, as shown in Figure 5.3, which offered both advantages and disadvantages in the context of this study. On the one hand, the professional theatre space created a distinctly theatrical atmosphere that immersed the audience in a dramatic world, enhancing the performance's emotional and narrative impact. The hall's stage, being at the same level as the audience, further facilitated immediacy and visibility of the gestures, facial expressions and subtle interactions that the artist employed, making the storytelling more intimate and engaging.

On the other hand, the same setting posed challenges for fostering interaction among audience members and cultivating a sense of collective experience. Unlike spaces designed for participatory theatre or workshop-style events, the professional theatre carried an inherent formality and dim lighting, which may have inhibited spontaneous communication or shared responses among attendees. This difficulty was compounded by my own oversight in welcoming the audience and not facilitating an introductory activity or ice-breaker, which could have helped bring participants together emotionally.

Consequently, while the venue supported the aesthetic and performative dimensions of the study, it simultaneously limited the potential for interactive and community-building aspects of audience engagement, both within the theatre and among the participants themselves.



Figure 5.3. *The Hall at The Irish World Academy of Music & Dance.*

The Dublin venue, Innovation Academy, Trinity College Dublin, comprised two adjacent rooms. The first room served as the dedicated space for the workshop, while the second functioned as the designated theatre area (Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4. *Twin rooms at The Innovation Academy.*

The front room, depicted in Figure 5.4, not only served as a convenient space for the focus groups but also facilitated mingling, which was instrumental in breaking the ice among participants. The room's adaptable layout allowed me to offer refreshments and snacks, reminiscent of Turkish hospitality where guests are treated with utmost care. While I recognised that such gestures are not exclusive to Turkish culture, I endeavoured to infuse a Turkish atmosphere by providing snacks that hold a special place in Turkish tradition, such as Turkish sultanas. During the last workshop, I also brought a traditional Turkish cologne for participants to use; however, I could not consider spraying it myself and letting it fill the space. Remarkably, these offerings served for their intended purpose of valuing and comforting the participants and provided an opportunity for spontaneous icebreaking among participants who did not know one another. In this sense, they were not merely hospitality but also functioned as intentional efforts to connect the participants with each

other and with the overall context. Moreover, they served to stimulate their emotions through taste, a direct sensory avenue to emotional arousal, as specific tastes from past memories can involuntarily stimulate those past scenes (Korsmeyer & Sutton, 2011), surrounding them as social and material worlds (Halbwachs, 2020). In addition, at Senem's request, I obtained permission to burn sage in the room as part of her ritual, with its strong scent further stimulating the senses. Although this was intended primarily for Senem's comfort, it also created opportunities for deeper sensory engagement, particularly due to the subtle meanings attached to sage in Turkish culture, as noted in Section 5.2.3.1.

It is significant to note that the participants commented on the raisins (*üzüm* in Turkish) and the scent of sage without any direct prompts. Such organic engagement highlighted the importance of designing a multi-sensory experience that resonates with participants, fostering both shared connection and emotional involvement. These seemingly small details played a crucial role in enhancing the overall impact and depth of the performances. For example, Ahu and Damla shared:

As I entered the place, the divine smell [of the sage] captivated me from the very start. (Ahu, focus group)

Üzüm is Turkish. You can't translate it as raisins or sultanas. It is *üzüm*. (Damla, individual interview)

Additionally, tactile engagement may have occurred when participants touched snacks with cultural significance, further enhancing their immersion. Nevertheless, there is a good chance that they were keenly aware of the larger surroundings, the 'other' culture, prevalent in the traditional interior design of the building, with the ancient-theatre-like hall at the entrance (Figure 5.5) and with the remarkable Bank of Ireland building located a couple of steps away, whose magnificence could be seen through both of the rooms' windows (Figure 5.6).



Figure 5.5. *The hall at the entrance of The Innovation Academy.*



Figure 5.6. *The historic-looking Bank of Ireland building, through the window of the workshop room.*

Overall, I argue that building on the emotional resonance and collective engagement enacted by the experience as a whole, Senem's performance served a significant aesthetic function, acting as a pretext (O'Neill, 1995) for the post-performance workshops that followed, which explored emotional responses and identity. Following the detailed analysis of the nuanced elements in *The Fertile Crescent* and the introduction of a small portion of my data, the insights gained from these explorations are discussed in the subsequent chapters.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a detailed account of the performance *The Fertile Crescent*, highlighting the significance of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the myth on which the performance is grounded. I then introduced Senem, the artist, including her background relevant to the study and her unique narration of the myth. The discussion was expanded to consider the various elements in Senem's storytelling as well as the theatre setting. Building on this foundation, the next chapter addresses the first sub-question by mainly examining participants' immediate responses to Senem's performance, with particular attention to their emotional reactions to her translanguaging, primarily revealed through reflections on the Language Portraits they created.

Chapter Six: Emotional Responses to the Bilingual Performance

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present three themes, addressing the first sub-question: “How did a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland emotionally responded to the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent*?” The focus is primarily on the participants’ immediate emotional responses and, at times, on their inevitable links to identity, expressed mainly through reflections on the Language Portraits they created during the focus groups. At times, I incorporate data from individual interviews to provide further evidential support. I begin by outlining the context in which these responses were elicited, followed by an overview of the main themes and categories that emerged from the data. These insights are then illustrated through the poem *Grey to Green*, which weaves together participants’ experiences metaphorically. Following it, the chapter presents a detailed analysis of emotional responses related to English, Turkish and the *requiem* performed in the theatre.

The chapter itself echoes Tablet VI of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000). In the tablet, Gilgamesh and Enkidu return to Uruk in triumph after killing Humbaba, parading proudly through the streets of Uruk. Gilgamesh washes himself and dresses in fine clothes, which catches the attention of the goddess Ishtar. Enamoured by his appearance, she proposes marriage, but Gilgamesh rejects her, recalling the misfortunes of her previous lovers. In response, Ishtar unleashes her wrath, sending the Bull of Heaven to wreak havoc on Uruk. Gilgamesh and Enkidu defeat the bull and, as a symbolic act of devotion (and perhaps in hope of divine protection from the revenge of other gods and goddesses) they offer its heart to the sun god Shamash, who had supported them earlier. While Ishtar mourns the creature’s death, the two heroes celebrate their second victory, parading proudly through the streets of Uruk. The tablet ends with Enkidu having a dream and rising “[...] to relate the dream, saying to his friend:” (2000, p. 54), leaving the rest to be continued in the following tablet.

Just as Gilgamesh cleans himself and regains composure after battle, this chapter follows my own intensive struggle with the data – now presented in a clean and orderly fashion. More importantly, it reveals the participants’ struggles with English and conveys the misfortunes experienced by bilingual speakers, often rooted in feelings of perceived incompetency. Furthermore, like Gilgamesh and Enkidu feeling pride and comfort in their hometown of Uruk, moments of relief in understanding both English and Turkish use in the theatre captures the ease and familiarity experienced by bilingual speakers, particularly making Turkish their home. The chapter also captures the experience of encountering an unfamiliar language through song – where words may be unknown, but the message is powerfully conveyed through melody, tone and Senem’s expression. This silent language of music transcends literal meaning, becoming a bridge that evokes feelings and memories tied to one’s first language despite linguistic barriers, mirroring how Gilgamesh and Enkidu’s journey connects them to powerful forces like Ishtar and Shamash beyond human understanding. And, akin to the end of Tablet VI left incomplete and continued in the following tablet, this chapter does not conclude the findings on bilingualism, instead leaving the exploration of bilingual identity to the next chapter.

6.2 Procedure for Administering the Language Portraits

The emotional responses presented in this chapter mainly came from Language Portraits (LPs) of the participants and reflections on these artifacts, facilitated as the first activity of the post-performance workshop. The procedure included several steps, beginning with a warm-up activity. As a start, participants were invited to close their eyes and recall the moments when Senem used Turkish and English in the theatre and try to sense where they felt these languages in their bodies. This embodied approach allowed participants to visually map their lived experiences of language, offering a unique way of representing bilingual identity through the visual and embodied medium of LPs. Although LPs were primarily encouraged to be created through theatre’s mediation, the reflections that emerged went beyond the theatrical context, often revealing participants’ personal, earlier experiences. This approach aligns with Bundy’s (2003) two critical concepts - aesthetic response, “a particular way of perceiving and knowing the world and our relationship to it” (pp. 171-172) and aesthetic engagement, “connection relates to the experience of

percipients when they engage with the *idea* beyond the work. An *idea* has no material substance and is therefore difficult to clearly define” (p. 177, italics in the original). In this study, LPs provided a means for participants to explore and express their own ways of knowing, allowing *ideas* and insights to emerge through engagement with the tasks and reflections, rather than imposing any specific idea beforehand. After creating the LPs, participants reflected on their artifacts to explain the meanings in them, taking voluntary turns to express their emotions and thoughts. I refer participants’ reflections following their LPs as *commentaries*. The participants took multiple turns, reflecting on and responding to each other’s reflections during the Focus Groups. These reflections were recorded and transcribed and the excerpts used in the thesis are translated into English. This process is detailed in the Chapter Four, in Section 4.5.

6.3 Themes and Main Categories

Through analysis of the data, I generated three themes as a response to the first sub-question: (1) *Barefoot in the biting, yet reviving waters*, (2) *Finding home in the world of the known* and (3) *Finding home in the universe of the felt*. These address, respectively, emotions as responses to English, emotions as responses to Turkish and emotions as responses to the *requiem* sung in the theatre. Upon identifying the emotions expressed, I found that they closely aligned with four specific groups of emotions in Brown’s (2021) classification, which were discussed in Chapter Three. As a result, these groups of emotions, in Brown’s (2021) terms ‘places we go when’, became the main categories. To use Brown’s (2021) words, they were taken to places we go when:

- Things are uncertain or too much;
- We fall short;
- We are searching connection;
- Life is good.

All main categories above feature in Theme 1, while the subtheme ‘life is good’ itself features in Theme 2 and Theme 3. Thus, in considering main categories together, Senem’s

use of English, Turkish and an unknown language in a *requiem* sung in the performance elicited the below:

- English taking participants to a place they went when *things are uncertain or too much, life is good* and *searching for connection*, as if being *Barefoot in the biting, yet reviving waters*, as the first theme;
- Turkish taking participants to a place they went when *life is good*, just like *Finding home in the world of the known*, as the second theme;
- The song, in the form of a *requiem*, taking participants to a place they went when *life is good*, like *Finding home in the universe of the felt*, universe they did not fully know, yet whose comfort was deeply felt, as the third theme.

The themes and their main categories, informed by Brown (2021), are illustrated in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1. *Themes and main categories in responses to Senem's use of English, Turkish and requiem* (N/A: not available)

... took participants to a place when...*			
	Main category I	Main category II	Main category III
Theme 1: Barefoot in the biting, yet reviving waters of English	Things are uncertain or too much	Life is good	Searching for connection
Theme 2: Finding home in the world of the known of Turkish	Life is good	N/A	N/A
Theme 3: Finding home in the universe of the felt of the requiem	Life is good	N/A	N/A

* In Brown's grouping of emotions.

This analysis was consequently translated into poetic form, which is shared in the following section.

6.4 Poem 1: Grey to Green

Below, I present below the poem *Grey to Green*, crafted from participants' original words in the data, with my own additions inserted in brackets to enrich both the meaning and the artistic expression. The stanzas of the poem correspond to Theme 1, Theme 2 and Theme 3, respectively. The poem aims to convey the essence of the themes in an artistic manner, to invite aesthetic engagement.

Distracted first, with the unknown.
Pain and hassle,
[The waters, biting]
I should focus, but I'm tired.
I won't be able make it; I feel weak.
I must attack, questioning myself,
Yet pretending that I will get.
English, something flying in the air, I can't catch,
Not elegant, corrupted.
[Numb in the biting waters].
[Numbed] emotions are the most difficult
in this *derya deniz*.
[Yet the same waters] give me strength and life;
Liberating, [reviving]; the Sun shines as I understand.

[Resting on a grass island], *kan can*,
the smell, the taste. My ears, I think and focus.
The comfort and ease [take hold],
Feeling my feet and hands [in the] warmth, bright.
I feel deeper, at the heart, nurturing pride,
my identity, my culture, my bonds,
the breeze enveloping my head, connecting to the environment.

[Taking me] home... I'm home.

Don't say I don't know, it's my land,
Hitting, so close; universal,
Taking me to Mesopotamia, [my home], safe place,
I could feel it, I understood,
Anadolu, the language.

The themes conveyed through each stanza of the poem, alongside the participants' drawings, namely Language Portraits, are presented in full in the unfolding sections, with none privileged over the others. This deliberate presentation functions as a non-verbal language, emphasising respect, equality and empowerment and closely aligns with the ethos of Arts-based Research.

6.4.1 Theme 1: *Biting, yet Reviving Waters of English*

The theme *Barefoot in the biting, yet reviving waters* of English is discussed here in relation to Focus Group reflections on the participants' Language Portraits (LPs), in response to Senem's use of English in *The Fertile Crescent* and at times draws on individual interviews. As the data suggests, Senem's use of English elicited a wide range of emotional responses that took the participants to a place where *things are uncertain or too much, we fall short, we search connection and life is good*, quoting from Brown's (2021) discourse on emotions. As the interpretations below reveal, the participants' main responses to English as the main language of the narration was akin to going to a place where things were *uncertain and too much*, bringing stress, overwhelm, anxiety, worry, avoidance, excitement and fear, as well as exposing their vulnerabilities. However, although described as 'dark' and 'harsh', it was also essential, much like water, but cold one – vital yet uncomfortable. This created a paradoxical experience where English was both necessary and painful, rendered in the metaphor *Barefoot in the biting yet reviving waters*.

In presenting the data that yielded to the first theme, I begin at the top of the head, continue with the whole head area and move downward, following the descending number of participants who embodied English in these areas on their LPs.

6.4.1.1 English at the Top of the Head

The top of the head was the main place on the Language Portraits (LP), with seven participants choosing this location: Enes, Duru, Defne, Derya, Damla, Ahu and Funda. Each LP and reflection present different nuances and features and will be analysed in depth below.

The first participant to locate English at the top of the head in his LP is Enes (Figure 6.1).

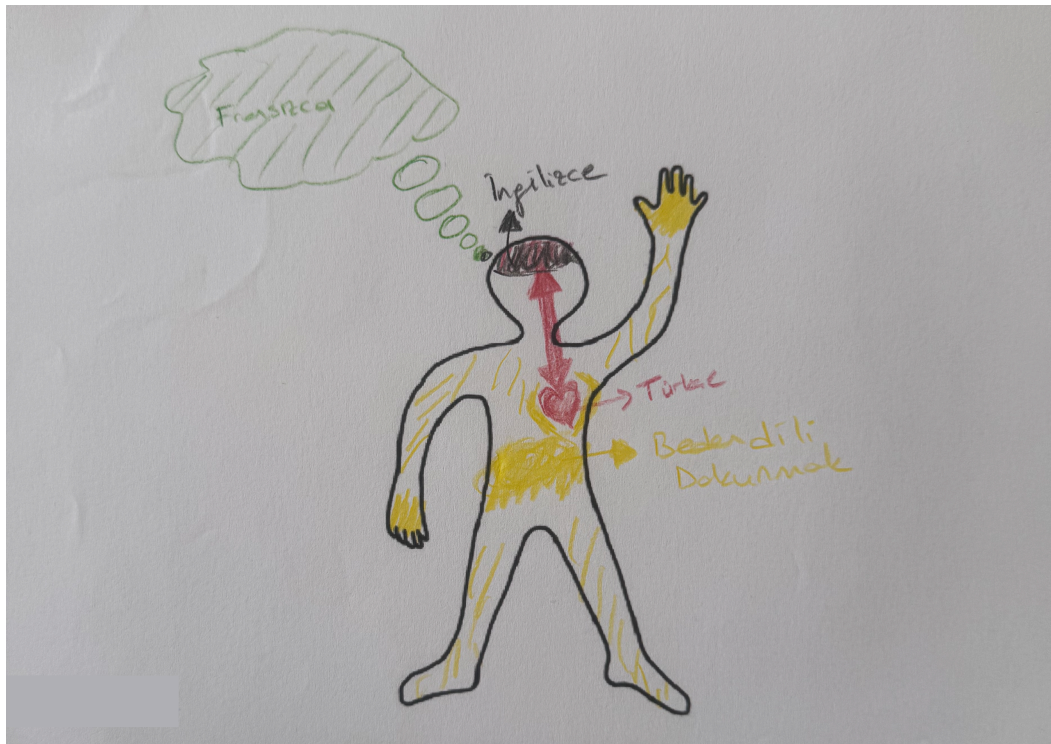


Figure 6.1. *Enes' LP.*

Enes' LP (Figure 6.1) depicts a brown brain coloured in a thick, brown tone. A red arrow points upwards from the right side of the brain, connected to the word *İngilizce* (English). Below the brain, a two-sided red arrow connects to a red heart on the left side of the body,

representing Turkish, indicated by a soft-touch one-sided arrow pointing to *Türkçe* (Turkish). The heart, left on the chest area, is outlined in a bold red, filled with a softer red and surrounded by a yellow halo. On the upper body, above the belly, there are irregular, random lines. These lines become more intense as they reach the hands, which are coloured yellow. At the belly area, a yellow belt-like illustration starts from where the heart's halo ends and reaches the hip area with irregular, fringed edges. Outside the belt, in the middle right, a yellow outward arrow points to 'body language'. Beneath 'body language' Enes has written 'touching'. The upper and lower legs, from below the hips to the feet, have irregular, yellow lines, sometimes turning into rough colouring. Outside the body, on the right top, is a dark green thought bubble with gradually growing circles at its root. The bubble is filled with dark green diagonal lines and in the middle, it says *Fransızca* (French).

Despite holding bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees from a university in Türkiye where English has been a medium of instruction and working at an technology company as an engineer, Enes still experienced stress, anxiety and/or worry when listening English speeches or narrations. In his own words:

I always know I will struggle in English. I don't want to go to that struggle. (Enes, LP commentary)

Enes' use of "will" in the excerpt above represented a future self shadowed by fear. He also expressed one of his greatest challenges, sharing emotions in English:

So I guess that's one of the biggest problems, in English [...] is not being able to convey that emotion. (Enes, LP commentary)

The reflection above can shed light to the red arrow Enes depicted in his LP. It may signify that emotions at the heart are going to brain when he is tried to be expressed in English, creating a struggle. Altogether, Enes' LP features a cognitive struggle he experienced in English, as if he was in the biting waters of English.

The second participant who positions English at the top of the head in her LP is Duru (Figure 6.2).

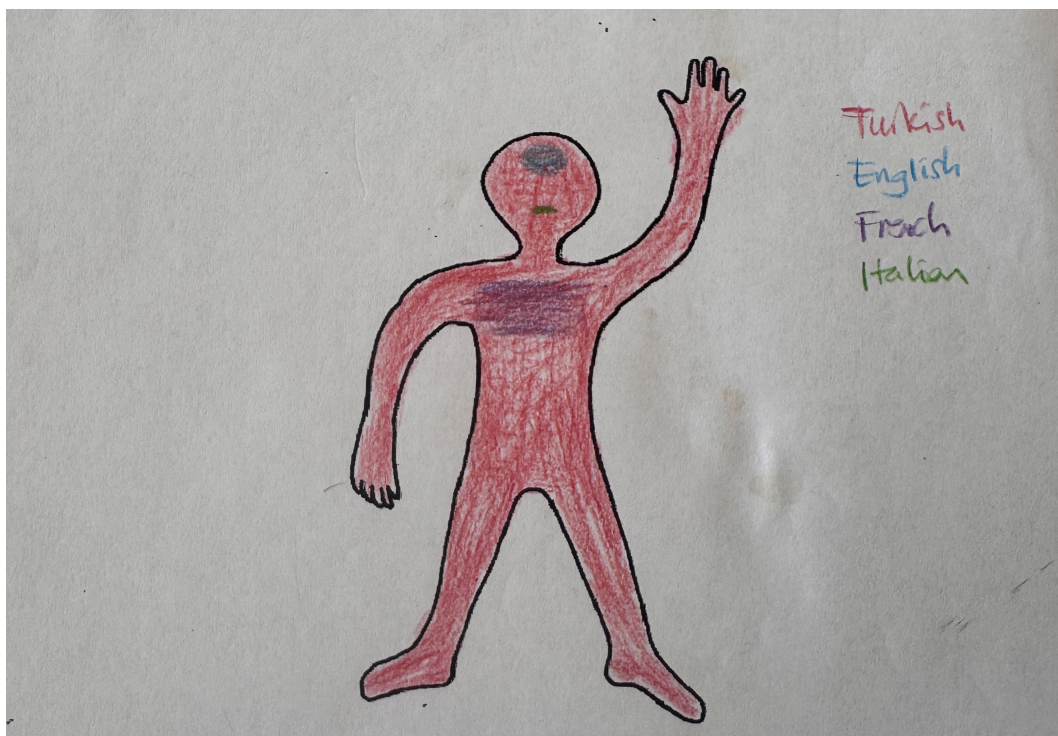


Figure 6.2. *Duru's LP.*

In Duru's drawing (Figure 6.2), the whole body is coloured in a thick, intense red. On the chest area, there is a purple colour block with irregular edges on the right and left, although the top and bottom lines are smooth. In the head area, there is a circle filled in dark blue, with a dark blue short line in the mouth area. On the left bottom of the page, outside the silhouette, 'Turkish' features in red, 'English' in light blue, 'French' in purple and 'Italian' in dark green. All are written in English.

Duru expressed a strong liking for English during the individual interview, stating simply and emphatically:

I can say I like everything about English. (Duru, individual interview)

These feelings towards English also appeared in her LP commentary; however, on this occasion, it was coupled with an emphasis on the effort the language requires:

I actually love English very much, but for me it's always paired with studying and such an effort [...]

Furthermore, Duru explicitly used the term ‘overwhelm’ and ‘sadness’ when reflecting on her experience during the individual interview:

In moments when the language was overwhelming me. [...] The struggle of using a second language or not being able to use my *mother tongue*. Its effect, its sadness... (Duru, individual interview, see Appendix E for extended excerpt)

Duru extended these efforts to the colour she picked, dark blue, but interestingly not for the sadness brought my not being able to use Turkish, rather for its calmness. This calmness was not the emotion evoked by English: it represented a necessary state of mind for understanding:

English is blue and I put it on the brain, because it’s a language that requires me to be calm, to have slept well, everything, I mean it’s a language that I can use all my brain like that. Also I very much like English, but for me it is also matched with working on it, like a constant struggle. (Duru, LP commentary)

Duru’s description of English as a language that requires her to “sleep well” and “use [her] brain” invites a deeper reading. Rather than being taken literally, the reference to sleep can be understood as a reference to the heightened cognitive effort English demands of her, a state in which she needs to feel mentally prepared and well-rested in order to perform. This framing reflects a form of metaknowledge about her language use: she recognises the demanding, effortful nature of English and the struggle it entails, which she describes as a “constant struggle.” Research suggests that heightened awareness of such effort can be closely tied to feelings of stress and pressure (Brown, 2021), which, if unrelieved, may contribute to cycles of anxiety (Bean & Ciesla, 2021). At the same time, her acknowledgement of liking English reveals a complex, even contradictory relationship: English is both a source of enjoyment and intellectual stimulation and a site of struggle and strain. Whether experienced with accompanying contradictory feelings or not, the struggle and stress English seemed to take her to *a place when things are uncertain or too much*, following Brown (2021). Duru’s later reflections revealed further contradictory yet simultaneously experienced emotions. She first reflected:

It’s certain that I’m not a talented person in language. [...] The lack of confidence there, when I’m speaking [English], is rooted in technical English [not lack of technical knowledge]. (Duru, LP commentary)

Despite this lack of confidence, Duru appeared to be highly experienced in English as she was fully immersed in the performance, sometimes even without noticing the language:

Even when it was in English, during the character imitations and the exciting parts of the story, I was thinking, was that in Turkish? Was it in English? Without really noticing, I was just listening, simply following along. (Duru, LP commentary)

This reflection illustrates how she became fully immersed in the performance, to the point where the boundaries between Turkish and English blurred. Rather than consciously tracking which language was being used, she followed the flow of the story intuitively. At the same time, when she became aware of her ability to speak English, she experienced a sense of confidence and felt more connected to the wider world.

English is the language of so many technologies and sciences [...] [it] is prevalent in all parts of the world. [...] I feel smart because of being able to speak English. (Duru, LP commentary)

In essence, English played a multifaceted role for Duru: it connected her to herself, enabling her to feel “a talented person” and also linked her to the broader world. This connection likely contributed to her fondness for the language, yet despite this, she still experienced struggles with it. Thus, English brought Duru to *biting yet vital waters of English*.

The third participant who represents English at top of the head in her LP is Defne (Figure 6.3).

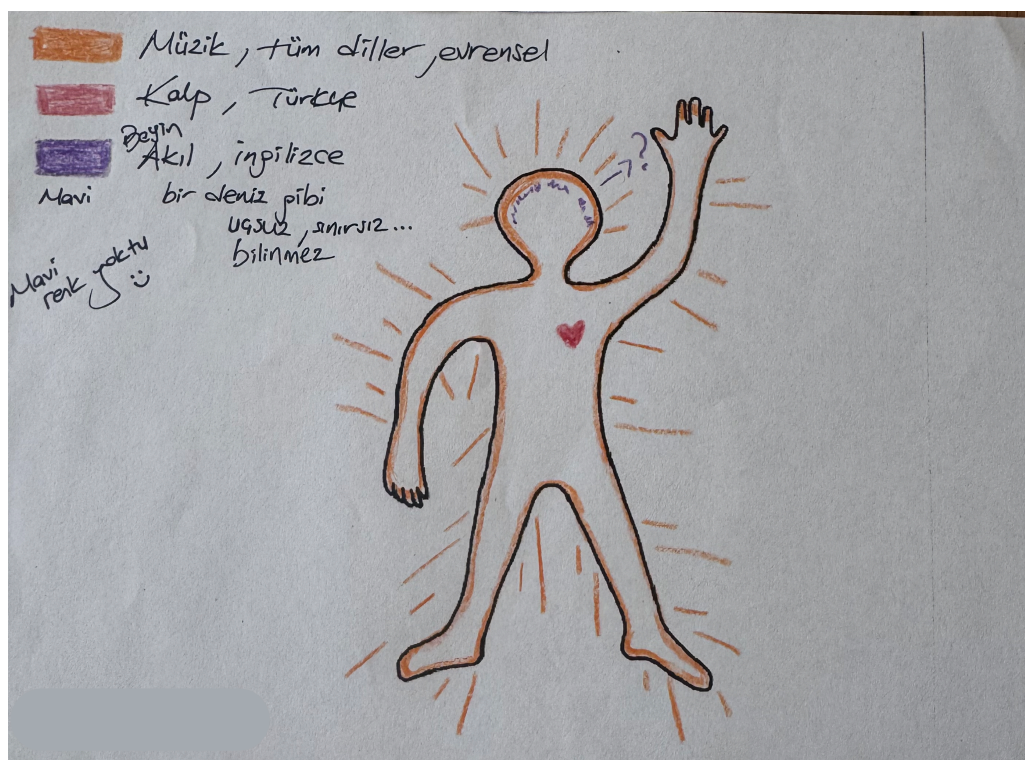


Figure 6.3. *Defne's LP.*

In her LP (Figure 6.3), Defne links English to the sea, portraying it as the language of science – a vast, deep ocean waiting to be explored. In her drawing, Defne depicts a solid red heart positioned on the left side of her chest. The figure is surrounded by a series of orange lines, in sequences of short and long lines, extending outwards from the body. The entire inside of the body is encircled with a continuous orange line, thicker around the head, which also has a few small squiggly purple lines. On the left side of the head, a purple outward arrow reaches a purple question mark. She uses the left corner of the paper (right of the body) to depict a key with colour-coded language labels, drawing rectangular colour blocks followed by the languages they signify. In the list, it is written “Music, all languages, universal” next to the orange rectangle, “Heart and Turkish” next to the red rectangle, “Brain, Mind, English” next to the purple rectangle, respectively. The word ‘blue’ features under the purple rectangle, adding the explanation diagonally: “There was not colour blue :)”, suggesting that she used purple instead of blue because she couldn’t find the blue, as she reiterated orally. Giving some space after the writing ‘blue’ she continues on the

drawing ‘like an endless, limitless and unknown sea’. All the written elements are in Turkish on Defne’s drawing.

Defne depicts English within the brain and used the word *akıl*, meaning ‘mind’ in English. However, in her reflections, she referred to it as ‘brain’. As previously shared, she also clarified that she wanted to use blue, to illustrate the deepness of the science, told through English, but purple was available. Furthermore, similar to a vast sea she described, holding a lot of uncertainties, therefore stress, English represented uncertainty for Defne, explicitly illustrated in her drawing in a number of question marks surrounding the head. Explicitly using the word ‘hassle,’ Defne reflected:

Since I couldn’t find the blue pencil...[...] Brain and question mark mean English for me here. There’s a vast amount of science out there right now. A journey. So why blue? What blue is like... The unknown and the emptiness are also a hassle. Because blue reminds me of the sea, right now English is blue for me. (Defne, LP commentary)

In her reflections, Defne’s negative self-beliefs in English became apparent:

I wanted to take a look at [the myth’s] summary before coming here. Because I knew I was not going to understand. [...] Well, also from time to time I felt like, yes, I can understand English, which I liked very much. (Defne, LP commentary)

Thus, despite recognising understanding the narration in the performance, Defne said, “I knew I was not going to understand”, instead of “I thought I was not going to understand”. This concern was particularly striking, given that at another moment she explicitly shared she understood Senem’s narration:

She conveyed the story so well through language and since it was a story, she narrated it with a slower flow and with feeling. And with the English as well, I sometimes had the feeling of ‘oh yes, I can understand it,’ and I really enjoyed that.

Together, I interpreted Defne’s emotions as a form of anxiety, coexisting with moments of clear comprehension and enjoyment. Therefore, I observed Defne both in *a place where the things are uncertain and too much* and *the life is good*, akin to being *Barefoot in the biting yet reviving waters of English*.

The fourth participant who embodied English at the top of her head in her LP is Derya (Figure 6.4).

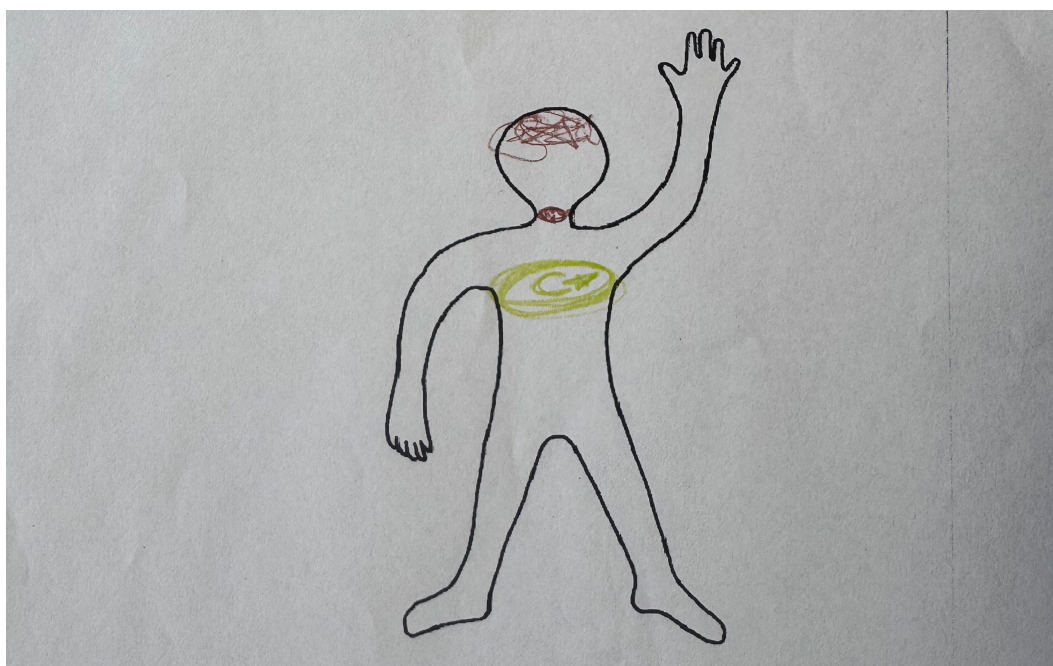


Figure 6.4. *Derya's LP.*

In Derya's LP (Figure 6.4), the head is filled with brown squiggly lines and there is a brown, filled-in circle in the neck area. A light green ellipse, with a solid, thick frame, encompasses the whole upper body, containing a crescent and a star.

In her commentary, English emerged solely as a language of strain and struggle, although from the very beginning, she asserted, "I can't say my English is weak." After this reflection, she offered no positive elaboration, immediately moving into a detailed account of the challenges and pressures it imposed. This struggle was vividly represented by brown zigzags in the brain, signalling the mental fatigue of continuously processing English and by the metaphor of a stone on the throat, capturing the anxiety and blockage she experiences when trying to articulate her thoughts; ideas hesitate or get stuck, compelling her to constantly reformulate sentences. She described the effort of speech as deliberate and taxing, with English requiring constant self-monitoring, hesitation and correction, highlighting the persistent tension between thought and expression. Interwoven with this

experience was a sense of resigned acceptance: she recognised that English would never be like a ‘mother tongue’, a reality she could not alter and must simply live with. This acceptance was not peaceful or neutral; it carried an undertone of helplessness, a recognition of limits alongside the ongoing struggle, where mental fatigue and speech anxiety seemed to be inescapable features of her engagement with the language:

Well, I can’t say that my English is weak, but never. I mean, I won’t be able to internalise it. I’ve accepted that now, the reality: it’ll never, you know, be like a mother tongue. I’ve accepted that and I’m going on like that, on my way here. [...] if I listened to full English, most probably I would get more tired. Like, you know, I would definitely experience that overload [used in English] in my chest, I know myself. [...] On my head, the dark zigzags I drew, of course, that’s English, because I get tired. [...] when you hear English all day, you get tired. And this thing I drew on my throat, it’s like, you want to express yourself, but there’s a stone sitting there. It doesn’t come out, what you want to say doesn’t come out and that represents it. [...] always like this: I want to say something, [...] oh no, how am I going to say it now? And then I change the sentence, I form it differently. [...] when I cannot explain myself, then my body comes out too. Somehow I keep moving, you know, like that. (Derya, LP commentary)

Within these reflections and emotions experienced as overload, tiredness, struggle, cognitive and physical effort and covert anxiety, English was observed like *biting waters*.

The fifth participant to position English at the top of her head in her LP is Damla, also locating it in multiple places in her drawing (Figure 6.5).

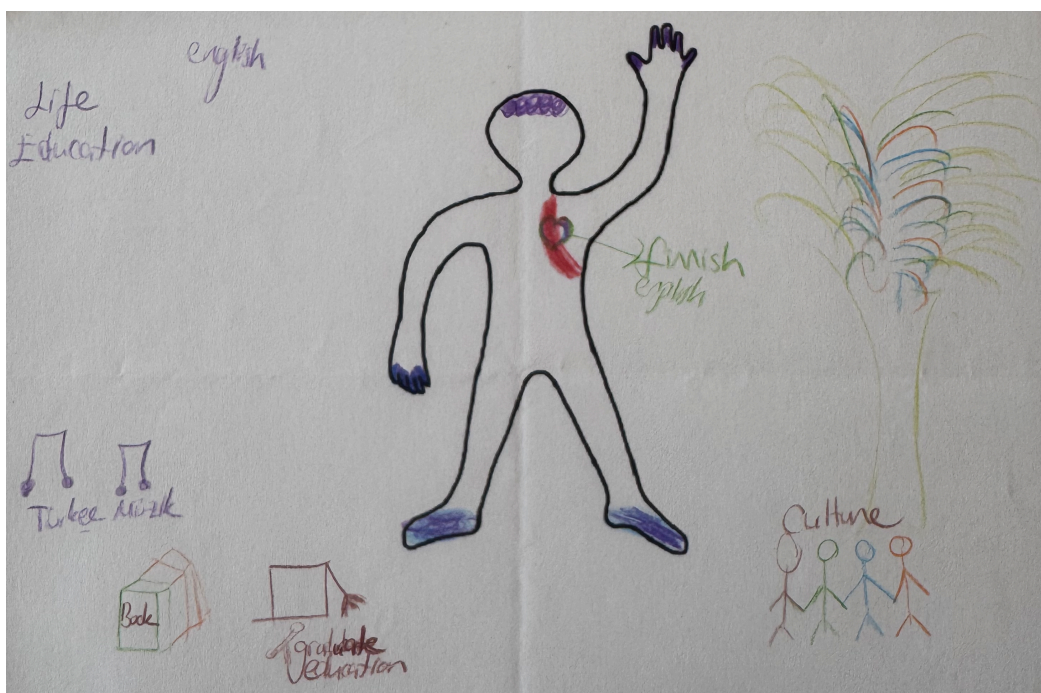


Figure 6.5. *Damla's LP.*

Her drawing (Figure 6.5) shows a body silhouette with the forehead filled with purple squiggly lines. There is a purple heart, outlined but not filled in, on the left side of the chest. A solid, thick red curve starting from the left side of the neck extends to beneath the left armpit, almost covering the whole heart. From the frame of the heart, a dark green outward arrow points to the words 'Finnish' and 'English' in list form. The fingers of the left hand, which is lifted, are intensely purple. The right hand, looking down, is also mainly purple, but there are small incidences of dark blue. The feet are a combination of dark blue and purple, but not as solid as the hands; the strokes are softer. Outside the silhouette, on the left side of the body, a tree-like structure is drawn, with branch-like curvy lines in various colours. In front of the trunk-like drawing of the tree-like structure, there are four stick figures, hand in hand, drawn in brown, dark green, dark blue and orange, from left to right. Above them, the word 'culture' is written, in brown. On the right side of the body silhouette, which is the left side of the paper, 'English' is written in purple at the top of the page, aligned between the head and the left end of the paper. Beneath it, aligned right, 'life' and 'education' are written in purple. Towards the right bottom of the page, there are four musical notes in two pairs. Beneath them, it is written *Türkçe Müzik*, (Turkish music).

Beneath the second pair, there is a stack of three books, the first drawn in dark green and the two following ones in brown. On the first book, she has written 'Book' in brown. On the right of the book stack, there is a square-like shape with a vertical line extending downwards, with a fringe at its end, on the right, all in brown. Beneath it, on the left, are two parallel vertical lines, combined with circles at both ends, again in brown. In the middle of the lines, there is a belt-like connection, extending vertically down, outside the lines, still in brown. At the right intersection point of the belt and lower line, she has written 'graduate education,' with the words stacked one above the other. These writings are also in brown.

Damla placed English also on her feet, a shared place with Turkish. She justified this representation, as English represented her "efforts to stay afloat and survive":

My efforts to stay afloat and survive are all in English [...] Standing up and struggling to survive is all in English. [...] I put English in my brain and feet and Turkish in my feet, because I think I can stand on my feet thanks to English and Turkish. (Damla, LP commentary)

Damla added:

Like my struggle to stay on my feet with Turkish in Türkiye, now it's in English. [...] As I'm using English here, maybe Turkish will disappear from my feet and only English will stay. (Damla, LP commentary)

In these reflections, it was evident that Damla felt a sense of gratitude to English and viewed it as a source of strength, related to her education. Revealing her profound positivity at another level of engagement, Damla placed English, Finnish and Turkish close to her heart. For her, English represents a very important, a "sacred thing":

I think English is very important because [...] if you have good English, you will get a good job, [...] a good place will wait for you. [...] Learning English has always been a very important and sacred thing for me. (Damla, LP commentary)

Evident in these reflections, to Damla, English was a tool for a better job and a better life, therefore her strength, which can be related to joy in complex ways. First, feeling of joy brings resilience, strength and courage (Brown, 2021). Second, feeling strong and empowered can create joy (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2005). Her overall reflections on multilingualism painted a joyful picture, closely related to multiculturalism:

I can describe it as a tree. Like birds or bugs in a tree [...] when I think about the ecosystem, I consider multilingualism as something possessing more than one culture in it. (Damla, LP commentary)

However, Damla not only placed English on her feet in her LP but also as squiggly lines in the head, in dark purple, representing her struggle and effort:

I am [...] a woman whose mother tongue is Turkish. You know, I experience difficulties in [...] English [language] and culture.” (Damla, LP commentary)

Damla further described the challenge, in the need for focus when the artist performed in English:

When Senem’s performance was in English [...] I needed to focus. (Damla, LP commentary)

Although her stress and difficulties with English appeared limited in the LP commentary, in the individual interviews English emerged as being infused with layers of anxiety, fear and worry, often rooted in the demand to “use proper grammar”:

The effort to use proper grammar... Or, you know, I try to correct myself. Usually, it’s Turks who do this. Like, they immediately say, ‘You should have made the sentence this way,’ that kind of thing. It happens a lot among Turks. [...] I feel ashamed. I go, ‘Ahh, I made a mistake... I should have constructed this sentence that way.’ Whereas another friend just says a word and moves on. [...] It’s also in the education we received in primary school. There’s this drive to be perfect, to be correct. [...] When we don’t use the sentence properly, we also feel guilty in a way. Maybe it’s something that comes from the education system we had. That’s why there’s this effort to construct the sentence properly. But then there are also times when I just say a word and think, ‘Well, they must have understood’. (Damla, individual interview)

The act of self-correction, repeated monitoring of speech and the expectation of being corrected by peers – particularly among Turkish speakers who, as she noted, were quick to point out how a sentence “should” have been constructed – created a constant sense of vigilance, leaving little space for spontaneity. Furthermore, anticipation of mistakes and the corrections that followed triggered a fear, reinforcing her sense of exposure. This produced not only worry about accuracy but also shame and guilt when she fell short of perceived standards. The perfectionist drive instilled by her early schooling heightened the overwhelm: language use became a high-stakes task where even minor errors carried

emotional weight. Anxiety here was not only about communication itself but mistakes seemed to signal a sense of ‘incompetency’ rather than natural slips in expression. Although she admitted to occasional moments of release – saying a word and trusting she was understood – these were exceptions that only underscored how rare ease was. For the most part, her experience of English was marked by the intertwining of anxiety, fear and worry, producing an emotional burden that left her overwhelmed.

Together, I interpreted these reflections as being in *a place when life is good*, with the joy and gratitude brought by the experienced strength and empowerment; when she was *searching for connection*, as she was connected with the whole ecosystem; and when *things were not certain or too much* with the observed fear, worry, anxiety and overwhelm in English, informed by (Brown, 2021). Therefore, Damla was trying to “stay afloat” *Barefoot in the biting waters* of English, while she was aware of the essentiality of it, thus the waters were also *reviving*.

Ahu is the sixth participant discussed in this section, representing English at the top of her head and also in half of her heart in her LP (Figure 6.6).



Figure 6.6. *Ahu's LP.*

As Ahu's LP (Figure 6.6) reveals, the upper head area is divided into two sections, resembling a short parted hairstyle at the forehead. However, Ahu shared in the Focus Group that these lines don't represent hair but rather "inside of the head". The two sections are primarily red, with the right side of the head transitioning to orange at the end. A heart is drawn on the LP, divided into two sections: the right side is light green and the left side is pink. A thick, belt-like line in light green is drawn across the belly, followed by another thinner line, also in light green. The right hand, looking down, is grey, while the lifted right hand holds a microphone. A thick black line appears on the right leg above the knee. Both feet are coloured in dark green.

Ahu framed English as a source of stress despite having lived many years abroad and being a confident and experienced user of English. Ahu realised her struggle, therefore stress with English during the performance in a specific moment of relaxation brought by singing of

the artist. Therefore, English was a cognitive attack represented in orange, despite she did not have doubts that she would understand:

In me, there's English in the orange, there's English in most of my head. [...] until the requiem, [...] everything was super. [then in the requiem] I felt like 'I am comfortable now.' I no more [...] have to listen [...], this is something I know very well. [...] Although I know I'll understand without any efforts, still [English] makes me attack [...] I raised my head. Because [...] I have to understand. (Ahu, LP commentary)

Ahu also shared her challenge in using English at home when communicating with her French partner. Due to this romantic place of the language Ahu positioned English also in the heart, in Ahu's words "the only place" she can communicate with her partner. Ahu shared the meanings she made:

My partner is French. [...] And the only place we can talk together is English. You know, we need to express our feelings somehow and we need to stay in touch somehow. (Ahu, LP commentary)

In Ahu's reflections above 'somehow' can represent the incomplete and difficult nature of English communication, supporting her initial comments . Together, English took Ahu to *a place when things were uncertain or too much*, while she still felt *connected* (Brown, 2021).

The last participant to locate English at the top of the head in her LP is Funda (Figure 6.7).

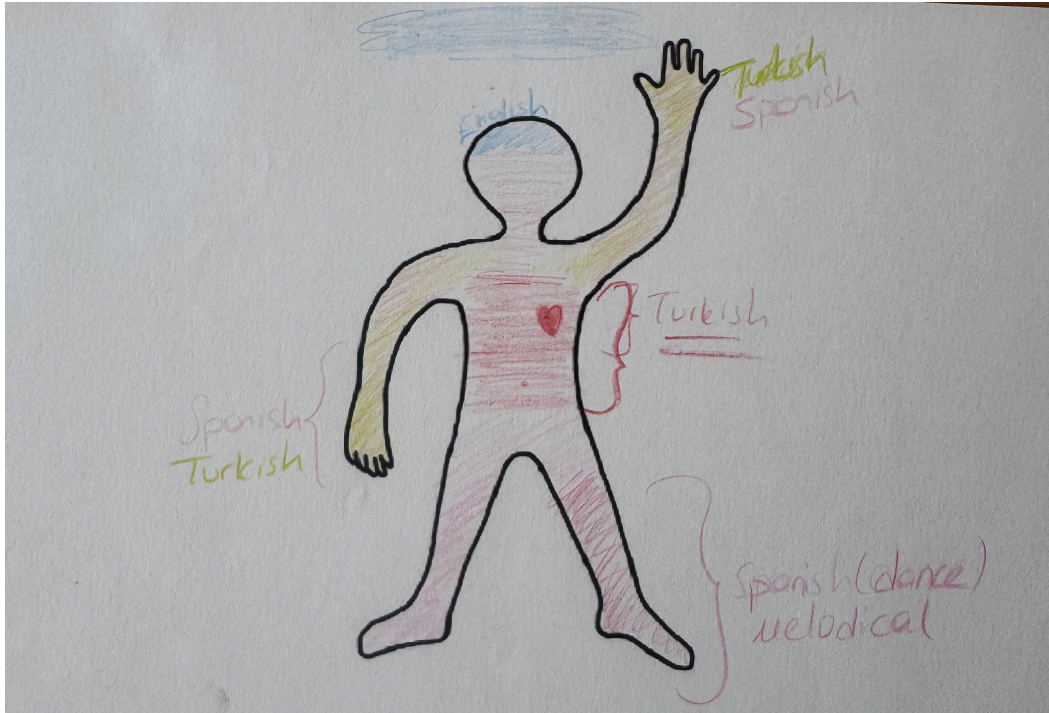


Figure 6.7. Funda's LP.

In Funda's drawing (Figure 6.7), the body is filled with various colours, leaving no blank space. Red stripes are present on the legs and torso. The red is more intense from the belly to the armpits and on the legs, becoming softer between the belly and upper legs. There is a solid, filled-in red heart on the left side of the chest. On the left side of the upper body, a parenthesis is drawn, signifying 'Turkish'. Another parenthesis, on the left leg, covers the darker red parts and contains the writing 'Spanish (dance)' and 'melodical' below. Both arms and hands are light green. Another parenthesis is drawn between the fingers and elbow on the right hand. The parenthesis reaches to the words 'Spanish' (written in red) and 'Turkish' (written in light green). Soft red colour extends to the neck and head area, while the head ends with light blue in the brain area. The word 'English' is written in a curly style around the head and there is a light blue area below the head, above the area between the shoulders.

Funda's choice of light blue in embodying English in her LP presented emptiness and vastness. In her reflections, Funda considered English as an obligatory learning, focusing, thinking and paying attention in the brain. This was rendered in the drawing as a cloud.

Funda also shared she did not have a positive or negative emotional connection with English, having a neutral stance:

[English is] the brain that needs to think. [...] Since I consider it a bit of a scientific language, you have to learn it, you have to know it, world language, I feel like this is a bit of an obligation. Actually, I don't feel it anywhere in my heart or it doesn't actually make me feel anything. [...] It is a language that exists in every aspect of our lives. It feels a bit obligatory to me. Do I hate it, no. Do I like it, no. (Funda, LP commentary)

I interpreted these reflections as Funda being at a place where she was *searching connection*, where feelings of both connectedness and disconnectedness could be experienced (Brown, 2021). The light blue also echoed the vastness of English, like a sea to explore. This analogy stemmed from Turkish, where the immenseness of something, especially knowledge, is expressed using the metaphor of the sea. To reinforce this concept, Turkish often combines the word “*deniz*” with its Farsi counterpart *derya*, forming the expression *derya deniz*. In this sense, her analogy was similar to Defne's, in the use of sea to refer to vastness of English. As a result, light blue she picked aligned both with the cloud of emptiness she felt and with the sea of unknown to be learnt:

[..] light blue [...] Vast [...] you know what they say *derya deniz*. I felt exactly like that and I made a cloud on the top. [...] there is an emptiness, I assessed it like this. (Funda, LP commentary)

In this sea, Funda appeared stressed and even somewhat anxious about whether she would understand the narration in English before attending the event. Although, she was experienced enough in English to “correct [her] Irish colleagues” at work, as she reflected in the individual interview, she still felt that she might not fully grasp the storytelling:

You try trying to understand, okay, yes, you understand, but of course there are things you are missing at some points. [...] While I was coming, I was questioning myself a little bit about whether [...] I would be able to understand, how it would happen. (Funda, individual interview)

Furthermore, although she understood the narration, Funda could not ease the anxiety totally, which hindered her engagement with the story:

Well, it went very smoothly for me in that sense, but it's still English like this, you know, I should listen a little more carefully. [Worried about these,] I couldn't get

into the feeling, as if I miss something, I'll miss the [whole] meaning. (Funda, individual interview)

Within these waves of anxiety, particularly in listening, which is discussed more in detail in Section 7.4.1.1, Funda might have been taken to *a place when things were uncertain or too much* (Brown, 2021), with the observed overwhelm, stress and anxiety, *Barefoot in the biting waters* of English.

Overall, the seven participants who chose to represent English at the top of the head reflected on their drawings using various analogies and feelings, among which a sense of 'stress' was the most common emotion. The participants generally described English with words such as struggle, challenge, effort, tiring, hassle, overwhelm, sadness, anxiety and difficulty, often revealing an anxiety about not being able to comprehend. At times, joy, gratitude, acceptance and calmness accompanied this struggle, just as other parts of the body accompanied the top of the head.

6.4.1.2 English in the Whole Head

Five of the study participants placed English in their whole head: Aylin, Serap, Müge, Selim and Bahar. Each drawing and accompanying reflections will be analysed in detail below.

The first LP and reflections discussed in this section are Aylin's (Figure 6.8).

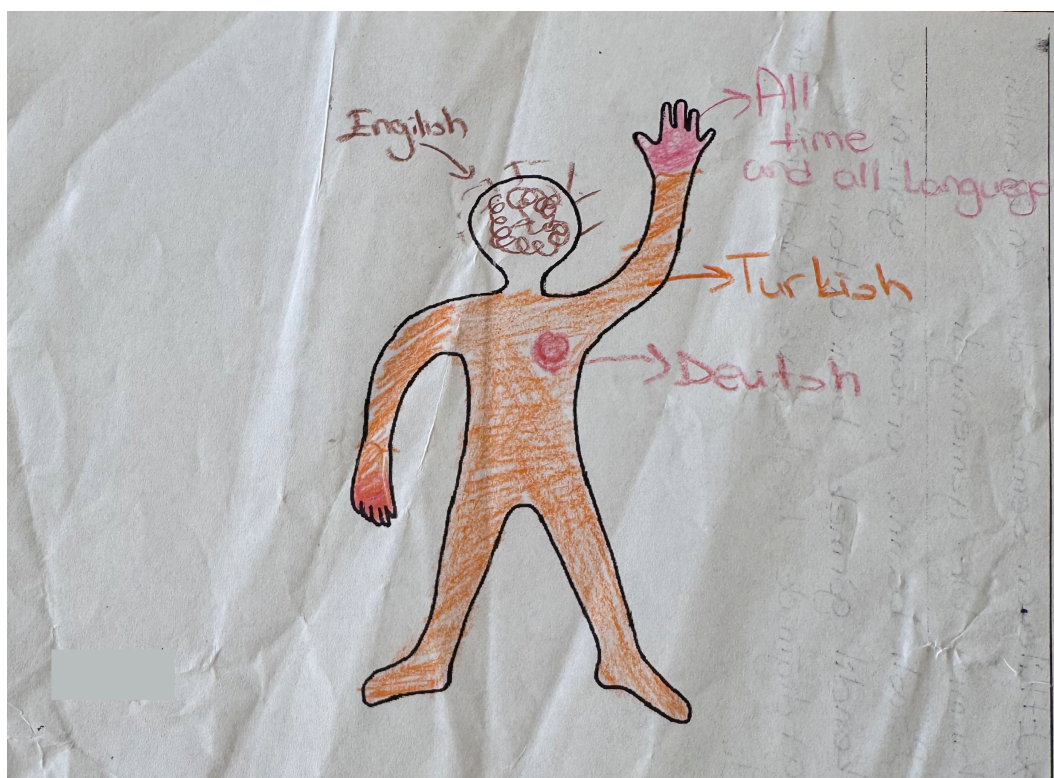


Figure 6.8. *Aylin's LP.*

In Aylin's drawing (Figure 6.8), the majority of the body, from the neck down, is coloured in a thick orange, with visible strokes of colour. On the left elbow, an outward arrow points to the word 'Turkish', written in English. Within the orange colouring, a red heart is depicted on the left side of the chest, with an outward red arrow linking it to *Deutsch* (German, in German language). Both hands are painted red, with an outward-facing red arrow on the left hand's ring pointing to 'All time and all languages', written in English. The head area is filled with brown, wire-like representations and there are short, irregular lines around the head. A couple of these lines on the left part of the head touch the head like hair, then transform into dotted lines on the right side of the head, not touching the head. On the outside right, English is written with a typographical error, 'Engilish' [sic] and a curved outward arrow connects it to the head.

In her commentary, Aylin revealed that, for her, English "resided in the brain" due to the challenges, complexity and cognitive fatigue it brought her. When she took her reflections

on engaging with English used in the narration to her daily experiences, as a listener in an English conversation, she revealed a profound anxiety in her reflections, as she shared that she sometimes convinced herself of things she fabricated as a listener. She stated:

English [...] is complicated like this because right now I feel like my brain is really tired in the evening as I'm exposed to this and trying to understand it. And one or two times I realised that I didn't understand what the other person wanted to say, but I understood it the way I wanted to understand. (Aylin, LP commentary)

In this reflection, English emerges as a source of persistent stress and anxiety. Aylin describes her brain as “really tired in the evening,” highlighting the cumulative mental fatigue that results from constant engagement with the language. This fatigue can even lead her to misinterpret or fabricate aspects of what she heard. The anxiety – and occasional avoidance – observed in her reflections will be explored further in Section 7.4.1.1. However, Aylin also experienced enthusiasm when she realised she could understand the narration, particularly when Turkish was used to facilitate comprehension:

I understood English more easily, when it was between two Turkish languages [between Turkish parts] .Then I know it will return to Turkish. [...] I listened [to the narration] with that enthusiasm. And it becomes easier to understand [English] when you listen with that enthusiasm. (Aylin, LP commentary)

In light of the notion that anxiety can be experienced as “[...] an energised state of enthusiasm leading up to or during an enjoyable activity” (Brown, 2021, p. 42), the reflection above can be seen as proving Aylin’s anxiety. At the same time, it also reveals a sense of excitement. In both cases, English took Aylin to *a place when things were uncertain or too much*, akin to *biting waters*. Yet between the lines, there was relief brought by understanding English, transporting her to a space *when life was good* (Brown, 2021), making the waters feel *reviving*. Importantly, this relief did not stem from English alone but from the artist’s strategic use of Turkish, which provided a space for relaxation. This dynamic is explored further in Section 7.4.1.3, which addresses the easing of oral fluency anxiety.

Serap is the second participant who positioned English in the whole head in her LP (Figure 6.9).

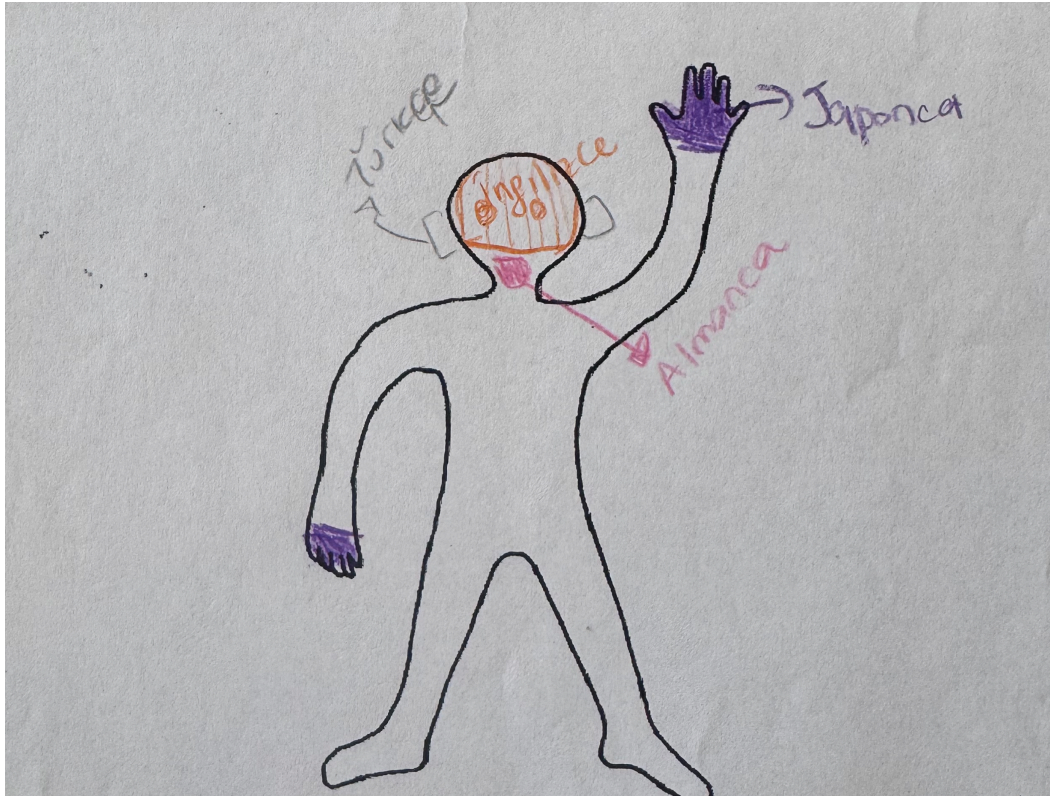


Figure 6.9. *Serap's LP.*

In Serap's creation (Figure 6.9), the body below the neck is mostly blank, with only the hands coloured in solid purple. An outward purple arrow on the lifted right hand points to *Japonca* (Japanese). On the neck, extending roughly to the nose, is a solid red circle. An arrow drawn towards the right of the body, reaching under the armpits, points to *Almanca* (German). Another red arrow points from the right hand to the word *Japonca* (Japanese). Above the red circle, there is a solid orange, vertical line. The area between that line and the top of the head is filled with orange, horizontal, soft stripes. There are two solid orange circles in the area where eyes would be. Above the left circle, the word *İngilizce* (English) is written diagonally, with the last three letters extending beyond the head. Three rectangle-like shapes in grey are drawn on the ear area and from the right ear, an outward arrow extends to *Türkçe* (Turkish), written diagonally.

In her reflections, Serap revealed a deep immersion in the story, made possible by her full understanding of English, which allowed her to reach a level of dramatic engagement:

Since there were more parts she told in English, I actually drew [English], both on my eyes and on my head. Because when I was really listening, it was as if I was actually getting into the story and images were really appearing to me. (Serap, LP commentary)

The excerpt above suggests that engagement with English enabled a form of cognitive and emotional involvement for Serap, where language facilitated the construction of mental imagery and sensory experience. Along with her deep engagement and full understanding of the narration, Serap also showed her stress in the individual interview:

When I first joined, it really caught my attention. Senem started explaining, but because it was in English, after a while I was following, yes, I was keeping up in the background, I understood, but my brain didn't stop. (Serap, individual interview)

This stress even reached to overwhelm, triggering her obsessive tendencies, in medical terms, as she shared:

What I actually told the therapist was that I felt as if my brain was split in two: one part was listening, translating into English and understanding, while the other part was still running my own thoughts, making the obsessions that brought me to therapy harder, activating them. I couldn't let that go, for example. (Serap, individual interview)

Serap's reflections reveal that listening in English was not only cognitively demanding but also emotionally charged, bringing layers of anxiety, fear, struggle and overwhelm. She described her brain as "not stopping," pointing to a relentless mental effort that extended far beyond ordinary focus or processing. The sensation of being "split in two" – one part translating and understanding English, the other grappling with persistent obsessive thoughts – suggests a profound state of tension and internal division. This dual tasking created a continuous cognitive–emotional strain, in which following the story in English was inseparable from the stress of managing intrusive thoughts. Although it is not possible to link obsessive thoughts to being immersed in English directly, it may be argued that the stress induced by English can trigger obsessive tendencies, intensifying a sense of overwhelm. As a result, her reflections highlights not only her struggle to process language but also the mental labour and emotional weight, far more than attentive focus. When read alongside the aesthetic engagement reflected in the Focus Group discussions above, it becomes clear that, paradoxically, the challenges, even the presence of obsessive thoughts,

did not hinder aesthetic experience, demonstrating that aesthetic connection can emerge even under conditions of overwhelm, arising amidst both cognitive and emotional challenge.

Adding another layer to her complex emotions, Serap also felt the tranquillity as she understood the narration, experiencing this feeling like the sun shining in her head:

I felt tranquil when I understood. That's why I drew English in orange. [...] I really felt like there was a sun thing. I shouldn't say enlightenment, but I felt comfortable.
(Serap, LP commentary)

Bringing these together, Serap was both in *a place when things were uncertain or too much* and *where the life was good*, like being in the *biting yet reviving waters of English*.

Müge is the third participant to locate English in the whole head in her LP (Figure 6.10).



Figure 6.10. Müge's LP.

In Müge's drawing (Figure 6.10) most of the body, from the neck down, is covered with diagonal, random lines in light green and grey. A solid red heart is positioned on the left

side of the chest. Both hands are solid yellow, the entire throat is solid light blue and the whole head area above the neck is solid orange. The ear area is also light blue, with an ear shape outlined and there are solid lines extending upwards above each ear. On the right side of the image, there is a key with different colours and their corresponding languages:

- A solid orange, filled-in circle next to the word *İngilizce* (English);
- A solid blue, filled-in circle next to the word *Türkçe* (Turkish);
- A solid yellow, filled-in circle next to the word *İtalyanca* (Italian);
- A solid red circle next to the word ‘Accents.’ Beneath ‘Accents’, there is ‘Foreigner speaking Turkish, etc.,’ written in blue pen, put in parenthesis. These are written in English and there are corrections with black outs;
- A filled-in green circle and filled-in grey circle next to each other next to the word next to a ‘Other languages’. This is also written in English.

Although being a confident user of English and translanguaging to English many times during the interview, Müge embodied her struggle in her brain and shared her stress using the sentences:

[...] My head is full of English. [...] English makes the vast majority of [my communication], either in my professional life or in my private life, like ‘do we do this like this,’ I mean ‘do we say this like this?’ or ‘will it be understood if I say it like this?’ (Müge, LP commentary)

In this reflection, English emerged as a pervasive source of cognitive and emotional strain. Müge described her head as “full of English,” capturing a sense of mental saturation and overwhelm from continuously processing the language in both professional and private contexts. Her repeated self-questioning “do we say this like this?” or “will it be understood if I say it like this?” reveals persistent worry and anxiety about accuracy, comprehension and/or social evaluation. This constant monitoring reflects a struggle to communicate effectively, where even routine interactions require heightened effort. Implicit fear underlies these reflections, suggesting concern about misunderstanding or being misunderstood. For her, then, language becomes a source of challenge, a constant site of

vigilance and strain, rather than being a tool of expression and freedom, taking her to *a place when things are uncertain or too much*.

The fourth participants who embodied English in the whole head in his LP is Selim (Figure 6.11).



Figure 6.11. *Selim's LP.*

Selim used solid colours in his LP (Figure 6.11). He coloured the left leg orange and labelled it *İspanyolca* (Spanish) and the right leg yellow, writing *İtalyanca* (Italian). Both colours extend to the belly, which is shaded red and labelled *Türkçe* (Turkish) up to the armpits. The area between the armpits and chin is light green, with the colour extending slightly onto the upper arms. The right arm transitions from yellow to orange, while the left, raised arm reverses the sequence with orange followed by yellow. Both hands and the head are dark blue. Above the head, *İngilizce* (English) is written in a curved style, touching the top of the head.

In Selim's reflection, English appeared as a consuming presence, "constantly in my brain", conveying the strain of continual effort to understand and be understood. Selim's priority to learn English in Ireland, while working remotely for a Turkish company in Türkiye, added pressure from overlapping linguistic and professional demands. The frequent use of gestures particularly speaking in English, more often than in Turkish, suggested a strategy for gaps in expression, highlighting the underlying worry or anxiety, about full communicative competence. He explained:

My priority is to learn English [in Ireland], work will be secondary in this process. Therefore, it is English [...] constantly in my brain. It's in my brain because I want to understand people and try to talk to them. [...] It is also at my hand. [...] We use gestures more often [when speaking in English]. (Selim, LP commentary)

Selim repeatedly framed English communication as labour – "constantly having that effort to explain ourselves" – which pointed to an ongoing cognitive and emotional demand rather than a natural flow of interaction. His later reflections presented an image of the brain as "always working on learning," suggesting an unrelenting vigilance that bordered on overwhelm, where the mind could not rest because it was continually processing translating and monitoring. The potential worry and anxiety became more observable when he gave a hypothetical example:

When speaking with foreign people [in English], we constantly have that effort to explain ourselves. [...] The brain is always working on learning. Yes, because the brain is constantly learning. [...] With foreigners, by speaking English, we constantly have that effort to explain ourselves. [...]. I don't know if it will sound a bit odd but let's say I were to get a girlfriend here. Would I be able to express myself and convey my feelings best to a Turk? Or would they come across just as well to a girlfriend I could speak English with? (Selim, LP commentary)

In the excerpt above, doubt over whether emotions would "come across just as well" revealed both insecurity and vulnerability. Thus, the very act of expressing himself to an imagined non-Turkish girlfriend in English emerged as a site of struggle worry and stress, rather than being perceived as a means of connection, where fear of not being able to convey himself effectively overshadowed the reality of communication itself.

The last participant who located English in the whole head in her LP is Bahar (Figure 6.12).

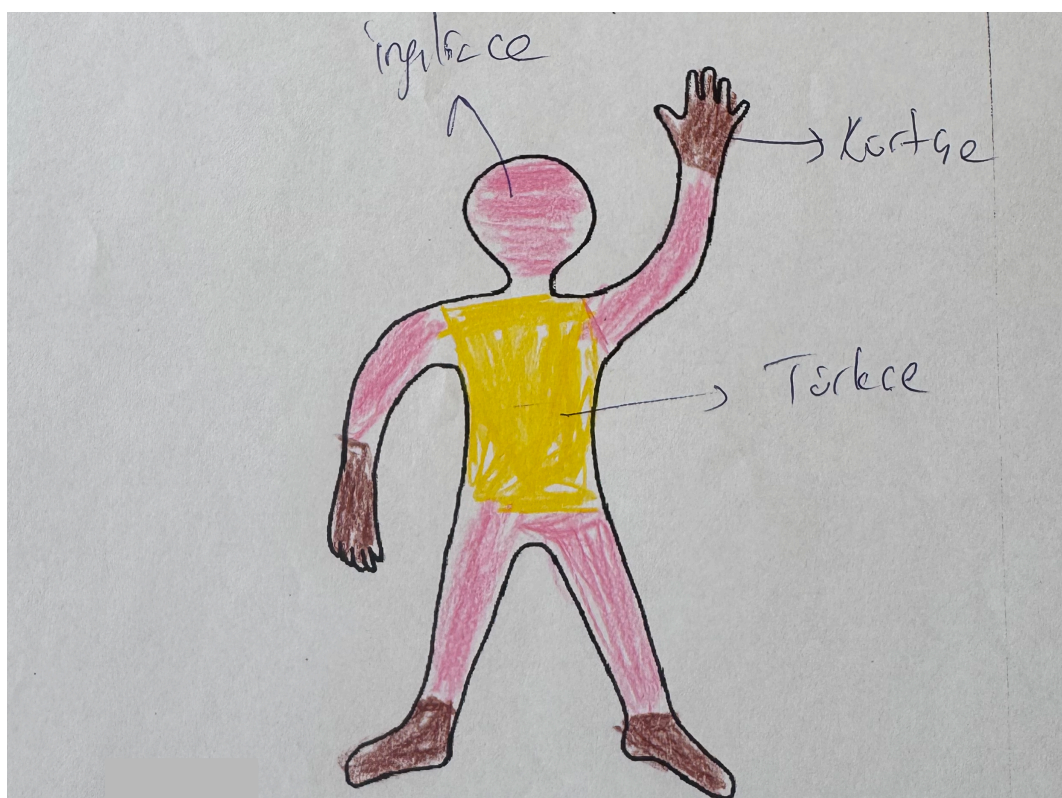


Figure 6.12. *Bahar's LP.*

In Bahar's LP (Figure 6.12) there are three colours – red, yellow and brown – to fill the entire body. The torso is yellow, the head arms and legs are red, but both the hands and feet are shaded in brown. Using a blue pen, she wrote the languages each colour represents, drawing arrows from the body to the outside. An arrow from the torso points to *Türkçe* (Turkish), from the head to *İngilizce* (English) and from the raised left hand to *Kürtçe* (Kurdish).

Bahar's LP sequenced the languages that resonated with her, starting from the centre. English is placed at the head, representing a struggle and extended to the arms and legs, implicating its frequent use and her increasing sympathy towards it, particularly because allowing her to earn a good life as an academic in Ireland. Although the colour she picked was red, she explained the colour as pink, recounting in her initial times in Ireland it was

red, but as she was gaining experience, it had turned to pink. Furthermore, she expected it to turn to yellow in time, the colour she used to illustrate Turkish.

Bahar also shared her struggle in English, accompanied with her increasing love to the language:

[...] in English the pondering effort of the brain is required. [...] English also represents my job, me earning my life and also my love to it is increasing and as I believe it has more place in my body now, I placed it here [head, arms and legs, in red/pink]. (Bahar, LP commentary)

When I asked a clarification question in the individual interview, Bahar responded:

It's pink [...] it was actually red. Alert is such a thing in a colour. You know, be careful, a warning. But as a result of the years or as I feel a little more confident, it turned to pink. (Bahar, individual interview)

Yet, in another instance, Bahar shared that she did not feel fully confident, although being an academic at a university in Ireland for five years, revealing some insecurity, leading to vulnerability:

My English... [...] I still don't feel fully confident in English. (Bahar, individual interview)

With stress, overwhelm and vulnerability, Bahar was in *a place when things were uncertain or too much* and *in the biting waters of English*. Yet, while she appreciated English as a means of sustaining her life through her work, the waters were also *reviving* and loved.

To sum up, Serap, Müge, Selim and Bahar placed English in the whole head area in their LPs, while Selim and Bahar also placed it in their limbs. Within their depictions; anxieties, difficulties, struggles, worries, fears and/or overwhelm were observed, as well as tranquillity, love and excitement.

6.4.1.3 English in the Upper Body, Sometimes Extended to Other Parts

Another body area that participants preferred to place English was the upper body, with three participants: Filiz, Duygu and Arzu.

The first participant to locate English in the upper body in her LP is Filiz (Figure 6.13).

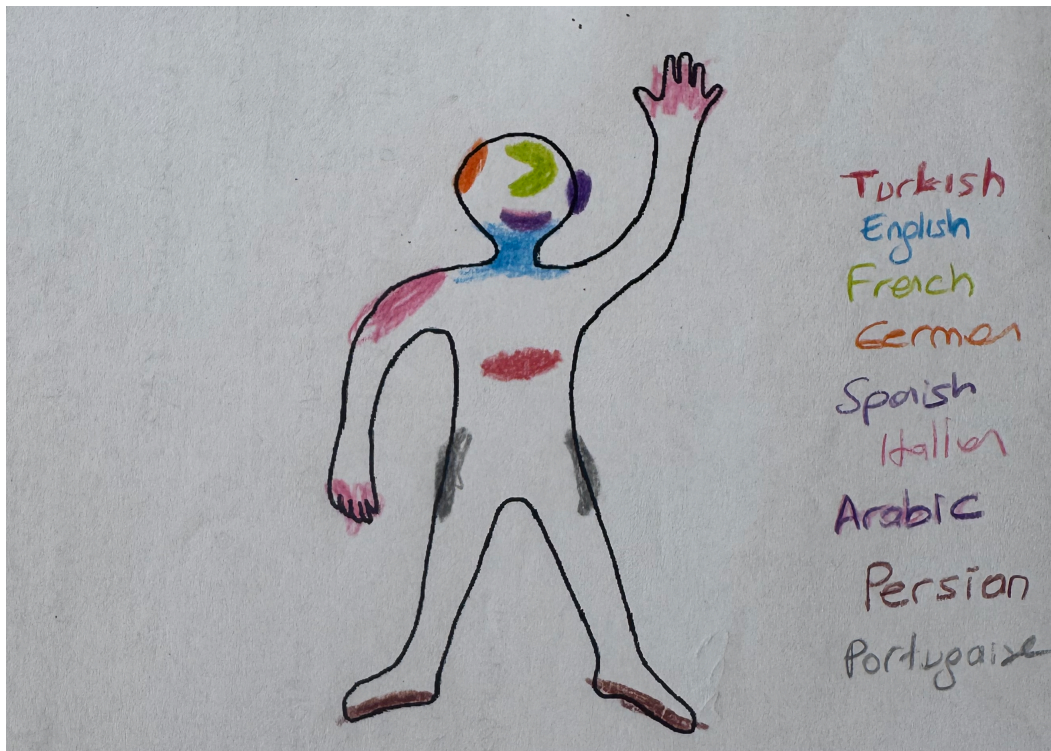


Figure 6.13. *Filiz's LP.*

In Filiz's Language Portrait (LP, Figure 6.13), the head is a blend of colours: a green reverse C-shape on the upper half, a slight U-curve where the mouth would be, a small vertical orange ellipse near the ear and a larger, more intense purple circle in the place of the left ear. All these shapes are filled in. Beneath the U-curve at the mouth area, a solid blue fill starts and extends down to the neck, slightly reaching the shoulder. On the right shoulder, an ellipse covers half of the upper arm. The fingers on both hands are red and a red, filled-in ellipse is centred on the torso. On the hips, two grey curved lines, resembling parentheses, face inward and outward. The soles of the feet are coloured brown. To the right of the figure, a vertical list of words is written:

- Turkish (in red)
- English (in blue)
- French (in green)

- German (in orange)
- Spanish (in purple)
- Italian (in pink)
- Arabic (in a deeper purple)
- Persian (in brown)
- Portuguese (in grey)

Filiz, the only participant who expressed positive-only feelings in English, placed the language on her throat, extending it to her lower jaw and shoulders. Being experienced and confident in English, she wanted to showcase her frequent use of the language with this depiction:

I chose blue for English. A little more *liberating* [used in English] for me... Because... I mean, like they say one language, one person, two languages, two people [a saying in Turkish]. I mean, it also expands when you master the world literature and the words in English, like that. I feel like my self-expression is expanding and liberating. [...] I feel like it's expanding your bilingual identity thing. [...] The more we expand, the freer we become, right? (Filiz, LP commentary)

These reflections clearly revealed an empowerment, gratitude and relief to English, *taking her to a place when life is good* (Brown, 2021).

The second participant who positioned English in the upper body in her LP is Duygu (Figure 6.14).



Figure 6.14. *Duygu's LP.*

Duygu (Figure 6.14) depicts the whole head in light blue, in stretchy lines, extending outside the head in an intense, tick halo form. “TURKISH” is written slightly diagonally, extending upwards on the right side of the head. The upper chest features two U-shaped curves between the shoulders, marked in dark green. The area within the inner curve is softly shaded in dark green, with “ENGLISH” written inside. On the right arm, the section between the armpit and elbow is grey with irregular edges and “FRENCH” is written diagonally below the arm. After a small blank space, a dark green section continues down the arm, ending in irregular lines and marked “KURDISH” horizontally outside. On the left arm, the area from the shoulder to the middle of the forearm is red with fringed edges and “SPANISH” is written diagonally up, outside the upper arm. The abdomen is patterned in alternating zigzags of blue and orange. A purple block on the right knee is labelled “RUSSIAN” horizontally outside. Similarly, a colour block in orange on the left knee is marked “GERMAN” horizontally, with the end slightly extending upward. Her drawing also includes additional elements beyond the body silhouette in spiral forms, such as a light green circle near the left foot, a triangle at the right upper corner, a light green square in the middle of the left edge of the paper and a purple circle at the top. At the left corner, there

is a blue, filled-in planet-like shape, with wave-like designs scattered on the right side of the paper.

In Duygu's reflections, English emerged as a source of persistent stress and cognitive strain. Duygu described constantly having to stay alert, monitoring both comprehension and expression, as if "pushing the language out from his chest," which conveys not only effort but also a physicalized sense of tension:

In English, it's more like... from my chest, like shouting from the chest (laughs) to myself. Since it's not my mother tongue, there're always things I need to learn and I'm constantly on alert, listening and watching. I try to engage without fully surrendering myself... trying to get in, but in a way that's a bit further from spontaneity. [...] I described it in my chest. It's as if I'm trying to push the language out from my chest [laughs] and trying to get into the language. (Duygu, LP commentary)

Duygu's overwhelm and stress became more evident in the individual interview, as she shared her repeated need to learn and process new information in English. Particularly handling practical tasks like reading numerous documents to complete a single procedure created a sense of overwhelm and mental fatigue for her. Frustration arose from the discrepancy between the effort invested and the outcome achieved, making even small tasks feel disproportionately taxing. At times, this effortful engagement produced a feeling of loss or being disadvantaged, even a "stolen" thing, maybe time, effort, energy and/or peace and ease, as though the energy expended did not yield sufficient return. In the individual interview, Duygu commented:

When I arrived here, there were paperwork and things, and before you understand it, you're reading 50 documents just to complete a single process. And then you won't use that information again. How much effort did you put into it? Even something like setting up the internet. Things you would do automatically in Türkiye without thinking... Here it's different. Researching in English is also a bit different. Maybe reading contract clauses is boring even in Turkish, especially unfamiliar ones in Turkey, and doing it in an additional language... additionally... like you constantly put in a lot of effort, but it feels like you can't make progress or the output doesn't match the input you gave. You do such small tasks... It also feels like something has been stolen from you. (Duygu, individual interview)

Although Duygu's proficiency in English was evident in her role as a lecturer at a university in Ireland, she particularly experienced overwhelm and stress in her use of English, where

language demanded constant attention and vigilance, *taking her to a place when things were unclear or too much.*

The last participant to represent English in the upper body in her LP is Arzu (Figure 6.15).



Figure 6.15. *Arzu's LP.*

Arzu's LP (Figure 6.15) shows the entire head softly shaded in light green. The chest area is framed with diagonal strokes and within it, there is a solid light green circle on the left side. Two filled-in orange circles appear on the arms: one on the left elbow, the other between the elbow and shoulder. Both hands and the abdomen are coloured in an intense light green, while the pelvis is left blank. The upper legs continue from the blank space with grey blocks. Almost half of the lower legs, including the toes, are orange. In the upper right corner of the paper, there is a key for the colours: *Türkçe* (Turkish) in light green, *İngilizce* (English) in grey and *Fransızca* (French) in orange.

Like Duygu, Arzu's experience of English was marked by a mixture of anxiety, overwhelm and bodily tension, despite having graduated from an Anatolian High School – a type of selective school in Türkiye that admits high achievers based on national exam scores and

is known to provide a high level of education in almost all subjects, including English. For Arzu, hearing English produced a spreading sensation from her interlocutor to her back, accompanied by worry about comprehension: “Oh my God, will I understand? What are they saying?” The heightened awareness of the Irish accent intensified this apprehension. She also reported pain in her legs, suggesting that the cognitive strain of processing a new language manifested physically, reinforcing the sense of struggle. English was described as “really challenging,” highlighting the persistent effort required to follow and engage, while the act of colouring it in black symbolised its emotional weight.

Despite these intense feelings, Arzu attempted self-reassurance, acknowledging that she would eventually adjust and that the discomfort would pass. Overall, the passage conveys a state in which cognitive, emotional and physical experiences intersect, producing a pervasive sense of stress, anxiety and overwhelm in her engagement with English, with an active coping strategy of reassuring the self. Arzu shared:

I am not someone who actively uses English. I graduated from an Anatolian High School, so I know, our foundation is solid but using it in daily life is something else. And right now, when I hear English, I feel this spreading sensation from the person to my back, like, “Oh my God, will I understand? What are they saying?” Also, the Irish accent adds to it – I feel this spreading sensation like, “Haha, okay, I understood,” you know? That’s why I felt it more in my back, even though it looks like it’s at the front. I also felt a kind of pain in my legs, maybe because it somehow reminded me of that. I coloured English in black because I did it intentionally; lately, it has been really challenging me (laughs). It really does something – it gives me a slight shiver. But I know I will get used to it, it will pass. I console myself with that. (Arzu, LP commentary)

In the individual interview, Arzu further elaborated on her struggle and cognitive strain, describing her efforts to focus on English. She particularly noted her difficulty in “catching things” or understanding unfamiliar words. These moments of being “stuck on words” suggest frustration, indicating that engaging with English required sustained mental effort and carried significant emotional weight. Arzu reflected:

I am someone who is only just beginning to concentrate on English. I have been in Dublin for a few months. [...] For example, I struggle to catch things in English. [...] [Likewise, as Senem narrated,] I had difficulties because I got stuck on words I didn’t know. (Arzu, individual interview)

Altogether, Arzu's emotional experience in English was marked by stress, worry and maybe anxiety, *taking her to a place when things were uncertain or too much*.

To sum up, English drawn in the upper body on the LPs mainly represented a *place when things were uncertain or too much* for the participants, with the anxiety, overwhelm, stress and worry it created. At times, it also represented freedom and liberation, with an expanded identity, potentially taking them *to a place when life was good*, with the empowerment, gratitude and relief freedom may imply.

6.4.1.4 English in the Limbs

English was placed in the limbs in two participants Language Portrait (LP): Ferit's and Jasmin's.

The first participant to be discussed in this section is Ferit, placing English on his torso and on his legs in his LP (Figure 6.16).



Figure 6.16. *Ferit's LP.*

Ferit's LP (Figure 6.16) colours the body areas from the toes up to the armpits in red. The upper chest, extending to the shoulders, is orange. The orange softens on the upper arms but intensifies again on the right hand, with a wide halo extending around it. On the raised left hand, light blue extends to the lower arm. The head is also light blue, with its halo spreading widely. An elliptical red shape, filled in, appears on the forehead. The background features a gradient of colours in the upper portion, transitioning from purple to blue, orange and then purple again, with some areas where the colours intertwine. Inside the right leg *Gürcüce* (Georgian) and outside the right arm *Fransızca* (French) are written, both diagonally upwards, with a black pen. *Türkçe* (Turkish) appears in red outside the left chest and lower left leg, both horizontally. Finally, *İngilizce* (English) is written diagonally upwards outside the left hand.

In his reflections, Ferit noted that, for him, English symbolised something that he did not like, “flying, air” and “something that [he] can't catch”, therefore, he placed English on his hand that was raised up, expanding to his head and its aura in his LP. Ferit shared his struggle in English as in the following:

So English is something [...] I don't like (all group laughing). [...] Something flying, air, atmosphere, I mean something... for me it's something that I can't catch.
(Ferit, LP commentary)

In the individual interviews, Ferit's struggles observed to create stress, anxiety and overwhelm, with the mental effort required to process and produce the additional language. There was a clear worry about expressing himself correctly and whether his intended meaning would be understood. This worry coexisted with stress, arising from the ongoing pressure to speak accurately, particularly in formal or professional contexts. The repeated cognitive effort and constant self-monitoring suggested a sense of overwhelm, as language use became demanding. Additionally, subtle hesitation and self-consciousness appeared, as Ferit carefully considered phrasing and expression. Using ‘anxiety’ and ‘stress’ explicitly, Ferit said:

Speaking in a language that is not my mother tongue requires a lot [of effort]. I mean, it requires processing, mental effort. It requires thinking a lot. Especially since I still don't feel comfortable in the language, I am currently working in a workplace where English is spoken. So, every sentence of mine... I prepare it in

advance... First, I think about it, sometimes... I hesitate whether I can express it well and so on. Therefore, it still requires extra processing for me; I haven't fully immersed myself in the language yet. [...] This extra aspect in English makes it a bit more challenging [...] The general feeling I experience in English at the moment is anxiety [...] I have been here about eight months now. I have Duygu's [participant Duygu is his partner] friends, opportunities to speak English with them and my English teacher is there as well. These all contribute to a sense that I need to speak correctly. Conversations continue under this kind of stress. (Ferit, individual interview)

With these experiences and reflections English took Ferit to *a place when things were uncertain and too much*.

The second and last participant to locate English in the limbs is Jasmin (Figure 6.17).

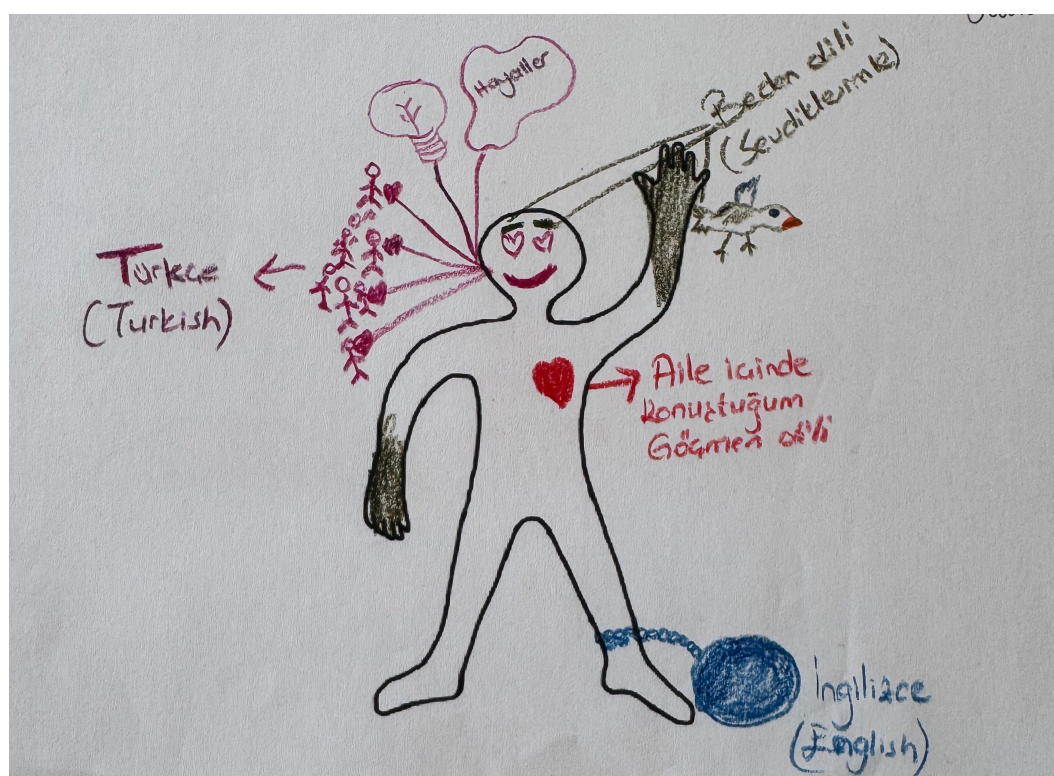


Figure 6.17. *Jasmin's LP.*

In Jasmin's LP (Figure 6.17), there is an intensely filled red heart on the left side of the chest. A red arrow points outward from the body, symbolising "the migrant language [she] speak[s] within the family" (Jasmin, LP commentary). Both hands are shaded in grey,

extending to the elbows. On the outside of the left hand, there is an outward-facing flying bird. Purple heart shapes replace the eyes and a U-curve represents the lips, with two thick downward lines in place of the eyebrows. From the eyes, two lines extend to the left hand, merging with another line drawn from the hand, leading to an upward diagonal with “body language” written above and ‘with my beloved ones’ in parentheses below. Where the right ear would be, there are six lines, the lower four ending in hearts and followed by stick figures. An outward arrow extends from the middle of these lines, pointing to *Türkçe* (Turkish). Above, a curvy line leads to a lightbulb and another line reaches a bubble containing the word ‘Dreams.’ Around the left ankle, a series of empty circles extend outward, connecting to a large, intensely filled dark blue circle. Next to it, on the left, is *İngilizce* (English), with the translation in parentheses below.

With this unique portrayal, as a weight anchoring her lower body, a symbolic ball and chain holding Jasmin from progressing, English was a deep overwhelm:

Well, here, of course, as I explained in the [LP] [...], English was a big hindrance [in verbatim translation foot-tie] for me. I thought we learned English in Türkiye. When we came here I realised we didn’t learn anything. (Jasmin, LP commentary)

The last part of her reflection, “we didn’t learn anything,” is an indicators that her expectations of having learnt the language in her own country were not met (Culatta & Clay-Warner, 2021).

As a result, English in the limbs corresponded to overwhelm, stress, anxiety and worry, taking the participants to *a place where thing were uncertain or too much*.

6.4.1.5 English Not Finding Place on the Language Portraits

Four participants of the study did not place English in their Language Portraits (LP): Murat, Dinç, Ece and Giray.

The first LP to be discussed in this section is Murat’s (Figure 6.18).

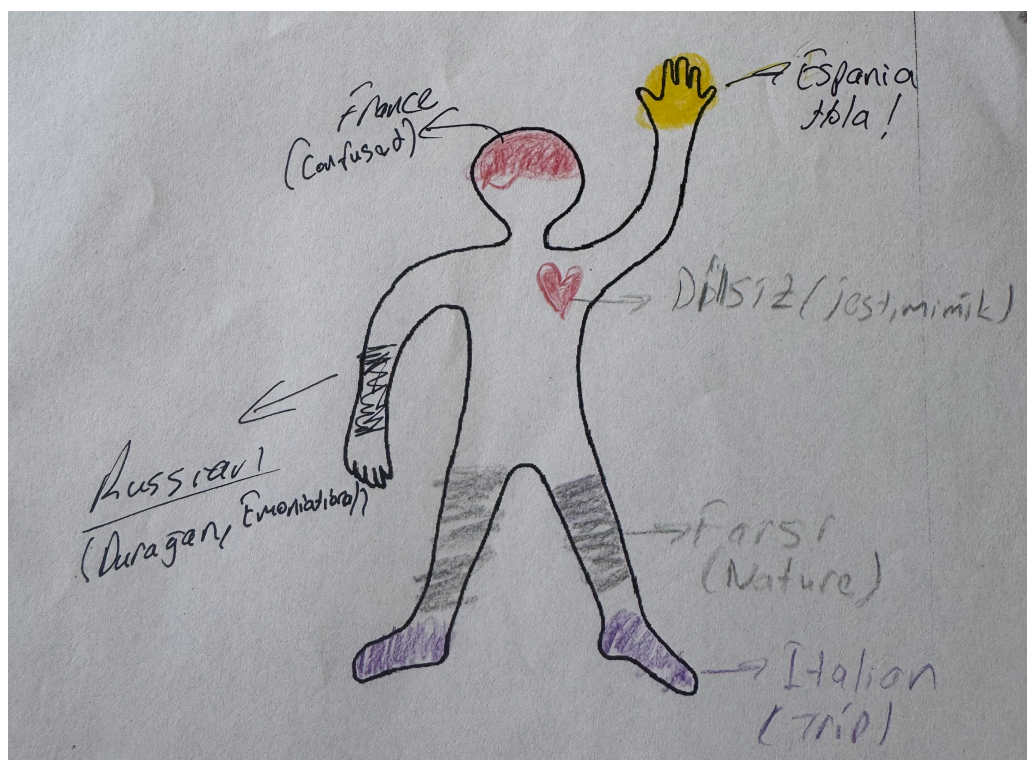


Figure 6.18. Murat's LP.

Murat's LP (Figure 6.18) features a red, filled-in heart-like shape on the chest. The head is also filled with red, extending from the top to halfway down, ending with an irregular, wavy line. The left hand is intensely yellow, with the colour extending slightly beyond the fingers. The right lower arm has scattered black lines. The legs are roughly coloured grey and the feet are purple. An arrow drawn to the right of the head points to 'France,' with 'Confused' in parentheses. On the right hand, an arrow indicates 'Espania' with 'Hola!' beneath it. Another arrow from the right hand points to 'Russian,' with underlines and 'Static, Emoniatioral' (sic, reads like 'emotional') in parentheses. These are written with a black pen. An arrow from the right leg points to 'Farsi,' with 'Nature' in parentheses beneath it, both in grey. Another grey arrow extends from the heart to *DİLSİZ* (means 'without language'), followed by *jest, mimic* (gestures, mimic). Finally, a purple arrow from the left foot points to 'Italian,' with 'Trip' in parentheses.

Murat's aversion to English hint at a deep apprehension rooted in discomfort, despite defining himself as C1+ user of English. To Murat, English was not more than the language

of technology and a “corrupted and not an elegant language”. Although using it in his work, in a technology company, Murat sounded emotionally detached from English:

I can say my English is C1+. [...] I think English is in the category of corrupt languages, but it still exists due to technology and similar topics. I don’t think it’s a very elegant language. (Murat, individual interview)

I interpreted this disconnectedness with English as a *search for strong connection* that could not have been found, informed by Brown (2021).

The second participant to be discussed in this section is Dinç (Figure 6.19).

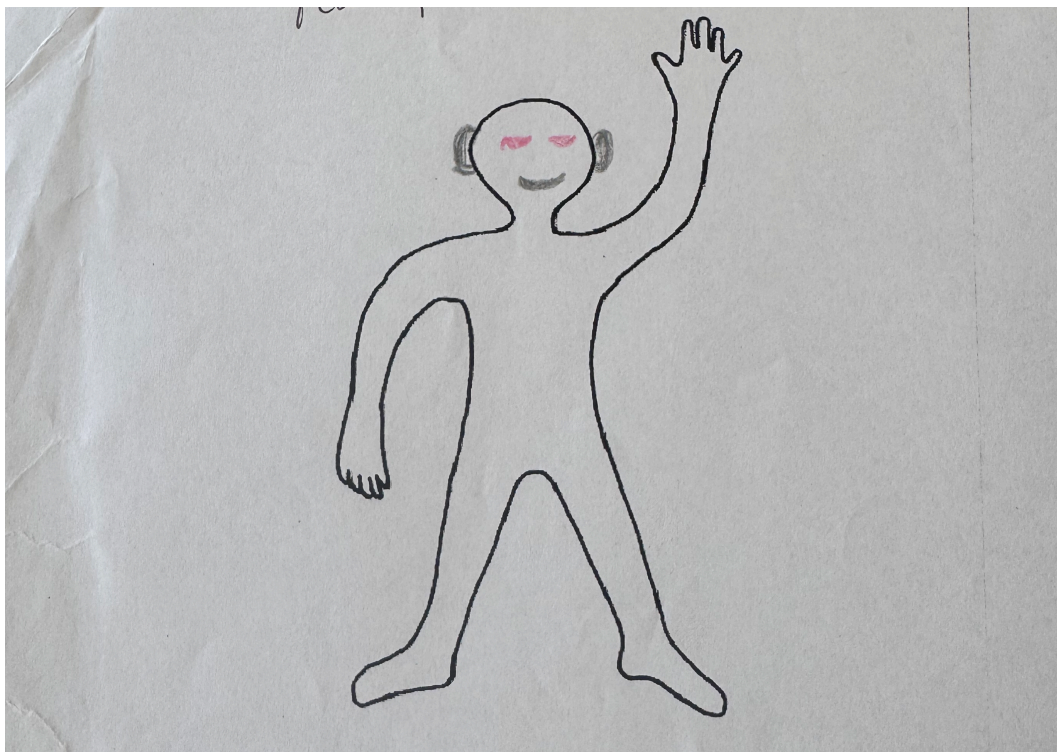


Figure 6.19. *Dinç’s LP.*

Dinç’s LP (Figure 6.19) is mostly blank, with a few elements in the head area: a curved line representing the lips, two red ellipses for the eyes and two grey circles around the ears. All these elements are solid. Using grey in the ears and red in the eyes, Dinç shared they meant the same, as he used red only to add a colour. Dinç, who holds a bachelor’s degree in English Language and Literature and his work experience as an English teacher, represented language learning as a general experience on his drawing, rather than depicting

English. His illustration of language learning aligns with Piazzoli's (2018) description of embodied pedagogy, which brings the body and mind of the learner together, essentially followed by a reflection on the experience, as he framed language learning as active engagement of the body and senses, recalling the way infants acquire language through observation and imitation. The focus on being fully attentive, using ears and eyes actively and physically doing the actions suggests an awareness of learning as a whole-body experience, rather than purely abstract or cognitive. Dinç reflected:

Here it is what language learning means for me, completely independent of English. So, the ears should be open, the eyes should be open as much as possible. It [sic] should be focused. As in [...] the infancy, since it has something to do with hearing, [...] seeing and doing it like that, doing it by imitating it... [...] It evokes something focused on hearing and seeing. (Dinç, LP commentary)

However, this embodiment can be considered as a hybrid one, as the actions Dinç described sounded like strategically tied to cognitive processing, to understand pronunciation or meaning by careful listening and finding clues in the movement of the lips. Hence, embodiment was serving cognition as well as perception, rather than being purely about bodily experience.

The third participant who chose to omit English from her LP is Ece (Figure 6.20).



Figure 6.20. *Ece's LP.*

In her LP (Figure 6.20), Ece drew an ellipse-like shape framed in orange in the centre of the head, with a filled-in yellow circle inside and purple, short, vertical lines extending from the top of the ellipse. Another solid orange ellipse-like shape is placed on the left side of the chest, with *ruh* (soul) written in orange above it. The left arm is coloured in orange, starting with a softer shade at the armpit and gradually becoming more intense towards the hand. A similar pattern is followed on the right arm, but in brown. On the torso, beneath the orange ellipse, there is a slightly diagonal brown colour block. The left leg is coloured purple, beginning with soft touches and gradually darkening towards the foot, where *iç ses* (inner voice) is written in purple. The right leg is filled with a soft brown, slightly darker on the heel, extending diagonally beyond the leg to the bottom of the paper and with a shorter halo inside the leg. Outside the left foot, near the bottom of the paper, *dış ses* (outer voice) is written. Three ellipses similar to the one on the left of the chest are positioned at the top right of the paper (left of the body) and four ellipses are scattered between the neck and knee on the left side of the paper.

Although Ece particularly thought about her use of English as the language of communication with her friends from South America, she did not place English in her Language Portrait (LP) (Figure 6.20). That experience led her to rely on her body for communication, particularly her eyes, so that the languages themselves seemed to lose their significance. Instead, the soul was present in her interactions, represented in her LP in both her heart and head (Figure 6.20), expanding outward during her communication. She also invoked the phrase “eyes are the mirror of the soul”, which is actually “eyes are the mirror of the heart” originating from an old popular Turkish song first performed by Atilla Yelken in 1982 and later covered by various artists, including new versions in the 2000s. The chorus continues:

The eyes are the mirror of the heart,
They do not know what a lie is.
Be they black, blue or green,
They never deny love (İlkan, n.d.).

In her reflections, Ece used the term *Arabesk* (verbatim translated as ‘Arabesque’), a music genre characterised by very sad, sometimes almost crying-like songs, after her quotation of the song. However, Arabesk is not merely a musical style; it also carries ideological significance. When Atatürk founded the modern Republic of Türkiye, he aimed to create a culture with its own traditions but closer to Western norms, including in music, promoting Turkish Art Music to potentially replace Turkish Folk Music and Arabesk (Markoff, 1990). With political shifts and changing leaderships over decades, the status of Arabesk has evolved, moving between political contexts, fluctuating in prevalence, yet continuing to reflect the social and political strata of the country (for a comprehensive analysis until 1997, see Özbek, 1997; also Poole, 2007). Although “[...] by the late 1980s, Arabesk had already lost its allure as a radical popular formation that used the materials of modernity to resist modernizing control from above” (Özbek, 1997, p. 13), it experienced renewed popularity in the 1990s (Taydaş & Sert, 2021), transforming through Western influences such as pop music (Özgür, 2006) and emerging as a representation of post-modernist tendencies (Poole, 2007) in its so-called ‘third wave’ (Küpçük, 2018, in Çağdaş & Sert, 2021). Despite these peaks, Arabesk has remained especially popular in rural areas and villages (Angı, 2013). Within these political and ideological contexts, for people who are not fond of the culture

it represents, Arabesk came to signify not only a musical genre but also a set of overly sentimental or emotionally charged expressions. In Ece's reflections, this cultural nuance was apparent: the song she referenced is technically Turkish Art Music, not Arabesk, yet for Ece, it carried the heavy and sentimental quality associated with Arabesk, connecting it to the roots she was not even appreciative of:

Actually, [...] inside us there is an inner voice and an outer voice... [...] During my language learning process, there was a group from South America, I had some interaction with them and the common language we all used was English. But sometimes, when our language was not enough to express things or to share emotions, in all those moments we used our eyes. Especially since we were wearing masks [because of COVID-19] at that time, the importance of the eyes... I realised that with our eyes we could explain things really clearly. So, actually, from that saying "the eyes are the mirror of the soul"... maybe it sounds a bit *Arabesk* (laughs) but even though we don't speak the same language, we don't share the same culture, I still had friends with whom I could make a strong connection through the eyes. That's why I started to question whether language as expression, is really that important in life. It seemed to me that feeling more and being able to give that feeling to the other person is what's important. That's why I came up with this kind of thing. These things, like the soul, reflect in our eyes. Sometimes we just raise our hand [...] [not clear] and say hi. It's like a greeting that comes from our soul. But there are inner voices, outer voices... maybe they take over our soul. They can be cultural, social or familial. In this process, they become a bond that stops us from raising our hand, like a chain tying us down. (Ece, LP commentary)

Ece also conveyed an appreciation of the artist's use of English, describing it as comprehensive, like a cloak. Yet, this appreciation was not directed towards the use of English in general, but specifically towards "our stories" being told in English:

So I think [English] will probably be in a cape. [It] was a more inclusive approach. Telling our stories in English. For reasons like this. (Ece, LP commentary)

From these reflections, I interpreted that English was not initially a language Ece felt connected to. Over time, however, it became a medium through which she could reconnect with her Turkish roots – both through the use of body language and eyes as a means of conveying what is in the soul when struggling to express herself in English and as a tool to link Turkish culture to the wider world. In this way, even in the absence of it her the LP, English took Ece *to a place when searching for connection* (Brown, 2021).

Finally, the fifth participant who did not represent English on their picture is Giray (Figure 6.21).

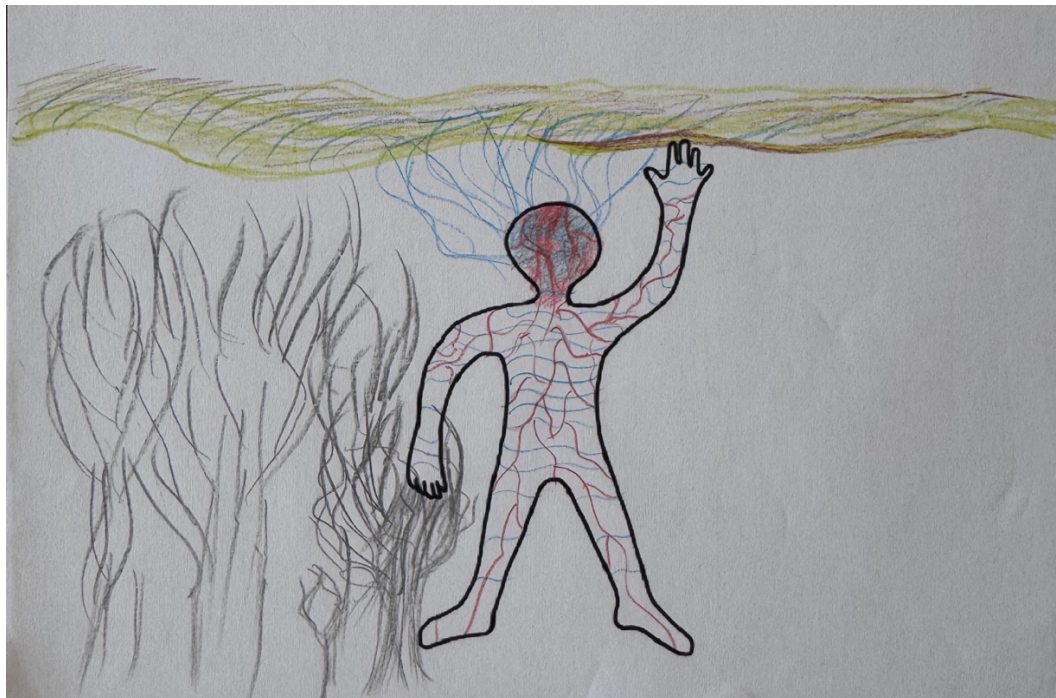


Figure 6.21. *Giray's LP.*

Giray's LP (Figure 6.21) is covered with intertwined red and blue lines running through the body. These lines become particularly intense on the head, which is entirely filled with red and blue. The left hand extends upward towards a wavy line filled with light green, brown and dark blue, stretching from the left side of the paper to the right. Irregular dark blue lines emanate from the head, reaching towards the wavy line. The left side of the paper is filled with these irregular lines, varying in intensity from strong to faint.

Giray's inadvertent omission of English in his LP, as he realised he had not placed English in his LP during the Focus Group discussion, revealed a subconscious shift. Although using English at home with his Italian wife and their child, as well as at work – as an academic – he did not think of English when creating his LP:

I am an academic. We just got here. We were living in America. My wife wanted to live in Europe. Somehow, we came here. [...] I realised I never thought about English when I drew this. English was never on my mind. (Giray, LP commentary)

After elaborating on the other languages he put in his LP, Giray went back to English and made more meaning in the absence of English in his LP:

But now I realise that since [English] is an academic language for me, I see it not as a source of communication, but rather as a source of information, reading and prose. For example, what you [the other participants] said was very interesting to me. [Language as] communicating, existing in society, so on. (Giray, LP commentary)

With this reflection, Giray revealed his emotional disconnection with English, although using it extensively both at work and in his immediate family, which is *a place when searching for connection* (Brown, 2021).

6.4.1.6 Overview of 'Places We Go' on Language Portraits

The data interpretation revealed that Senem's use of English created a place for participants where emotions like stress, overwhelm, anxiety, worry, avoidance, excitement and fear were prevalent, therefore *a place where things are unclear and too much* (Brown, 2021). Another highly observed emotion, vulnerability, was indirectly and extensively evident in every reflection that conveyed anxiety, fear, stress, perceived incompetence or the potential failure to understand. As they were exposed to English – the source of these emotions – participants became open to experiencing cognitive or emotional consequences that were often negative. The only emotion not evident in the data set from Brown's (2021) *place we go when things are unclear and too much* was 'dread'. Moreover, English also created *a place we go when life is good*, with the observed emotions joy, calm, gratitude, relief and tranquillity; and *a place we go when we search connection*, either in the form of experiencing connectedness or disconnectedness (Brown, 2021).

As *The Fertile Crescent* began, the artist's use of English, even in a simplified form, immediately confronted participants with their own insecurities and vulnerabilities. This initial reaction, in my interpretation, was akin to being barefoot on uncomfortable ground – exposed and unprotected. Despite their discomfort, participants had no choice but to

proceed, understand and reach the end of the performance. Their journey was not just about standing still, but actively moving forward while grappling with their vulnerabilities which, to me, is akin to walking barefoot on harsh terrain. Participants described English as ‘dark and difficult’, reflecting the cognitive, emotional and physical struggles they faced but also as a necessary element of their experience, akin to water; essential yet biting and uncomfortable. Thus, the use of English by the artist created a paradoxical experience for the participants: it was both painful and vital, as captured in the metaphor for Theme 1, *Barefoot in the biting yet reviving waters*. In line with this depiction, the artist’s translanguaging into Turkish resembled resting one’s feet on a small, grassy island – soft, warm, familiar and offering a brief respite, like home, during a challenging barefoot journey, leading to Theme 2: *Finding home in the world of known*, which is discussed in the next section.

6.4.2 Theme 2: Finding Home in the World of Known

My interpretation of the participants’ Language Portraits (LPs), particularly in relation to their responses to the translanguaging into Turkish within a primarily English narration, revealed that those moments took them to *a place we go when life is good*, mainly with relief but also with joy, happiness, calm, contentment and tranquillity observed in their reflections (Brown, 2021). Most of the time that place was *home*, sometimes uttered explicitly – in Somerville’s (1997) conceptualisation as a place that creates feelings of safety, belonging, emotional attachment and identity. Furthermore, home has been associated with warmth, comfort and bright life (Daniels, 2015), even embodied as such in many paintings (Pallasmaa, 1994). Therefore, I constructed the theme as *Finding home in the world of the known*, while groups of emotions in Brown’s (2021) framework became the main categories.

Feeling home can also be related to nostalgia and belonging. Brown (2021) lists nostalgia under a place *we go when the things aren’t what they seem*. Nostalgia is a ‘bittersweet’ emotion, such as experiencing sadness and happiness together (Brown, 2021) and nostalgic ideas can be specifically related to feelings of comfort and safety (Coontz, 2016). However, as the participants of this study did not mention ‘bittersweet’ emotions associated with the

Turkish use of Senem, I could not observe nostalgia in the data. Similarly, Brown (2021) tackles belonging under *search for connection*, however the participants of this study were not observed to try to make connection. Instead, they were naturally connected as a result of “a sense of getting away, a feeling of immersion, holding attention without effort and compatibility with [their] preferences”, which refers to *tranquillity* of good life (Brown, 2021, p. 319).

The sense of comfort, without holding attention, the participants expressed was not sustained, as the artist did not remain solely in Turkish but continued to shift fluidly between English and Turkish, as well as other theatrical modes, keeping the experience dynamic and unpredictable. As a result, the feeling of being *in a place when life is good* with Senem’s Turkish use was temporary. On the other hand, the main path to *a place where life is good* was the ability to understand effortlessly, which brought not only comfort but also a range of other emotions tied to this ease of communication. Given this, rather than representing this theme merely as *home* – which would imply that the first language alone brought the participants home – I use the metaphor *Finding home in the world of the known* to articulate the wide range of emotions the participants experienced. This highlights, rather than overlooks, the cognitive dimension of the emotions evoked by Senem’s use of Turkish. Additionally, similar feelings were experienced when English parts of the narration were understood effortlessly, as well as when Senem sang a song in an unknown language, showing that the sense of *home* was not limited to the first language alone. Ultimately, each time the participants could follow the narration with ease, they found comfort, in Turkish’s case, they found home in the comfort of the known. This metaphor is also reflected in the visual I created to present these themes through a visual (Figure 10.4), where Turkish appears as a grassy island in the river, surrounded by the biting yet reviving waters of English, offering a moment of relief during the arduous journey.

Among the 18 participants who placed Turkish on their LPs, nine participants (Filiz, Funda, Selim, Bahar, Derya, Enes, Defne, Arzu and Ahu) positioned it around their torso, particularly near the heart and chest. This placement primarily symbolised a deep emotional

connection and the comfort associated with the familiar, as revealed in their reflections. Additionally, Jasmin, Müge, Serap and Duygu placed Turkish on their head area, symbolising versatile emotions. Similar to the representations in the torso, deep emotional connections were evident in four LPs – Duru’s, Ferit’s, Aylin’s and Giray’s – where Turkish was depicted across the entire body. Damla, on the other hand, placed Turkish on her hands and feet, reflecting the strength. Finally, three participants, Murat, Ece and Dinç, did not include Turkish in their LPs; Murat due to her utmost strong identity, Ece and Giray having different focus in their artifacts.

In the subsequent sections, I share participants’ LPs and reflections, starting with the most widely used representation: the torso. Then, I move on to the head area and whole body, respectively. Next, I present the meanings associated with the place of Turkish on the feet and hands. Finally, I discuss the LPs that do not include any representation of Turkish.

6.4.2.1 Turkish in Torso, Sometimes Extended to Other Parts

Nine participants positioned Turkish around their torso: Filiz, Funda, Selim, Bahar, Derya, Enes, Defne, Arzu and Ahu.

Filiz is the first participant to be discussed in this section. Her approach to Turkish on her Language Portrait (LP, Figure 6.13), symbolising the language by an ellipse under the chest and colouring red, was steeped in cultural and emotional significance. This was related to general use of Turkish, not specifically Senem’s, although she “felt as if it was in [her] throat, [...], somewhere close to [her] mouth” during the theatre. Her choice of red and the word *can ve kan* (life and blood), underscores the deep connection she feels to her language, culture and identity. In Turkish, *can* is a word rich with meaning, representing the essence of life, spirit and the profound bonds between people. When the suffix *-lı* is added, *can* becomes *canlı* meaning ‘with life’ or ‘alive’ This linguistic transformation highlights the vitality and presence of life. Similarly, the addition of the suffix *-ım* turns *can* into *canım*, meaning ‘my life’ or ‘my spirit.’ This term is often used affectionately to address loved ones, conveying a deep personal connection, although it is sometimes used casually as well. The phrase *canımsın canımsın* further deepens this bond, combining *can* (life) with *kan*

(blood) to express an intense connection, as if to say, ‘You are my life and blood.’ In the light of this cultural meanings, Filiz revealed the meaning of Turkish for her in the following reflections:

I started with Turkish, because I can feel Turkish in the middle of my body, [...] it is somewhere under my chest. [...] It represents life and blood, red. The colour red is also on our flag. (Filiz, LP commentary)

As observed in her reflections, red in Filiz’s LP is symbolic on multiple levels. It represents life and blood, essential elements of existence along with the term cultural connotations, but it also carries a profound national significance. The red in the Turkish flag symbolises the blood shed by soldiers during the Turkish War of Independence, with the crescent and star reflecting in the blood, signifying the enormity of the sacrifice, as also discussed in Section 5.2.3.5. By using red in her LP, Filiz also connects her personal identity with the collective memory and pride of her nation, much like how one’s home is not just a physical space but a repository of shared memories and values, as she used ‘life and blood,’ immediately followed by linked in to Turkish flag.

Although Filiz, with her confidence and extensive experience, was the only participant who spoke of English exclusively in positive terms, particularly highlighting its pragmatic use in multilingual and multicultural environments (discussed in detail in Section 6.4.1.3), her reflections also revealed a deep emotional connection to Turkish. It shows that identity is not about choosing one side over another, but about creating a sense of contentment in different trajectories of life. This is akin to valuing versatile resources in translanguaging theory. However, this does not mean that every exposure to Turkish created strong emotions or a heightened sense of identity for Filiz. In fact, the artist’s use of Turkish did not evoke deep emotions for her, as she did not consciously register the translanguaging into Turkish – which instead highlights her deep engagement in both English and the performance as a whole:

Well, for me, the transition to Turkish was very smooth [used in English], so it wasn’t as if it had switched to a different language. It’s so smooth [used in English], like that for me. (Filiz, LP commentary)

Filiz's reflections revealed how Turkish is felt deep within her, a central part of her being, much like how home resides not just in a location but in the core of one's identity. In contrast, English, while respected and used effectively in multilingual contexts, did not evoke the same profound sense of belonging and emotional depth for Filiz. For her, Turkish was not just a language but a symbol of home, where language, culture and history converge to shape her sense of self.

The second participant who located Turkish in her torso is in her LP is Funda (Figure 6.7). Funda represented Turkish in two distinct ways: in red at her torso, emphasising her heart and in light green in her hands. The use of red at her heart symbolised a deep and multifaceted connection to the language, rooted in sensory, emotional and cognitive engagements that speak to her identity and sense of home. She explained that she naturally thought in Turkish when engaging her senses, particularly olfactory, visual and gustatory experiences, making cultural connections that were deeply personal and familiar. She described:

From the abdomen up [...] it's directly in Turkish. Because when I sense a smell and when I see something, I think in Turkish. [...] I can't help it. Whenever I feel or express something [in English], I still think in Turkish. When I look at my tummy, directly food comes to my mind [chuckling]. When we speak about food, I directly think Turkish, I think about Turkish food (chuckling). (Funda, LP commentary)

Funda's sensory connection to Turkish was particularly evident when discussing her feelings. She noted that emotions were more powerfully conveyed and received in her first language, showing her immersion and tranquillity, stating:

We can convey and receive the emotion more in our own language. (Funda, LP commentary)

This deep emotional resonance was further reinforced when she spoke of engaging with the Turkish use of an artist. When the artist used Turkish, Funda felt an immediate shift, feeling warmer and more connected:

Of course, the moment she turned to Turkish, [...] you say 'she speaks my language' and that's it! You become more careful. It feels warmer. You give yourself more. (Funda, LP commentary)

The ‘warmth’ Funda described not only highlighted her emotional engagement but also her cognitive involvement. She became more attentive and invested when interacting in Turkish, underscoring the profound impact the language had on her overall experience. She acknowledged that English sometimes felt inadequate for conveying certain emotions, reaffirming the special place Turkish held in her heart.

Funda’s decision to represent Turkish in light green on her hands was shaped by two factors: the frequent use of hand gestures in Turkish communication and the perceived warmth of the language, which she likened to the warmth of a familiar home. The significance of the ‘known’ surfaced once again when she reflected that Spanish felt similar to Turkish because speakers of both languages often used their hands while communicating. Although Funda does not speak Spanish, these shared ‘knowns’ seemed to blur the boundaries between the languages she spoke and those she did not, weaving them together through embodied familiarity. Furthermore, his representation of Turkish in her hands reflected not only the physical expressiveness of the language but also the cultural warmth she associated with it. She noted:

I said both Turkish and Spanish are on my arms [...] I think both languages are very warm languages. I think we use our hands a lot when speaking Turkish in the same way [with Spanish people]. (Funda, LP commentary)

Funda’s observation underscores the idea that bilingual speakers often carry not only linguistic resources but also culturally shaped communicative behaviours, which become intertwined with their embodied self-expression.

The third participant who chose to locate Turkish in the torso in his LP (Figure 6.11) is Selim. He embodied Turkish in torso with red, representing Turkish flag. He initially placed the language at the heart but later decided it belonged in the most important area, emphasising that it was not just an organ-specific connection but something that permeated his whole identity:

[...] first I drew was on the heart, but I expanded after that. I painted the most important area with red [the torso], reminiscent of the Turkish flag. (Selim, LP commentary)

Selim further elaborated on his emotions stimulated by the Turkish use in the performance, showing his immersion in feelings without effort, therefore his tranquillity:

But in general, it is probably the Turkish parts that catch us and since it is our mother tongue, we can feel those emotions deeper. (Selim, LP commentary)

Bringing these two reflections together, Selim's idea that Turkish occupies the "most important area" could symbolise how central his language culture and by extension, his sense of home are to his identity. His acknowledgment that the Turkish parts of the performance caught his attention more and allowed him to feel emotions better further reinforces this connection to home – suggesting that Turkish is the language in which he feels most at ease and emotionally connected, much like one feels in a familiar, comforting environment.

Bahar, the fourth participant discussed in this section, focused on how she could place the languages in her LP (Figure 6.12) in the 'compartments' in her body, starting from the central. As she experienced Turkish as bright, with intense emotion, echoing tranquillity, she placed it at the centre, in the whole torso, using the colour yellow. Her reflections also highlighted translanguaging, rather than monolingual use of Turkish:

When she turned to Turkish [...] I really started to feel it more. I felt like there was such an intense emphasis. I thought very simply, how can I divide the languages I know into compartments in my body. I thought that Turkish would always appear as a bright colour in the central. So, I painted it yellow. (Bahar, LP commentary)

Bahar's reflection highlights the deeply embodied and affective nature of her relationship with Turkish. She perceives the language as occupying a central, vivid space within her body, suggesting both emotional intensity and a clear personal mapping of linguistic identity through colour and spatial symbolism.

Derya, the fifth participant discussed here, also positioned Turkish at the chest in her LP (Figure 6.4), symbolising it with the crescent and star of the Turkish flag. This choice clearly demonstrates her deep connection to her cultural identity. The Turkish flag, a powerful symbol of national pride, represents more than just language for Derya: it

embodies her roots, values and potentially the core of who she is. Derya employed the metaphor of “end of the camp” to convey her emotional response to the artist’s use of Turkish. “Camp” is a term commonly used in Turkish to describe a period of laborious and intensive work. For instance, when preparing for final exams one might say, ‘I am in a camp,’ implying a focused period of intense study with little to no distractions. Derya’s metaphor highlights the end of her rigorous efforts to understand English, at least for a while, when the artist used Turkish. These feelings were similar to the ones that could be felt at home, but she also explicitly used “home” in her reflections, underscoring her emotional connections:

Having Turkish sentences made me feel at ease, like I’m at the end of the camp. [...] it relaxes me because it makes me feel like I’m home. [...] Turkish, of course, is the thing that I feel most comfortable with, thing that I feel the utmost from the heart, so I put it directly on the chest [in Turkish flag]. (Derya, LP commentary)

However, instead of the traditional red in the flag, Derya chose light green to represent Turkish and Turkish flag, as it evoked a sense of renewal, refreshment and comfort for her:

It’s [light] green because it is refreshing, it provided relief. (Derya, LP commentary)

The choice of light green suggests that while her identity is firmly rooted in her Turkish heritage, it also brings her a sense of rejuvenation and peace, qualities she finds vital to her well-being. In this way, Derya’s depiction of Turkish is not only a testament to her cultural identity but also an expression of how this identity brings her comfort and a sense of home. This metaphor signifies a moment of respite, where she could let go of the mental exertion required to understand English and fully immerse herself in the familiarity of her native tongue.

The sixth participant discussed here, Enes, placed Turkish at his heart, represented in red in his LP (Figure 6.1). He shared that it was the language in which he felt most comfortable, despite being an experienced English user and an technology professional in Ireland. He used the word “mould” to describe Turkish’s place in his heart, reflecting his sense of ease and feeling natural, reinforcing the idea that Turkish is a core part of his identity. His reflections indicated his tranquillity:

[...] I used red and placed Turkish into a mould. Because it is the language in which I feel most natural. (Enes, LP commentary)

Enes also found the Turkish parts of the narration to be more sincere, requiring less thought and described them as warm and comforting, bringing his identity to the stage as it made him feel more like himself. Enes reflected:

For me, the transitions [to Turkish]... created more warmth. [...] felt more sincere, something that required less thought, something more me. (Enes, LP commentary)

Enes also drew an arrow from his heart to his brain. Based on his reflections, this arrow likely represents the connection between his emotional and cognitive comfort when using Turkish. It can imply that his emotional engagement with Turkish flows naturally into his cognitive functions, enhancing his comfort and ease with the language, providing tranquillity. Within this lens, by describing Turkish as a ‘mould’, Enes emphasises how the language forms the foundation of his identity, much like a home that allows one to be their genuine self, free from worries.

Defne, the seventh participant discussed in this section, also placed Turkish in her heart in her LP (Figure 6.3), symbolised by the colour red, explaining simply:

Heart Turkish. It means emotions and feelings. That’s why I made it red. (Defne, LP commentary)

As a less experienced user of English and had reviewed the myth’s summary before the theatre to better familiarise herself, Defne expressed her better engagement during the Turkish parts, along with feeling better and nurtured:

The parts that drew me into the story were the Turkish segments. I can’t deny this. After all, for me, listening to something in your mother tongue feels much better and much nurturing. (Defne, LP commentary)

Defne’s experience illustrates how the first language took her to the comfort of home, nurturing her and making her feel better. This depiction resonated with contentment, experienced as completeness, appreciation and satisfaction (Brown, 2021).

Arzu, the eighth participant to position Turkish in the chest, precisely in her heart, along with her brain and hands, using light green (Figure 6.15). Turkish in the heart was due to the narration's emotional influence, in the brain it was due to being able to fully understand and in the hands it was due to the warmth of the language she felt in her hands. The colour light green was chosen due to this warmth, along with the enlightenment she experienced when she was exposed to Turkish in the theatre. When Arzu was reflecting on those moments, she highlighted the translanguaging of the artist, rather than focusing on Turkish alone. She shared:

I experienced a different kind of enlightenment in the parts Turkish was spoken between the English. I mean... Like... It felt really nice, [...]. That's why I marked the head for Turkish, as I could perceive it more fully with my entire brain and I marked the heart because it affected me deeply, from the heart. And I painted my hands because I felt a warmth in them. (Arzu, LP commentary)

By marking the head for Turkish, she suggests that the language engages her cognitive processes fully, indicating a cognitive alignment with her first language. The heart symbolises the profound emotional impact Turkish has on her, while the painted hands signify a tangible warmth and comfort she feels, likely tied to the emotional and cultural familiarity of Turkish. This multidimensional response draws on the metaphor of home, with its familiarity, ease and warmth. Her ease in understanding and feeling of immersion implied her tranquillity, while her appreciation and satisfaction implied her contentment.

Finally, Ahu, the ninth participant to be discussed in this section, placed Turkish in her chest, both in half of her heart and half of her brain in her LP (Figure 6.6) in pink, while the other halves were English. Although she did not comment much on Turkish in the heart, Ahu's mere words "At the heart, of course there is Turkish" showcased her emotional connection with the language, hence identity. However, Turkish in the brain echoed her struggle with finding certain words in Turkish and feeling as though she was "losing" it. She said:

Sometimes I think, 'What was that word in Turkish I'm trying to remember?' I wonder how I could have lost it so quickly [...]. I try to read and watch things in Turkish to help. That's why I divided my heart into two parts: one side is English and the other side is Turkish, just like my mind. (Ahu, LP commentary)

Ahu's struggle with finding certain words in Turkish reveals an underlying concern about her connection to her first language, suggesting that this struggle is not just linguistic but also tied to her sense of identity (Sevinç & Backus, 2017). Her effort to 'not lose' Turkish underscores a deep emotional connection to the language, which she fears might diminish over time. This connection is more than just practical; it's a part of who she is. The act of reading and watching things in Turkish is a way for her to maintain this connection, preserving a key element of her identity. By dividing her heart and mind between Turkish and English, Ahu acknowledges the influence of both languages on her life, but her reflections suggest that Turkish holds a special place, representing a core aspect of her identity, her home, that she is determined to preserve.

6.4.2.2 Turkish in the Head Area, Sometimes Extended to Other Parts

Four participants, Jasmin, Müge, Serap and Duygu, represented Turkish as being in their ears, occasionally extending these depictions to other parts of their Language Portraits (LP).

The first LP to be discussed in this section is Jasmin's (Figure 6.17) Jasmin had a unique relationship with Turkish, as it she comes from an immigrant family – they immigrated to Türkiye when she was three years old. She is an early bilingual, learning Turkish alongside another migrant language, a language she did not specify, but shared that they spoke it in the family. She placed that migrant language on her heart, in red, representing the good feelings, relaxation and smoothness, hence tranquillity, as they spoke it in the family. She noted:

Within our family, we speak a migrant language [...] During conversations with my parents, I feel very comfortable and relaxed and it's a language that flows very smoothly for me. (Jasmin, LP commentary)

In her reflections, the migrant language presented home-like comfort for Jasmin, although Turkish was the language she spoke with her Turkish husband and children. Representing its pragmatic use, Jasmin placed Turkish in her head area, with an emphasis on the eyes and mouth. In the eyes, she put Turkish in a heart-shape. Although Turkish was not in her heart in this depiction, she reflected Turkish was in her heart, too. Jasmin shared:

Turkish is the language I both speak and [not clear in the recording]. It's the language I use with my spouse and children. It's the language that I can express my dreams and [the language] that I can have ideas. I am proud to use it. Everywhere, all the time. It's a language through which I can communicate with many people. I try to use it as correctly as possible. (Jasmin, LP commentary)

In these reflections, Turkish sounded like her language for communication, *lingua franca*, as Jasmin focused on the communication aspect of the language, rather than emotions it brought. Furthermore, the reflection "I can have ideas" can be an evidence for the strength and liberation that an additional language can bring, like English brings, as discussed in the subsections of Section 6.4.1.

Müge, the second participant to be discussed in this section, placed Turkish in her ears and throat in her LP (Figure 6.10), using blue. Both places she chose reflected sentiments of struggle, accompanied by worries in the throat like a stone, mainly about her Turkish diminishing. In Turkish, we use the idioms 'something gripping the throat' and 'to feel like a fist is gripping the throat' interchangeably to describe a situation that upsets and troubles someone. It suggests that a deep emotional burden, triggered by distress, causes the person to feel as though it is stuck in their throat, preventing any sense of ease. Again in Turkish, we use the idiom 'to perk up ears' to very carefully listen to something in the state of being alert, indicating stress. Turkish in her ears seemed to make her ears grow larger, as if attuned to the unexpected sound of the language. Her initial reaction to overhearing Turkish was to focus intently on the conversation, followed by the mental effort of translating the words from Turkish into English. Müge described her emotional experience in Turkish as:

Well, since I live here, every time I hear Turkish, I feel like my ears really perk up. You know how it is when you become alert, [...] start paying attention to it. [...] when I think about Turkish, it feels like there's a sort of processing and translating happening in my mind. Also, my Turkish used to be very good, [...] and was very proud of it. But as I've been living here for the past seven years, I feel like [...] my Turkish is drawing back. This upsets me beyond description [...] and something sits here [in the throat]. (Müge, LP commentary)

Müge's connection to Turkish seemed like to be deeply tied to her sense of home and identity. The diminishing use of Turkish can represent not just a linguistic struggle, but a profound sense of losing a part of herself that is intimately linked to her cultural roots. The emotional and physical responses she described – her ears perking up and the sensation of

something heavy in her throat – highlighted the tension between her adopted environment and her first language, underscoring how critical language is to maintain a connection to one's sense of home and self.

Serap is the third participant who depicted Turkish in the head area in her LP (Figure 6.9), specifically on her ears, reflecting its less prominent role in the predominantly English narration. She described her experience with Turkish as emotionally shallow, emphasising that she only heard what was necessary, using the colour grey to symbolise a lack of emotional depth. She further associated this with the absence of “things” to visualise in her mind:

The reason Turkish is grey is that it didn't have much of an impact on me [...] Since the Turkish part was less present and there wasn't much to visualise in my mind, I drew it more on the ears. [...] It was just about hearing what I needed to hear and then it was over. (Serap, LP commentary)

Despite using rich descriptions in her Turkish narration, Serap's explanations reveal an area worth exploring further. As Serap reflected further, it became evident that her understanding of Turkish was linked to its ease and effortless comprehension compared to English. She profoundly contrasted this with the difficulties she experienced in English, highlighting how Turkish, in her experience, required less cognitive effort, bringing tranquillity:

You don't have to make any special effort, like wondering what you'll understand. [...] In Turkish, I can fully focus; there isn't someone else speaking in the back [of the mind]. But it's different in English. (Serap, LP commentary)

This comparison underscores a deeper cognitive struggle where neither language fully engages her emotionally. The limited presence of Turkish in the narration meant it was insufficient to alleviate Serap's cognitive strain, leaving no space for emotional connection:

Turkish there was not enough to silence my brain. (Serap, LP commentary)

However, Serap was not emotionally disconnected from Turkish in general. On the contrary, her reflections in the individual interview echoed a strong identity, identified with peace and warmth, in the colour green:

I would have placed Turkish in my full body if I think it in general [not specifically related to performance]. [...] Maybe in green. [...] peaceful, something warm.
(Serap, individual interview)

Serap's depiction of Turkish in her ears, marked in grey, reflects its diminished role in her English-dominated environment. This choice symbolises a lack of emotional depth and the ease with which she comprehends Turkish, which paradoxically leads to a sense of disconnection. Despite this, her broader reflections reveal that Turkish remains central to her identity, associated with peace and warmth, symbolised by the colour green. This contrast highlights a complex relationship where her first language which, though significant, struggles to fully engage her emotionally amidst the cognitive demands of an English-speaking world, taking away the otherwise peaceful and warm home.

Duygu is the final participant to be discussed in this section, placing Turkish in the whole head and further expanding it around the head, in blue, in her LP (Figure 6.14). Duygu, expressed both cognitive and emotional experience. The cognitive experience was in her attempts to focus more, while emotional experience was in feeling more. Her tranquillity was evident in her reflections, as she was immersed in the story without any efforts. Experiencing Turkish as something like “a smoke or breeze” and giving her attention, she explained:

In this picture, I depicted Turkish around the head area as something like smoke or a breeze because it felt like something that enveloped my face. It is a language that I can focus on and feel more around my head area due to it being my first language.
(Duygu, LP commentary)

The metaphor of smoke or a breeze which gently envelops and touches her face, may symbolise a comfort, gentleness and familiarity with Turkish, her home, which is central to her self-perception and cultural identity. This portrayal underscores how Turkish is not just a means of communication for Duygu, but a core component of her personal and cultural identity.

6.4.2.3 *Turkish in the Whole Body*

Four participants, Duru, Ferit, Aylin and Giray, placed Turkish in their whole body on their Language Portrait (LPs), not leaving a space for interpretation, instead explicitly sharing their strong emotional connection to Turkish and their identity in their reflections.

To begin with, Duru represented Turkish in red in her LP (Figure 6.2), symbolising life and blood, as she shared a deep connection with Turkish. It indicated that her sense of self is deeply intertwined with the language, influencing how she perceives and relates to the world, reinforcing its fundamental role in shaping identity, as discussed in the following chapter. Her description of Turkish as being presented “from the tip of my finger to my feet” underscored the pervasiveness of the language in her life. This imagery suggests that Turkish is embedded in every aspect of her being. Duru also expressed her concerns, therefore stress, about her Turkish declining, which upset her. This feeling of loss or deterioration highlights the emotional significance of maintaining linguistic heritage. It reflects a fear of losing a vital part of her identity and a source of personal and cultural connection. Duru stated:

Turkish is red. Red is not my favourite colour, but it's the colour of life, I mean blood. [...] Now... my personality, character, emotions, everything that makes me who I am, my childhood, my youth... All of these have shaped themselves along with Turkish, so when I hear Turkish, it feels like it's everywhere within me, from the tip of my finger to my feet [...]. Sometimes I feel like my Turkish [...] is going down, which upsets me. (Duru, LP commentary)

The second participant in this section, Ferit, not only experienced Turkish with his full body but also associated it with his roots and ancestors, revealing a strong identity. He used the colour red to illustrate Turkish in his LP (Figure 6.16) yet did not share a reason. By stating that Turkish “reaches all the way to my core,” he emphasised how deeply embedded the language is in his personal and cultural domains of self. Furthermore, Ferit's effort to “use the language well” reflected his commitment to maintaining this core aspect of his identity, despite any challenges he might face. He also showcased a sense of completeness and immersion in his linguistic and cultural heritage as he was “wrapped” by Turkish. The experienced completeness reflected contentment, while effortless immersion reflected tranquillity. Ferit shared:

Our rooted generations are in Turkish. Turkish reaches all the way to my core. [...] Everything is in Turkish – my brain is in Turkish, my emotions are like this, too. I try to use the language well and so on. Essentially, I am wrapped in Turkish. (Ferit, LP commentary)

The third participant to be discussed here, Aylin, felt Turkish in all her body in the colour orange, but except the head, as she depicted in her LP (Figure 6.8). The artist's use of Turkish connected her to the story, making her feel as though she had found a missing piece of a puzzle. Turkish thus became a bridge, enabling her to understand and integrate within challenging English contexts. It provided a sense of belonging and clarity, fostering tranquillity through ease and immersion. In making her feel the final piece of a puzzle, Turkish brought a sense of community of which she was an important member, revealing a deep contentment. Aylin showcased these in the following reflection:

[...] while I was trying to pull myself together and focus, [...] Turkish *Love Song* came into play, that was the first Turkish word, if I remember correctly. After that, I suddenly adapted to the environment without knowing how. I immediately started to focus on the story. Because in a period when I struggled with focus, knowing Turkish instantly connected me to the environment. It was as if I was a missing piece of the puzzle that immediately fit into the story. (Aylin, LP commentary)

The *Love Song* was performed in the fourth minute of the artist's performance, yet it was not the first instance of Turkish being used. The artist began using Turkish at the one-second mark of the performance and there were two additional instances of Turkish before the song. This discrepancy between Aylin's perception and the actual timeline can be understood through two key factors. First, Aylin had limited experience with English and perceived her proficiency as low, as she admitted in her comment, "my English is poor." This limited proficiency likely led to a focus on understanding the English parts of the performance, causing her to overlook the initial uses of Turkish. Second, Aylin revealed in her reflections that she tends to fill in the gaps when she doesn't fully understand, saying:

I don't understand the words, but I noticed the sentence I wanted from the other person as if I understood it. (Aylin, focus group)

This tendency may have contributed to her missing the earlier Turkish parts, as her attention was likely absorbed by the effort to make sense of the English, resulting in cognitive overload. Consequently, Aylin's perception that the *Love Song* was the first instance of

Turkish seems to reflect not a deeper engagement with the performance, but rather a moment of relief when her cognitive burden was eased. Her earlier sense of panic and detachment, stemming from her struggle with English, likely prevented her from recognising the initial use of Turkish, making the song a pivotal moment in which she could finally re-establish a connection with the performance.

Finally, like Murat and Aylin, Giray depicted Turkish in his full body in the form of curves from top to toe, in red, potentially signifying the veins (Figure 6.21). He did not reflect on Turkish much, only shared:

Turkish is very important for me.

With this brief explanation, he showed his strong connection with Turkish.

6.4.2.4 Turkish in the Feet and Hands

Only one participant, Damla, chose to locate Turkish in the feet and hands in her Language Portrait (LP, Figure 6.5). Damla located Turkish in her hands and feet, using the colour purple to represent the strength she derived from the language. While she also placed English on her feet, symbolising a different kind of strength – one associated with movement – Turkish provided her with the stability and grounding necessary to ‘hold still.’ The additional placement of Turkish in her hands further emphasised the crucial role it played in her sense of security and identity. Damla expressed that both languages allowed her to stand firm, but Turkish was the language she turned to when she needed to hold onto something steadfastly. This depiction reveals not only her reliance on Turkish for strength but also her deep emotional connection to it, underscoring Turkish as a core element of her identity and a source of security in her life. Damla shared:

I put Turkish and English to my feet, because I can stand on my feet with English and Turkish. [...] On my hands, it’s again Turkish, because I think it’s always Turkish when I have to hold on something firmly. (Damla, LP commentary)

Damla expressed her connection to Turkish by reflecting on the artist’s use of the language, specifically mentioning twice the act of translanguaging through a sudden switch, relating it to her own experience of randomly hearing Turkish in an English-speaking country. She

explicitly linked this experience to her sense of identity, sharing how hearing Turkish served as a reminder of her roots and who she was. She sounded contented as her appreciation and satisfaction with the use of Turkish was observable in her reflections:

Focusing in English and then suddenly turning to Turkish... it was like remembering the place you came from all of a sudden. Or remembering your *mother tongue*. [...] This happens in daily life too. During the day, I speak English, then I meet a Turkish friend and start speaking Turkish. Or if I hear Turkish while walking somewhere... [...] triggers a sense of place or identity. [...], Turkish comes out and in that moment, I remember who I am. That's what it does. (Damla, individual interview, see Appendix E2 for extended excerpt)

This reflection highlights Damla's deep connection to her home, which she views as a secure and safe place, intricately tied to her sense of self. The act of hearing and using Turkish acts as a powerful reminder of her identity, reinforcing the emotional bond she has with her first language and the cultural roots it represents.

6.4.2.5 Turkish Not Finding a Place on the Language Portraits

Three participants, Murat, Ece and Dinç, did not place Turkish in their Language Portraits (LP) Their cases are discussed below.

The first participant in this section is Murat. In his LP (Figure 6.18), he intentionally omitted Turkish, as he believed that the richness, variety and cultural beauty of Turkish traditions – such as empathy and benevolence – were ‘too sophisticated’ to be reduced to a mere colour on paper. This omission paradoxically emphasises his strong Turkish identity, further underscoring the profound connection between language, culture and identity in Murat's life,. He reinforced this sentiment by stating, “I am a citizen of Republic of Türkiye”, a seemingly obvious fact that gains significance when openly declared. He further revealed that Turkish held a sacred place in his life, preferring to keep it internal rather than expressing it outwardly. He sounded like he wanted to protect the value of this beauty. His contentment and great appreciation echoed gratitude, as it was clearly observable that he was grateful for coming from that culture. His reflections highlighted this reverence:

The colourfulness here, the richness... [short silence] Abilities, empathy... [short silence] Things like helpfulness, many qualities like that. [short silence] [...] I am a citizen of the Republic of Türkiye. [short silence] So, I didn't want to express this on paper with any colour. I *feel* this because, outwardly, I didn't want to, so to speak, oversimplify it by reducing it to a single colour. [...] Why should I confine it to one colour? Yes, the colour of our flag is crimson red and white, that is fine. [...] (Murat, individual interview, the underlined word is emphasised in the interview, see Appendix E3 for extended excerpt).

This illustrates how deeply intertwined Turkish language and culture are with his identity, signifying a respect for its intrinsic value that transcends visual representation.

The second participant to be discussed here, Ece, did not incorporate Turkish or any other specific languages into her LP (Figure 6.20), choosing instead to focus on body language as the form of communication that resonated most deeply with her emotions. Her further reflections were shared in Section 6.4.1.5. However, she did reflect on the use of Turkish by the artist during the performance. Ece first expressed the inclusivity she felt when Turkish was used, revealing a sense of collective pride. The pride and her strong cultural identity, was more observable when she said “our stories” being told in English, acknowledging the significance of a Turkish myth gaining international recognition. This pride in the global sharing of Turkish culture highlights her connection to her heritage. Moreover, Ece described the artist's shift to Turkish as a moment of relief, using the Turkish exclamation “ohh,” which conveys a sense of deep comfort or release. She noted that this transition was not just a linguistic switch or a cognitive relief, but an emotional one, reflecting a personal connection to the language:

[It] was a more inclusive approach. Telling our stories in English. [...] When she turned to Turkish, I was like ‘ohh!’ [...] It was an emotional transition. (Ece, focus group)

Finally, Dinç did not include Turkish in his LP (Figure 6.19), as he misunderstood the task, believing he was only to depict languages that he was learning. However, Dinç's reflections revealed that neither Turkish nor English used in the performance had an effect on him, as the performance's language became ‘drama’ (theatre), a unique language of arts, independent of the named languages:

Her use of mimics and gestures [...] the main language of the performance had become drama. [...] It wouldn't have made any difference if it was in Turkish. (Dinç, LP commentary)

As Dinç could not participate in an individual interview, I was unable to collect further data. Nevertheless, the reflections above illuminate how the emotional and communicative power of the performance transcended language, with performed expression carrying the primary meaning for him. His comment reveals a perception that the essence of the performance was not bound to the spoken language, highlighting the nature of dramatic expression.

Similar to how dramatic expressions became the language for Dinç, the *requiem* performed by the artist in an unknown language spoke directly to the audience, transcending linguistic boundaries. I will elaborate on how the *requiem* became the first language in the next section.

6.4.3 Theme 3: Finding Home in the Universe of the Felt

During her performance, Senem sang two songs, *Love Song* and the *requiem*, details of which were discussed in Section 5.2.3.3. The *requiem*, although sang in an unknown language to the audience, was mentioned by five participants, Murat, Duru, Ahu, Filiz and Müge, when they were encouraged to identify their most significant moment. The *requiem* did not appear on their LPs; however, in the focus group, the *requiem* emerged as a language experienced aesthetically. Their reflections conveyed both emotional and cognitive relief: they felt it deeply while also making analytical sense of it, in a way comparable to the comfort they experienced when the artist utilised translanguaging into Turkish. Therefore the participants were taken to *a place when the life was good* (Brown, 2021). The personal, social and cultural meanings the *requiem* evoked were akin to the feelings of *home* described by Somerville (1997). Yet, in this context, *home* expanded beyond the familiar: the whole universe became *home*, as the emotions experienced reached beyond the known into the unknown, yet were still felt in the heart through the universal language of the arts, leading to the theme of *Finding home in the universe of felt*. This metaphor is also reflected in the visual I used to present these themes through an artefact

(Figure 10.4): The grass island in the river and the surrounding trees merge into one continuous green with the contentment and ease felt through getting what is conveyed, although it was in an unknown language to the participants in the *requiem*.

First, Murat highlighted a personal connection to the *requiem*, which triggered memories of home, heightening emotions:

I perceived it as a requiem and I have been in requiem [sic.] or similar contexts [in Türkiye]. As I made emotional connections with them, [...] that [part] took my attention. (Murat, focus group)

Interpreted within Somerville's (1997) conceptualisation, Murat also articulated social meanings he found in the *requiem*. The song evoked memories of childhood, which I interpret as a reference to home – a place integral to the construction of one's identity during childhood (Somerville, 1997). His use of "we" in this context suggests a shared social identity among the participants. Murat further noted that the *requiem*'s impact was amplified through the artist's storytelling, making the unfamiliar language feel intimate and familiar:

Yes, it was a requiem that we didn't know the language [...]. But [...] it's definitely something we've listened to before, hitting us right in the feelings, so we felt it close. [...] We all have a village memory of our childhood. She told us about the scene with her body language and with the requiem. [...] it was very influential [...] her voice, acoustics... (Murat, focus group)

Second, Duru also expressed a deep cultural connection, feeling as though she had been transported home:

She gave the full emotions while she was singing [the requiem]. The story takes place in Mesopotamia, and the requiem directly reflected that. I mean it took me there. (Duru, focus group)

Third, Ahu revealed a strong cultural identity as she reflected on how the unknown language evoked such intense emotions that it felt like a first language. She also recognised the *requiem*'s ability to foster a sense of interconnectedness and belonging, rooted in Turkish culture. This moment transported her to a place of safety, aligning with Summerville's (1997) conceptualisation of being at home:

[I]n Türkiye, you randomly go to a family's house [...] to ask if they have some water. They give you food, feed you, try to do everything for you. It reminds [me of] [...] a safe place. (Ahu, focus group)

Ahu was engaged in reflections also on cultural meanings. Similar to Murat, who contributed to the study in a different Focus Group, Ahu referred to a collective social dimension with the use of “we,” evoked by the *requiem*:

There, we shared the sadness. I mean, a mother tongue do not have to be your own language. I could feel that. We all understood that requiem without knowing the language. (Ahu, focus group)

Fourth, Filiz's reflections on the moments she was engaged with the *requiem* underscored the deep connection between language and culture. She noted that the *requiem* sounded like Kurdish to her (she comes from a region with a predominantly Kurdish population but she does not speak Kurdish), although the language of the *requiem* was not Kurdish. This familiar cultural context influenced her perception, making the *requiem* resonate as if it were in her first language. Despite not understanding the language, the *requiem*'s sound evoked a sense of familiarity and cultural relevance, highlighting how cultural background shapes our interpretation of language and music:

As the requiem belonged to that region [of Türkiye], it sounds like a [named] language [...] [T]he requiem was impressive. (Filiz, focus group)

Finally, like Filiz, Müge's statement powerfully illustrated the deep connection between language and culture. She confidently asserted that the *requiem* communicated with her in her first language, identifying it as Turkish, which she associated with Anatolian culture. Her response underscored how cultural identity could shape the perception of language, demonstrating that the *requiem*'s cultural context made it resonate as if it were in her first language. During the individual interview, Müge assertively stated:

It had a language and it was Turkish. I know it. Indeed [the language was] Anatolia. (Müge, Focus Group, underlined word had a strong emphasis in her reflections)

This collection of reflections demonstrates how an unknown language, through the power of emotional and cultural resonance, can become as comforting and familiar as one's first language, revealing deep connections to home, culture, identity and shared experiences.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I addressed the first sub-question of the study. I presented three themes, focusing on three key elements: English, Turkish and the *requiem* sung in an unknown language. I encapsulated the essences of these themes in a table and in a poem, *Grey to Green*, before engaging in an in-depth analysis of the Language Portraits, to unpack the themes and main categories, cross-referencing the data with focus groups and some individual interviews. In the next chapter, I discuss the themes related to participants' emotions and identities.

Chapter Seven: Bilingual, Sociocultural and Personal Identities

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I address the second sub-question the study posed: “What aspects of identity were revealed in a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland engaging with the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent?*” First, I introduce Theme (4) *Fractured selves in English speech*; Theme (5) *Bilingual voices under pressure*, and Theme (6) *Selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence*, constructed in response to the second sub-question of the research. I then share the poem *From Silenced Selves to Existence*, which I crafted by translating the data into a poetic form. Following this, I engage more fully with the question through detailed analysis and interpretation, echoing the three themes. First, I explore anxieties in oral fluency and accent. Second, I examine *translanguaging anxiety*, introducing the term *Plaza Turkish Anxiety*. Third, I present cultural and personal identities as they observed in the four role plays, overview’s of which are shared in Section 4.5.2. Top of Form

In Tablet VII (trans. George, 2000), continues from Tablet VI, where Enkidu asks Gilgamesh “My friend, why were the great gods in counsel?” (p. 54), referring to his dream where he sees the gods deciding to take his life. The answer to his question is in their slain both Humbaba and Bull of Heaven, as the gods decree that one of them must die to restore cosmic balance. Enlil chooses Enkidu to face this fate – maybe because of Gilgamesh’s mother Ninsun’s prayers to the gods for his protection in a preceding tablet. Stricken with a grievous illness, Enkidu is overwhelmed by sorrow and despair, blaming hunter and Shamhat for his weakened state, while Shamash reminds him of her care and kindness. Moved by this, Enkidu withdraws his curses and accepts he was wrong. Enkidu then shares a terrifying vision of the underworld – a dark, silent place filled with the spirits of ancient kings and priests, ruled by the goddess Ereshkigal. The vision reveals a grim fate where there is no return, only darkness and dust. Continuing visions and dreams make Enkidu rise weakly.

Ultimately, he shares a dream with Gilgamesh, implicitly accepting the death coming, by saying he will not die as hero. But the narrative breaks off there, leaving his fate unresolved because “[...] thirty or so lines of Tablet VII [are] still to be recovered” (George, 2000, p. 62) and they remain lost to this day. Although the tablet ends abruptly after recounting Enkidu’s twelve days of suffering – without specifying on which day he died – it is very possible that he dies on the twelfth day. The number twelve holds significant meaning throughout the epic: the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is composed of twelve tablets (including the appendix); in Tablet IX, the scorpion-man opens his mouth after twelve double-hours; the Sun God’s journey takes another twelve double-hours; and in Tablet X, the counting of punting-poles stops at twelve, only to continue with “At *one hundred and twenty* double-furlongs Gilgamesh had used all the punting-poles” (George, 2000, p.83), which is ten times twelve.

Like Enkidu sharing a troubling dream that reveals his deep fear, anxiety and vulnerability about the gods’ judgment and impending fate, this chapter unfolds participants’ anxieties and vulnerabilities as a profound confrontation with fear and uncertainty, particularly shaping their bilingual selves. Furthermore, similar to Enkidu grappling with mortality, the participants confront bilingual, personal and cultural landscapes that evoke challenging emotions. At times, their personal identities are shaped by existential themes, mirroring Enkidu’s existential suffering. In general, their introspection and unpacking of emotions with wise acceptance reflect Enkidu’s two significant moments of acceptance – Shamhat’s kindness and his death. Much like Enkidu revisits his life through dreams, participants’ reflections – prompted by the storytelling theatre performance that opened a surreal world – offer moments of imaginative exploration and deepened self-understanding. Finally, akin to the sudden and incomplete ending of Tablet VII, which leaves Enkidu’s fate unresolved, this chapter’s exploration of identity is limited to the audience members’, deferring the discussion of Professional Artist Identity to the following chapter.

7.2 Themes and Main Categories

The interpretation methods I employed to interpret the data on bilingual identity revealed the exploration of participants' *sociocultural* and *personal identities*, in addition to their *bilingual identity*. Since these identities are fluid and interrelated, examining sociocultural and personal dimensions provided deeper insights into the central focus of the study. In this process, Theme 4, Theme 5 and Theme 6 of the overall study were generated. The two themes within bilingual identity represent identity as constructed through oral communication in English and through translanguaging, respectively. These are (4) *Fractured bilingual selves in speech* and (5) *Bilingual voices under pressure*. Participants' navigation of their sociocultural and personal dimensions inspired the theme (6) *Sociocultural selves in connection and personal selves in existence*. The subthemes are:

- Anxiety;
- Avoidance;
- Easing anxiety;
- Connection;
- Trust;
- Pride;
- Gender;
- Existential dilemmas.

The first and second subthemes above illustrate Theme 4, *Fractured selves in English speech* and Theme 5, *Bilingual voices under pressure*, whereas the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh subthemes represent Theme 6, *Selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence*. These themes, sometimes co-existing together, yielded to in main categories. The themes and main categories are summarised in Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1. *Theme and main categories in bilingual, sociocultural and personal identities.*

(N/A: Not available)

	Main Categories		
	I	II	III
Theme 4: Fractured selves in English speech	Oral fluency anxiety	Accent anxiety	Easing oral fluency and accent anxieties
Theme 5: Bilingual voices under pressure	Translanguaging anxiety	Easing translanguaging anxiety	N/A
Theme 6: Selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence	Connection, trust, pride and existential dilemmas in sociocultural self	Gender in sociocultural and personal self	Connection and existential dilemmas in personal self

The themes and main categories outlined in Table 7.1 are explored in detail in the following sections. Before delving into this discussion, I present the poem *From Silenced Selves to Existence* as an artistic representation of the meanings I constructed during data interpretation. Each stanza of the poem corresponds to one of the main thematic areas: anxiety in oral fluency and accent; anxiety in translanguaging; and the construction of sociocultural and personal selves.

7.3 Poem 2: From Silenced Selves to Existence

[Comfort of] unasked questions, I fudge.

On the football field, the urge to react, [yet I] silence,

I'm quiet, as I know they won't get.

Rather than the struggle, [at least] I'm not tired.

Morning's [embrace], a half-conscious state, [words left unspoken,] hesitant.

In the work no headset worn, [a job's price to pay].

Imitating them, can't escape, my accent still [whispers],

Afraid of discrimination, to be made fun of,

Türkler people correct the most – irritation, torture,
We are harsh to each other, “speak without an accent.”

Afraid to be judged, told to be showing off, smarty pants, a wannabe,
It’s happening, popping, emerging, naturally growing in me!
What am I doing? Closing my mouth with my hands, fear, becoming red.
Guilty. Incompetent. Embarrassed. Ashamed.
Still thinking about it in the morning, is my Turkish that bad?
People mocking me at the store, at home; if they don’t react, I suspect more.
My child, oh God! Speaking *yarım yamalak*!
Yet, proud. My girl won’t suffer like me, I’m a happy mom.
[Still] stopping her; censor, be careful, protect the language!
Dad mocking me, my child becoming uneasy, [it’s not home anymore].

Lonely, although the power of Mesopotamia,
‘*yaramaz*’ they say, [or] they [may] turn out bad,
Fish[y].
I wish I could speak Turkish.
[Connected to the past], it’s [also] so humane,
I will call you yeah, [now you are] embarrassed.
Ego satisfied,
Stubborn, continue, peace with the past.
Taking off our shoes, we may stumble,
Yet have limits; affecting and affected;
existential,
I wasn’t strong [now, I’m here].

7.4 Bilingual Identity

In this section, I present the findings I constructed in relation to bilingual experiences of the participants, mainly drawing from the individual interviews. My data interpretation brought to light the participants’ experiences of oral fluency anxiety and accent anxiety in

English, as well as their translanguaging anxiety and related avoidance behaviours. As language anxiety is intertwined with identity, as discussed in Section 2.3.5, these behaviours shed light on bilingual identity. Within this context, I tackle oral fluency and accent anxiety and their avoidance under one theme, *Fractured selves in English speech*, while I discuss translanguaging anxiety and its avoidance under another theme, *Bilingual voices under pressure*.

7.4.1 Theme 4: *Fractured Selves in English Speech*

The data interpretation revealed that the participants experienced a profound anxiety about their oral fluency and accented speech, resulting in their use of avoidance as a coping strategy. As stated in Section 1.6, the term anxiety, as well as other emotions discussed in this section, such as fear, trauma, anxiety, worry, embarrassment and distress, are not applied here in the sense of diagnosing psychological disorders – they solely reflect experiences that subtly shaped participants' choices, attitudes and perceptions, occasionally influencing aspects of daily life, yet without reaching a clinical level that substantially disrupts functioning. However, it can be important to ease these challenging emotions, as there can be a potential for escalation into more significant consequences.

The anxiety the participants experienced observed to be primarily grounded in the fear of being negatively evaluated by their listener, in terms of their oral fluency and accent (similar meanings were also observed in translanguaging; however, this discussion is reserved for Section 7.4.1.2). Furthermore, the real-life moments they felt 'incompetent' in their communication, with regard to their oral fluency and accent, created shame, perfectionism, guilt, humiliation and embarrassment. Inevitably, the fear brought stress, and these emotional experiences threatened their self-image, and to save their face, the participants sometimes avoided communication. On the positive side of the coin, multicultural environments eased the anxiety with the positive change they initiated in the perceptions and beliefs related to oral fluency and in accented talk. Through these observations, the main theme (4) *Fractured selves in English speech* was constructed. Under this main theme, there were subthemes of *anxiety*, *avoidance* and *easing anxiety*, leading to main categories are constructed: *oral fluency anxiety*, *accent anxiety* and *easing*

oral fluency and accent anxieties. These main categories are discussed in the following sections. These are summarised in Figure 7.1 below.

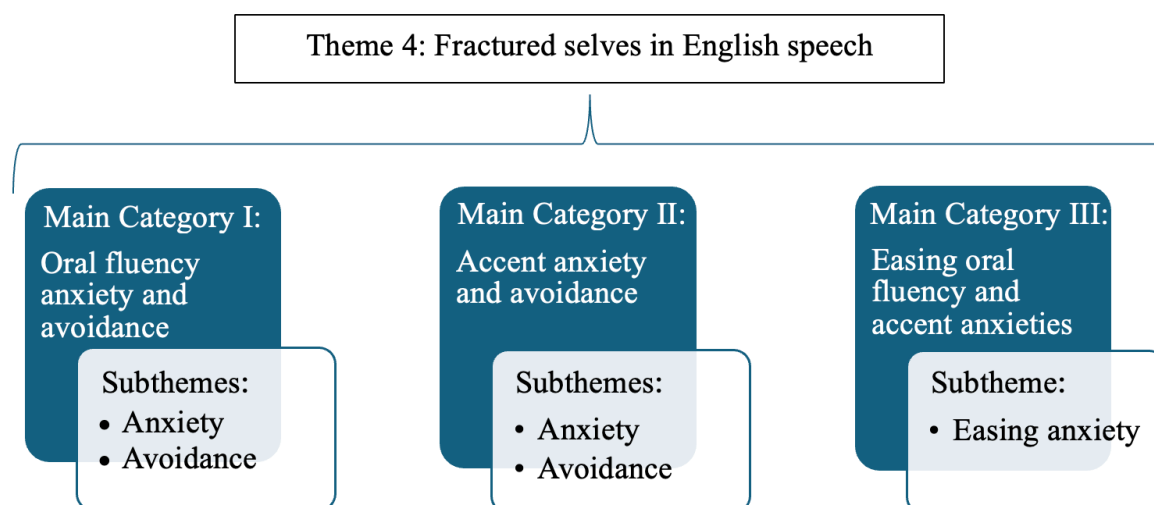


Figure 7.1. *Main categories and subthemes under the main Theme 4*

After summarising the main categories and subthemes under Theme 4, *Fractured selves in English speech*, the following section presents detailed observations of these as reflected in the data.

7.4.1.1 Oral Fluency Anxiety

The interviews data seems to suggest that participants experienced profound anxiety in their oral communication in English, due to a perceived lack of fluency. This anxiety appeared so pronounced that some participants admitted to actively avoiding communication out of fear of failure, stemming from their inexperience (in their own words perceived “incompetency”) in English. The anxiety surrounding oral fluency was rooted in two main experiences. First and foremost, participants’ past instances of struggling in communication instilled a persistent fear and anxiety of recurrence. Consequently, they developed a learned helplessness and began avoiding communication altogether. However, even in the absence of negative experiences, participants still avoided communication due to ingrained perfectionist language beliefs in Türkiye, which was the second main source of their anxiety. Oral fluency anxiety was prevalent in both oral communication aspects, namely listening and speaking, but mainly in the former. Regarding listening, Enes stated: “I

always know I will struggle in English”, revealing his anxiety, echoing his LP reflections (discussed in Section 6.4.1.1). He further shared that he did not ask for clarification when he did not understand something in a conversation or if he did, he only asked once, never twice. Instead he developed a habit he referred to as “fudging”. Despite the risk of communication breakdown, Enes still maintained this pattern.

Sometimes when I don’t understand, I can fudge. Or I don’t want to ask again. Or I ask once but don’t ask twice. [...] It can be distressing. I don’t want to make that effort. (Enes, individual interview)

While reflecting in his LP, as discussed in Section 6.4.1, Enes described English as a “struggle” in the brain that he “[did] not want to go” and further shared that he felt shy about speaking, particularly in the presence of Turkish speakers, fearing judgment – thus confirming his experience of stress:

I don’t [like to] speak in English with people who speak Turkish. [...] Like a feel shy. Like there is the feeling of being judged. (Enes, individual interview)

Likewise Ferit, in different moments, shared that he did not react and did not ask questions in English. First in the Focus Group, as shared in Section 6.4.1.4, Ferit shared that he felt alienated to himself when he used exclamations as reactions in English, so he did not react. In the individual interview, first he reinforced it by saying:

Yes, there’s some resistance there [in using exclamations]. I don’t know... maybe not everyone feels it, but it’s like I’m doing something outside of myself. [...] (Ferit, individual interview, see Appendix E4, for extended excerpt)

Later Ferit specifically shared that he refrained from speaking during football games with Irish people, expressing the activation of protective mode:

Maybe I am asking less questions than I normally would. [...] I found a group [to] play [football] at the weekends. [...] [There,] I turn [my] protection mode on. [...] I think about [the difficulty of] communication. I feel like I will react, but nothing comes out. (Ferit, individual interview)

These reflections align with Ferit’s characterization of English in his LP, as discussed in Section 6.4.1.4, as an intangible presence, “in the air”, that he cannot grasp; in this context, his inability to produce language leaves him once again experiencing a sense of emptiness.

Similarly, Derya articulated a preference for not speaking when the conversation was in English, particularly when she was going to make a description, sharing she preferred not to tell, rather than the struggling in English, anticipating an exhaustion:

Rather than struggling with telling it in English, I prefer not telling. For example...
Because there is a tiredness, it can overwhelm. (Derya, individual interview)

Although Derya noted feelings of tiredness when speaking English in the individual interview, her initial reflections in the focus group also described listening as exhausting. She explained that a full English-language performance would have made her even more fatigued and, at times, overwhelmed, as discussed in Section 6.4.1.1. Together, Derya experienced stress and overwhelm in both oral skills, namely speaking and listening.

Likewise, Senem, the artist, revealed in her interview that she often kept silent when she was about to speak in English – particularly before going to bed and upon waking – because her mind was not fully alert and she felt anxious about failing to communicate with her Irish spouse:

No, I am not going to be able to tell this. (Senem, individual interview)

Senem specifically mentioned this feeling was prevalent when she woke up in the morning to tell something to her Irish spouse, leaving her helpless to speak:

Particularly when I wake up in the morning, I will tell something to [my hubby] or when we're going to the bed, [...] when my cognitive functioning is not full, [...] I say [to myself] 'I won't be able to tell this' and I leave it. (Senem, individual interview)

At times, participants shared that they refrained from making jokes in their casual interactions. This was mainly due to the assumption that their joke would not be understood by the hearer and will not create the expected outcome. To avoid the unwanted response of not getting laughter, they gave up on making jokes in English. For example, Bahar, during the interview, shared she made jokes 'inside' and laughed by themselves:

Sometimes [...] [in English], [...] I'm making jokes, but I'm making them inside myself and I'm laughing by myself. I say... I wish they could understand. (Bahar, individual interview)

Murat also avoided making jokes but also avoided sharing an idiom/proverb, because he did not get the expected outcome from the hearer in his previous experiences. While humour often carries cultural nuances, Murat linked his difficulty in creating the desired response to the intonation he believed he lacked of:

When I make a joke, when I say a proverb, it won't have an effect. [...] When I make a joke, [...] if you don't use the correct intonation, [they] don't laugh. [...] I really started not to speak. (Murat, individual interview)

Although Murat attributed his difficulties to a linguistic element, intonation, it can also be interpreted as an emotional experience. As discussed in Section 6.4.1.5, he intentionally omitted English from his LP, describing it as a “corrupt” and inelegant language that persists largely due to its role in technology and related domains (Murat, LP commentary). From this, one could infer that he perceives English as limited in its capacity to convey certain affective or humorous expressions, as evidenced by his feeling that his jokes do not resonate.

Time to time, in their daily life, the participants avoided communication not only in social environments but also in professional ones. The fear of not being able to understand was so powerful that sometimes they took the risk of missing an important information instead of making effort to understand. For example, Funda's anxiety of not being able to understand the theatre, discussed in Section 6.4.1.1, was experienced in her daily life as well, particularly at work. She stated that when she started her job as a fast-food personnel working in the kitchen, she had to wear headsets. But she did not understand what was said in the headset, mainly because of the Irish accent. As she was missing a great proportion of the information, which caused ‘drama’ in her work, she started to leave her headsets aside. With this decision, she seemed to be opting for the serious negative outcomes of not listening to important information, rather than bearing the ‘drama’ brought by not understanding what was said:

I miss so many things that I'm like 'when did they say that?' [...] I don't like these dramas. I'm leaving my headsets somewhere, then they always come and say 'Who did leave these?' (Funda, individual interview)

In addition to the excerpts shared in this section, Duru, Defne, Derya and Aylin expressed experiences of anxiety and, at times, avoidance, as discussed in the previous chapter on emotions (see Section 6.4.1). Ultimately, as evident in many of these reflections, anxiety stemmed from past communication failures, shaping expectations of recurrence and ultimately fostering a sense of learned helplessness, prompting individuals to abandon their efforts. However, sometimes these feelings changed, as was the case for Enes, as he started to join international meet-ups:

Although I thought I knew English, I was having difficulty in daily speech. Now I am a bit more relaxed, I started joining that Meet-up [application] events and such. Joining those and communicating with different people [from different countries]. (Enes, individual interview)

In his interview, Enes linked his reflections above to accent, another central source of anxiety for the participants, as discussed below.

7.4.1.2 Accent Anxiety

The participants' reflections showed that they were anxious of accented talk and tried to hide their accent. Although accent anxiety can be a source of additional language (LX) speaking anxiety (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022), in this study, I discussed listening and speaking anxiety under one category, while here I discuss accent as a separately, for several reasons. First, fluent speakers – and even first language users – do have an accent; therefore, I argue that accent and the anxiety surrounding it deserve a distinct discussion. Second, unlike oral fluency anxiety, the accent anxiety reported by the participants was not primarily about the fear of failing to understand or convey their message, but rather about the perceived risk of negative judgement by the listener.

Furthermore, the nuances between these two types of anxiety (oral fluency anxiety; accent anxiety) were different: the former often led to avoiding communication broadly, while the latter involved avoiding only accented speech. It can therefore be inferred that accent

anxiety and accent avoidance were milder than oral fluency anxiety. Consequently, participants' beliefs about their accent shifted more readily than their beliefs about their LX fluency. Finally, accent is closely linked to identity, often more explicitly than fluency alone (Avila-Saavedra, 2010; Edwards, 2009). Given these differences in both the literature and participants' reflections, I have addressed accent anxiety as a distinct form, separate from LX oral fluency anxiety.

Several participants in the study expressed their endeavours to mitigate their Turkish accent, driven by anxiety of being negatively assessed. Among them, a striking comment came from Damla who shared that she was afraid of discrimination and being made fun of:

Accent is, I mean, I little like... If you don't escape from it, sometimes because of accent, you can be exposed to discrimination. Because they can laugh at you. They can laugh at your pronunciation. (Damla, individual interview)

Damla's perceived risk of discrimination or exclusion was also hidden in her comment that she did not want to be "someone from outside":

It is important for me to articulate the word correctly. I pay attention to this; I also consider it as important. I'm trying to articulate in the way I hear from a native person. As I said, I don't want to someone from outside, when they listened to me, I don't want them to say 'look, she has an accent, she has a Turkish accent.' (Damla, individual interview)

In Damla's reflections above, although she said 'articulate the word correctly,' her anxiety sounded more related to fear of judgement based on her accent, rather than the intelligibility of her speech. Echoing this, Murat explicitly stated that she did not find the Turkish accent "elegant", but found it okay in certain contexts, such as a work environment:

As English spoken with a Turkish accent only serves its purpose, it doesn't feel elegant to my ears, nor does it appeal to me, because its intention is obvious. [...] [When making a presentation at work] the detail to be focused should be the meaning [...], the message, not articulation. (Murat, individual interview)

Murat made a similar comment on English, saying it was not "elegant", as discussed in Section 6.4.1.5. Together, these statements reveal that his sense of inelegance applies both to accented English and English in general, reflecting his accent anxiety and concern over the social and stylistic appropriateness of his speech. Adding his avoidance of making jokes

due to concern over his intonation, as discussed in the previous section, his comments reflect a strong focus on both stylistic and social appropriateness in speech. On the other hand, Murat's perceptions of accent were not only personal but also, he expressed a strong criticism to being corrected, particularly by other people coming from Türkiye, as mentioned above. He used the word 'torture':

What I mean by being corrected, it's torture of one Turkish person to another.
(Murat, Focus Group)

Bahar defended the Turkish accent, while she sounded overwhelmed by the perceived pressure and cruel criticisms of people coming from Türkiye, confirming Murat's experience:

Of course we have to have an accent. [...] While in Türkiye, always that pressure. [...] Those cruel criticisms here are unfortunately to ourselves. (Bahar, individual interview)

Arzu's views on accented talk seemed in transition as she both expressed that she wanted to 'fix' her accent and found accent-free talk artificial. Furthermore, she also was jealous of the ones who spoke without an accent:

Of course I have an accent. [...] I'm thinking like 'will this accent be fixed?' [...] [when trying to imitate speakers of English as L1] [...] it creates a bit shyness, like something doesn't feel natural. It feels it will be showing off. I couldn't digest it. [...] On the other hand, I'm jealous of people who do that transition [to accent free talk] well. (Arzu, individual interview)

Arzu's reflections above show that she was afraid of being seen as trying to show off or act above her station. At the beginning of this reflection, she shared the pressure that she received from a specific person from Türkiye, her child, to "fix" her accent:

[My child] speaks by rounding [the syllables] when giving order [in a restaurant]. [...] [Teaching me] 'you can round it, you can do it likes this Mom.' He calls me out. (Arzu, individual interview)

Arzu further added the idiom *ayar çekiyor*, which means her child is mildly admonishing someone to fix a particular behaviour. This attitude of her child towards accent is likely to be inherited from the parent(s), as her child is a pre-schooler and also, she had moved to Dublin only two months before the interview. Arzu's views on accent likely contribute to

her depiction of English as a pain in her back and legs in her LP, despite describing herself as having a strong background in English, as discussed in Section 6.4.1.3, highlighting the sense of overwhelm it brings her.

At times, these anxieties were eased by observations made at multicultural environments. Below these experiences are discussed under the main category *easing oral fluency anxiety and accent anxiety*.

7.4.1.3 Easing Oral Fluency Anxiety and Accent Anxiety

Some participants' negative perceptions and worries about their accented speech shifted as they engaged in multicultural environments. For example, Enes, who previously showed additional language (LX) oral fluency anxiety (as discussed in the previous section), also described a transformation in his beliefs about accent. He added:

Joining [Meet-up events] [...] it made me relaxed [...] to talk to people who are coming from different countries, people who have different accents. (Enes, individual interview)

Defne also shared her transformation, also unveiling a strong identity with her accent:

I was looking at this accent issue different before. [...] I was more timid, thinking how it was understood. I mean, that I didn't know is understood very much. Maybe it's perceived funny, I had thoughts like that. But I think the opposite here. [...] Maybe they think it's funny but at the end it's me. Not somebody else, it is [me] speaking and it's very normal that it's different. [...] I'm not belittling myself. (Defne, individual interview)

Likewise, Filiz's comments reflected the importance of multicultural environments. Although she did not overtly share that her views were transformed, her positive views on accent can be related to multilingual environments she was engaged in:

Yesterday, for example, [...] the owner of the cafe I went to [...] was from Azerbaijan. [...] I told him that I was Turkish. 'I've already understood it from your accent' she told. It means that it was understood. [...] Normal, it can be understood. [...] Most of my friends are non-Irish. I mean, most of the people I'm hanging out are international. [...] As if it was very organic, I find myself in international environments. (Filiz, individual interview)

Bahar also suggested how her perceptions transformed as she was engaged in multicultural environments at her work, with a specific emphasis on LX accent, initially she found “funny.” In Bahar’s reflection below, I omit the specific group she mentioned, using [X] instead, as pointing out a specific accent would not offer any additional insights, yet may be perceived as offensive:

There are many very successful [X] people and when we look at their accents, sometimes it seems funny, but we all listen to them. I mean we are listening to what they say open mouths. [Then you realise accent] was not a big thing, accent should be present and people should not criticise each other based on this. (Bahar, individual interview)

As a result, bilingual identity was observed to be constructed with anxieties in oral fluency and accent, as well as in the experiences that transformed the views on oral fluency and accent. A similar pattern – anxiety, avoidance and ease of them – became visible also related to o translanguaging experiences, as discussed in the following section under the theme *Bilingual voices under pressure*.

7.4.2 Theme 5: Bilingual Voices under Pressure

This section examines emotional response to translanguaging, independent of the main language of the speech, primarily rooted in internalised language hierarchies – shaped participants’ sense of self across various interactional contexts, as revealed in the data and influenced their bilingual identity. This dynamic is captured under the theme *Bilingual voices under pressure*, where ‘voices’ refers both to participants’ use of English and Turkish within the same speech, namely translanguaging and to aspects of identity. Participants’ bilingual identities emerged as deeply shaped and at times constrained, by their emotional experiences with translanguaging. Rather than reflecting a united expression of bilingualism, translanguaging frequently became a site of tension and self-monitoring, where participants negotiated both who they were and how they wished to be perceived.

The data interpretation suggests that the participants of this study extensively experienced anxiety, which is deeply rooted in bilingual identity, when they were translanguaging,

independent of the main language of the conversation. In that, they felt anxious when they used English in their Turkish speeches with the Turkish interlocutors, in the same vein they felt anxious when Turkish words ‘slipped’ from their mouth when they were speaking in English.

The emotions observed in the reflections on translinguaging experiences mainly echoed the ones discussed in the previous section, such as stress, fear, shame, embarrassment and had an important role in identity construction. The experienced anxieties yielded to avoidance as a coping strategy, where they avoided translinguaging in both ways. For some participants, translinguaging also emerged as a sign of perceived additional language improvement, bringing confidence and a sense of ‘competence’, in addition to their anxiety. The only exception to the experienced anxiety and manifested avoidance was when they were interacting with other people from Türkiye, living in Ireland, who utilised translinguaging to English in their Turkish speech. With these observations, the subthemes anxiety, avoidance and ease of anxiety were evident in participants’ reflections, yielding to main categories *translinguaging anxiety* and *easing translinguaging anxiety*. These subthemes and main categories are summarised in Figure 7.2.

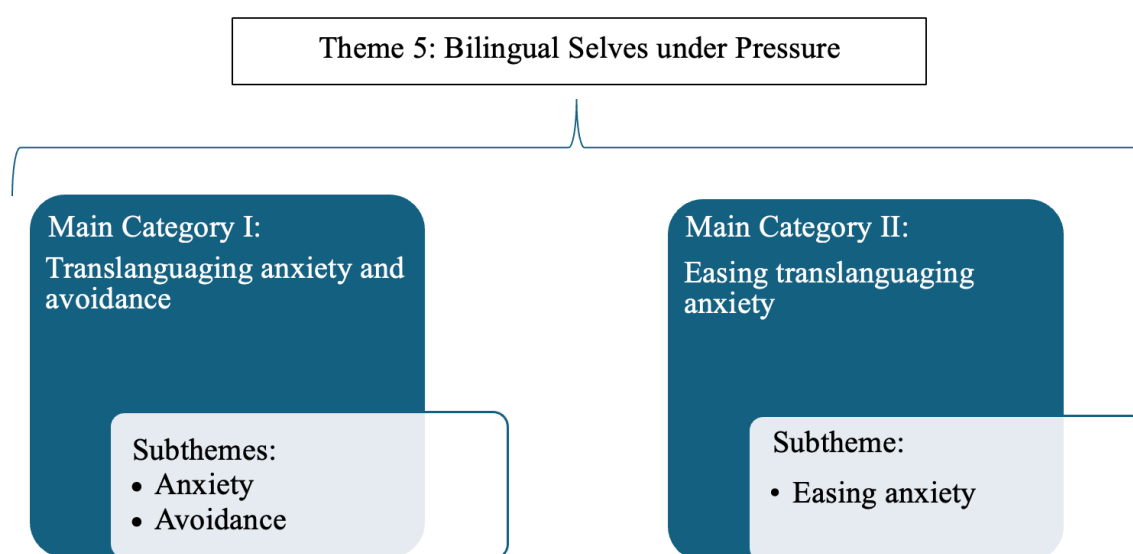


Figure 7.2. Main categories and subthemes under the main Theme 5

Before presenting these findings in a broad sense, below I clarify my use of ‘translinguaging anxiety’ in a bidirectional way, informed by the findings of the study.

7.4.2.1 *Translanguaging Anxiety*

The participants in this research described emotions such as embarrassment, guilt, shame and feelings of ‘incompetence’ when reflecting on moments where they used more than one language within the same conversation. I interpret these emotions through the lens of anxiety as conceptualised in psychology (Chorpita & Barlow, 2018; Spielberger, 2013). Importantly, these feelings did not vary depending on whether translanguaging occurred in speech that was primarily in Turkish, their first language (L1) or in English, their additional language (LX). In other words, the source of anxiety was not tied to which language dominated the interaction. On this basis, I use the term *translanguaging anxiety* in a bidirectional way, to capture both situations under a single concept. In the literature the term translanguaging anxiety is used only one scholarly work, by Turnbull and colleagues (2025), however, without suggesting a definition, rather only listing it as a category, as in the following: “Translanguaging anxiety (two responses). For two TCs [teacher candidates], the notion of translanguaging invoked nervousness, e.g. ‘I felt that the translanguaging might be above my skill level’ (Natalia)” (p. 23). Herein, using the term, I acknowledge that participants’ anxieties stem from ‘purist’ ideologies about language use and the pressure to keep languages ‘pure’ and separate. As discussed at the end of Section 2.3.5, Woolard (2020) describes ‘purist’ ideologies as beliefs turning into attitudes aimed at maintaining a language in a pure form by rejecting non- influences or non-standard variations, which can restrict natural linguistic diversity and limit speakers’ expressive possibilities. In this study, these beliefs were observed to shape attitudes in translanguaging, resulting in avoidance in using Turkish and English in the same speech, independent of the main language of the interaction. In this vein, ‘which language to preserve’ became an unimportant question, echoing in translanguaging “which language is being used becomes an uninteresting and insignificant question” (Li Wei, 2018, p. 26). Bringing these together, I my definition of translanguaging anxiety encompasses the discomfort or unease experienced by speakers when drawing on their full linguistic repertoire, often rooted in purist ideologies and social pressures to keep languages separate, which can lead to avoidance of mixing languages despite communicative benefits. This conceptualisation is

informed by Turnbull and colleagues' (2025) use of the term, expanding it to align with the context of my research.

In translanguaging from English to Turkish, Funda felt a degree of anxiety when she unintentionally used Turkish in her English speech. Moreover, her reflections revealed that such unplanned shifts to Turkish in English contexts created embarrassment:

It [using Turkish in an English speech] happens sometimes. Then I'm closing my mouth with my hands as if I've cursed. Well... A friend of mine told me [...] she sneezed in the class and [the classmates] said 'bless you.' [...] and [my friend] responded '*hep beraber*'. [...] She woke up in the morning and said 'what am I doing?' (Funda, individual interview)

Similarly, although not remembering the details of the incident in which he used Turkish in a mainly English speech, Ferit clearly remembered his feelings of embarrassment and his effort to 'fix' it, as if it was a mistake that had to be corrected:

It was a cheerful moment, vivid. [...] you cannot control and it comes [Turkish words]. And then I was like '*Hay Allah*' [a word of pity]. I tried to fix it, but it was not something that could be fixed. (Ferit, individual interview)

Damla used similar words when she was sharing her experience in translanguaging from English to Turkish, as Turkish words escaped and she tried to 'fix' that mistake:

My mind wanders and a Turkish word pops up. Right away, I try to fix it. (Damla, individual interview)

Bahar shared a recurring experience, illustrating her negative beliefs about translanguaging from English to Turkish, further generating self-suspicion. In unintended instances of translanguaging, by using Turkish in her English speech, during classes at the university she taught at, she expected that students would react. When the anticipated reaction did not come, she interpreted it as a lack of engagement from the students, bringing the suspicion that they were not listening. She even suspected that students were not understanding what she was saying overall in English, as her English was not intelligible:

Many times, Turkish slipped off my tongue. [...] [The students don't react.] [...] Don't they listen to me? [...] I feel bad. I feel like maybe they don't understand my English as well. (Bahar, individual interview)

Similar to their translanguaging from English to Turkish, most participants described their translanguaging from Turkish to English as an unwanted experience, though some expressed contradictory feelings, for example, a sense of competence accompanied by guilt. In her interview, Aylin explained that she avoided translanguaging in environments where she did not feel safe and feared being judged. To prevent this, she sometimes pretended to forget what she wanted to say, choosing silence over using the English equivalent of a word. She was particularly concerned about being perceived as ‘showing off’:

Well, yes, it depends on who I’m talking to. Sometimes in Turkish I forget the Turkish word and say the English one instead. And sometimes I even pretend as if I’ve forgotten the word just to avoid saying it in English. [short silence] So... English... yes, I forget, but the English word comes to mind. Sometimes I just say the English one. Sometimes I don’t say anything at all. [...] It feels as if I’m showing off, like “look, I’m in Ireland, sometimes I forget.” (Aylin, individual interview, see Appendix I for extended excerpt)

Like Aylin, Defne also deliberately avoided translanguaging in her Turkish communication, reflecting that she may have impeded herself, as she noted that she refrained from using English. Intriguingly, she tackled the translanguaging as a phenomenon that ‘happens’ to someone, as if it is something that makes the performer a passive subject. However, she also sounded positive about translanguaging, presenting a confusion or a state of transformation:

It [translanguaging] does not happen to me because I’ve been here for a short time. Maybe I impeded it. [...] But this used to happen when I was studying English more intensively. It doesn’t happen now because I have completely stopped. But, indeed [translanguaging] has to be and even it has to be more to adapt to English. (Defne, individual interview)

Likewise, Filiz took her translanguaging as ‘incompetence’ and added that she was sometimes perceived as a ‘smarty pants’, in her own words, when translanguaging from Turkish to English. She also shared her experience of being judged, however, she did not let others decide her speaking and continued translanguaging. Nevertheless, her perceived incompetency may reveal echoes of those criticisms:

I use a lot of English words when I’m speaking [in Turkish]. [...] There were some friends who don’t like it. Unfortunately, it’s perceived as being smarty pants.

Indeed, it's the opposite. [...] It's because I remain incompetent in Turkish. (Filiz, individual interview)

Filiz's reflection above, when considered alongside her appreciation of English as "one language, one person; two languages, two people [...] expanding", as discussed in Section 6.4.1.3, highlights the significant social and emotional pressures that translanguaging can exert on speakers within the Turkish context, underscoring the tension between personal linguistic flexibility and societal expectations.

Revealing her purist language beliefs (Woolard, 2020), Serap strongly criticised the translanguaging she encountered while living in Germany, explaining that she felt 'very bothered' by a speech delivered primarily in Turkish that incorporated elements from German. She added she found that kind of speech *yarım yamalak*, meaning 'unpleasantly incomplete', because it is done in a hasty and 'sloppy' manner. Sharing a proverb from Turkish culture, she implicitly signalled her disapproval, using the word 'condemn' to express her fear that her young child might adopt a similar translanguaging pattern. She further described how she suppressed both her child's translanguaging, and her own, pretending not to understand when her daughter used English and Turkish simultaneously:

They were speaking neither German, nor Turkish, *yarım yamalak*, [...] it was bothering me very much. [...] Once my daughter said '*Onun house'una ne zaman gidiyoruz?*' [When do we go to their house?] My God! I felt like I was hit by a bucket of boiling water! Whatever you condemn will find you. [...] Now my daughter is speaking like that... [...] After I asked her what she meant, she stopped it. [...] Now when she cannot remember her Turkish, she says the English and asks what it was in Turkish, and makes the sentence again. [...] I'm [also] forcing myself, really forcing myself to produce [a monolingual] Turkish. (Serap, individual interview)

In the focus group, Serap, as a speaker of English as an LX, extensively reflected on the comfort she felt when she understood English, using the words 'enlightenment' and 'the Sun', as discussed in 6.4.1.2. Yet, her insistence that both she and her daughter refrain from translanguaging illustrates how deeply internalised negative beliefs about the simultaneous use of different languages can be, even suppressing her ability to use the beaming sun as a metaphor for smooth, effortless communication.

Similarly, in Derya's reflection, her stance on translanguaging was revealed conflicting emotions, in one hand taking translanguaging as a symbol of competency and feeling happy that her child will not "suffer" using English as she did, but in the other hand, being disturbed by it. She used the word "*Alamancı*" (a variety of the word *Almanıcı*) as an analogy (in verbatim translation it can be 'Germanist'), a potentially offensive word for people coming from Türkiye, living and working in Germany. She used another strong word, 'disabled', reflecting on her perceived incompetency in English:

You know the feeling, [...] he [her son] won't feel disabled like me. [...] Yes, he won't suffer, exactly. In that sense I'm happy that he's growing up bilingual. But at the same time, I also feel a bit uneasy. Like, what if he ends up like those *Alamancılar* [plural of *Alamancı*, laughs] God, I hope not. [short silence] (Derya, individual interview, see Appendix E6 for extended excerpt)

Derya extended her reflections to the home context, noting that her child's sense of comfort in translanguaging was negatively affected when they, as parents, did not understand her speech. This underscores the importance of comfort in language use, as discussed for L1 and LX in Chapter Six, thereby contributing the notion of comfort in translanguaging to the broader discussion. Furthermore, Derya's reflections about the home environment can be linked to the metaphor I used to describe the practical comfort of using L1 as akin to 'home' – a familiar and reassuring space – which formed the second theme of the study, *the home comfort of the known*, discussed in Section 6.4.2. In this sense, Derya positioned translanguaging as a 'comfort zone' for her daughter, yet constrained that sense of comfort at home, both in practical and metaphorical terms, by expecting her to speak only in Turkish, rather than attempting to understand her translanguaging:

[...] [Monolingual Turkish], it's like you're in your comfort zone. Because sometimes when he [her son] says something in English, we [she and her husband] don't understand. And since he's a child, his pronunciation isn't clear either. We just say *heee* [nod along]. (Derya, individual interview, see Appendix E6 for extended excerpt)

Derya's reflections closely echoed Serap's in both pattern and emotional tone. Like Serap, she acknowledged the comfort in smooth understanding and the frustration created by disrupted communication, as discussed in 6.4.1.1, yet insisted in the latter.

Funda also shared that she avoided translanguaging in Turkish interactions in the fear of being accused of ‘showing off.’ In her reflections, Funda explicitly expressed a fear of mockery from friends, further stating that the sources of her anxiety were both the incidences where people laugh at her translanguaging in the past and her purist beliefs in language. While recounting a specific incident, it became evident that her translanguaging anxiety was so intense that she felt deeply upset, questioning how it could happen and feeling extremely embarrassed. Although Funda used the moderating phrase ‘a bit’ in her reflection, her anxiety and embarrassment sounded profound enough to lead to a physical response, that is, blushing:

Then I used an English word. It made me embarrassed a bit. [...] And I became red. [...] I cannot believe, why did this happen? [...] I felt so bad. [...] A couple of times sales assistants in a shop or in a grocery store, they were laughing at me. And I say ‘Pardon, I’m sorry.’ [...] I mean I’m a bit afraid to be honest, [...] to be mocked in the friend zones. [...] Like ‘You don’t know Turkish, ah. How did you forget the word so quickly, ah? Yours is a bit like showing off, are you showing off because you know English.’ [...] You’re in a guilty position. (Funda, individual interview)

Adding to the responses she received for her translanguaging in Türkiye, Funda shared that her father would sometimes laugh at her. Although his reactions were friendly and non-threatening, and Funda recounted them with a cheerful, smiling tone, these moments of teasing nonetheless seemed to have an impact on her:

My dad used to make fun of me [...] he says ‘thanks’ [in English]. Probably the pressure I’m putting over myself is coming from this. (Funda, individual interview)

Regarding her language beliefs, Funda expressed a strong purist stance (Woolard, 2020). When she asked, for the second time, ‘Why is this happening?’, positioning translanguaging as something to feel guilty about. She sought answers to this question in an effort to stop it:

I’m a person who really tries to speak good in Turkish [...] I also pay attention to the written [grammar] rules. When I realised this [utilising translanguaging] I felt a bit ashamed, became a bit angry at myself. Am I not reading a book? Why is this happening? I’m stressing out myself. (Funda, individual interview)

Enes and Bahar, in their interviews, also reflected on their deliberate efforts to adhere strictly to Turkish without engaging in translanguaging. Enes simply shared that he did not do translanguaging in a mainly Turkish speech, commenting:

Well, no, I don't do that. I mean I'm saying '*e-posta*' instead of 'email.' So, [translanguaging] doesn't happen. (Enes, individual interview)

Bahar, on the other hand, elaborated on those moments, sharing she did not let English words 'to escape' even when she was struggling to recall its Turkish correspondence. This was due to perceiving translanguaging as 'a threat' to language harmony and a pitfall. Bahar also expressed a strong disdain for a culturally coined Turkish term, *Plaza Turkish*, as discussed in the following section.

7.4.2.2 *Plaza Turkish Anxiety*

Using 'Plaza English', Bahar is referring to a phenomenon known as *Plaza Turkish*. This refers to the habit of casual Turkish-English translanguaging among professionals that are working in corporate firms in Türkiye, especially those drawn from business and IT contexts. Bahar noted:

That Plaza [Turkish] what they call in Türkiye, I really find it very artificial. But I know what emerged in me [casual translanguaging] is natural [...] [but] it's open to misunderstanding. [...] Like "Oh how you Turks say it?" a lot of people make fun of. Sometimes I'm being too hard to myself [to speak monolingual Turkish] like 'what was it [in Turkish]? [...] is it like Turkish is diminishing? [...] Definitely it must be protected, it's necessary to be very careful. Because it's artificial. But sometimes it's inevitable. (Bahar, individual interview)

While linguistically Plaza Turkish can be understood as a form of translanguaging, in Turkish public discourse it is overwhelmingly condemned. Influenced by this prevailing perception, Bahar views translanguaging as a stigmatised form of language. Her fear of losing proficiency in Turkish further intensifies her discomfort with translanguaging as it arises, resulting in a stance strongly shaped by linguistic purism and concerns over language loss – essentially connoting Plaza Turkish.

This term requires further unpacking, as it encapsulates a deeply rooted perception of translanguaging in Türkiye. In Turkish, the *plaza* label originally referred to high-rise office buildings that house international corporations banks and large-scale firms, particularly in metropolitan business districts. Beyond its architectural meaning, however, plaza has acquired strong sociocultural connotations, symbolising the lifestyle of corporate professionals, which is often high-end. Similarly, Plaza Turkish is a sociocultural term referring to the incorporation of English words into Turkish speech, often by plaza professionals. Rather than being regarded as a natural evolution of language, such usage is frequently perceived as a corruption of Turkish. What emerges is that Plaza Turkish functions as a linguistic marker of corporate identity, yet socially it is stigmatized rather than admired. It symbolises both globalisation and alienation: global in its orientation to English as the prestige language of business, alienating in its perceived distance from ‘authentic’ Turkish.

In this sense, Plaza Turkish exposes deep anxieties integrity of English words in Turkish language. Examples from grey literature, *Ekşi Sözlük* – one of the most popular user-generated online forums in Türkiye, where contributions range from personal anecdotes and everyday observations to pointed critiques of politics, culture and society, often delivered in a humorous or satirical tone – illustrate the intensity of criticism and in some cases outright hostility, directed towards translanguaging. Of the 252 entries under the title ‘Plaza Turkish’, only one presents it as unproblematic and some of them provide descriptive examples, while the overwhelming majority adopt a negative stance. These entries frequently employ disparaging language, ranging from ridicule to overtly hostile expressions, in order to delegitimise those who incorporate English into their Turkish speech. Particularly striking is one entry authored under the pseudonym *men küçük chomichmen* (2014, p. 14), who describes having lived abroad for 15 years and acknowledges personally engaging in translanguaging, yet nevertheless delivers a vehement critique of the practice, as translated below:

It has become almost obligatory to write about this.

I’ve been living abroad for about 15 years, moving from one country to another. I speak English from morning till night. I only use Turkish when I’m in Türkiye, for

about a month each year. I read Turkish newspapers, follow the important news and finish a Turkish book I get once a month or so.

Apparently, I even speak English in my sleep – that’s how far it’s gone.

When I go to Türkiye or when I speak with people from Türkiye for work, sometimes I stumble. It’s because I’m trying to think of the Turkish words. If I end up having to use the English equivalent, I apologise, because I feel like I’ve done something wrong, something shameful.

In short, those damn uneducated idiots who speak “plaza Turkish” : don’t throw in two or three English words and say “oh, I couldn’t remember the Turkish, you know, it’s the work environment.” Don’t spit out every random word that comes to mind. Think twice before you speak. Respect yourself and your language, you blockhead. Deep down, you know perfectly well that saying those things in Turkish is not hard for you at all.

There are two possibilities: either you could remember but you’re so undisciplined, so lacking in character, that you blurt out whatever comes to mind or you’re brainless, uncultured, ignorant and managed to “forget” your own language in just two days.

Either way, you’re an asshole. (men kucik chomichmen, 2014)

The entry above vividly illustrates the prevailing attitudes toward translanguaging, amidst many harsher comments under the same title. Notably, as stated, out of 252 entries, only one adopts a somewhat positive stance – although even this example concludes with a degree of labelling. This exception, authored under the pseudonym *Littles* (2017, p. 21), translates as follows:

I think the emergence of Plaza Turkish is inevitable, so don’t just make fun of it. People working in corporate offices actively use English while doing their jobs. The software they use is in English and they correspond in English with the people they work with. And honestly, when we try to “Turkify” some technical terms in our own conversations, it often means nothing to the other side.

Of course, I exclude the pretentious plaza employees who insist on using English even when there’s a perfectly good Turkish equivalent and who do so not out of necessity but just to *try to be cool*. (Littles, 2017, italics my emphasis)

This critical stance toward translanguaging is not confined to popular discourse; it also permeates academic and professional contexts. For instance, one working group explicitly stated in the abstract of an article they published in an academic journal:

The aims of our working group are clarified as: To clean the Turkish informatics terms from defective terms; to develop a dictionary to offer proper Turkish equivalents to especially contemporary informatics terms; to be a role model to other domains in the cleaning of Turkish from defective use; and to promote awareness of the value of meticulous Turkish in lieu of defective Turkish. (Tabak et al., 2021).

This ‘defective’ view also appears in an article on English as the medium of instruction, where Tuncer (2022) uses the term Plaza Turkish as a kind of ‘distortion’. He argues that “Foreign language learning ought to allow the *distortion* of Turkish and be more open to English, which is obligatory from the 2nd grade of primary school to university” (Tuncer, 2022, p. 783, italics my emphasis). In a similar understanding, Efe (2019) tries to find Turkish equivalents for the most commonly used expressions in *Plaza Turkish*, defining the term as a “jargon is a special variant, usually composed of half English, half Turkish or completely English or a *distorted* Turkish expression, which only white-collar employees understand/speak” (p. 104, italics my emphasis). Given that there is no embracing scholarly work for the term Plaza Turkish and even in a popular online forum it is almost impossible to find supportive perspectives, the label persists as an insult, frequently deployed to shame and delegitimise those who engage in translanguaging in their Turkish speech. This reinforces stigma and polices linguistic boundaries rather than fostering understanding or acceptance in Türkiye. Such statements illustrate how the prescriptive and purist attitudes evident in everyday discourse are further reinforced and legitimised in formal academic and professional spheres, amplifying the social and ideological pressures surrounding translanguaging in the country.

Given these, I combine Turnbull and colleagues (2025)’s notion ‘translanguaging anxiety’ with the notion of Plaza Turkish, advancing the term *Plaza Turkish Anxiety* (PTA). By PTA, I refer to the heightened unease that participants in my study experienced when drawing on their full linguistic repertoire. Rather than recognising translanguaging as a natural and *resourceful* practice, such moments of anxiety were often shaped by the real or imagined fear of negative labels such as ‘smart pants,’ ‘showing off’ or ‘wannabe’, along with personally held purist beliefs. Arguably, the high-status image of a plaza professional, combined with fluency in English, a high-status language in Türkiye, can create a broader social perception of ‘high-status people displaying their status.’ Such perceptions may

amplify feelings of insecurity among non-corporate individuals, potentially intensifying criticism. Given Türkiye's collectivist tendencies, this label of 'a-showing-off-plaza-person' can generate anxiety for corporate professionals, particularly when they fear disrupting group harmony in the broad context, leading to an internalised stigma, further reinforced by purist language beliefs.

Relatedly, the extent to which this anxiety manifested was influenced by the speaker's awareness of their audience. Speakers with greater exposure to translanguaging as a legitimate practice were better able to mitigate what has been termed PTA. These dynamics suggest that PTA is not an isolated phenomenon but one that can be applied cross-linguistically, wherever speakers navigate ideologies of linguistic purity, social hierarchies and varying audience expectations.

7.4.2.3 Easing Translanguaging Anxiety

For some participants, the challenging feelings associated with translanguaging from Turkish to English were alleviated when interacting with people who understood them – such as supportive family members, friends or fellow Turkish speakers living in Ireland. In this context, Arzu shared that she tended to censor herself, especially in Türkiye, but felt comfortable translanguaging into English while speaking Turkish with others from Türkiye in Ireland:

I don't experience [translanguaging] much [in Türkiye] [...] because I'm careful. [...] I don't want to unloose it. But I'm more comfortable when I'm talking to my Turkish friends here. [...] Because they are using the same. As we're using it in the course of the life, there are times I talk half-Turkish, half-English. [...] But I try to be a little more careful when talking to my friends in Türkiye. [...] I don't want them to say 'swagger, wannabe.' [...] It's funny [and] ridiculous in Türkiye. But here, it's not. Also, I'm trying to [avoid] out of respect to Turkish. (Arzu, individual interview)

These comments, in sharp contrast to her reactions when Senem utilised translanguaging, as discussed in Section 6.4.1.2, reveal Arzu's preference for using a 'pure' language, despite the comfort and flexibility she experiences when drawing on multiple linguistic resources.

Translanguaging from Turkish to English also created an anxiety. Aylin's occasional relief in translanguaging was rooted in the reaction received from close ones, such as family members. She shared that she enjoyed, even appreciated her translanguaging in English when speaking Turkish with her family. However, as shared above, it was the otherwise when she was interacting with people she did not feel safe with:

[Translanguaging] becomes funny, you know, we laugh about it, we tease each other. When I'm with my family, they actually like it. They say things like, "Well, that's why you went there, good, good, keep forgetting [Turkish]." But when I'm talking with people I'm not so close with and if I forget a word, then it's not pleasant. (Aylin, individual interview, see Appendix E5 for extended excerpt)

Similar to Aylin's relief in translanguaging with people who will understand her, Bahar shared she was okay, even good with translanguaging when friends were around:

On one hand, I'm happy that [translanguaging] happens, but [only] with you or with another friend. (Bahar, individual interview)

To sum up, while translanguaging anxiety constrained participants' bilingual identities, moments of support or witnessing others use translanguaging helped alleviate these pressures, suggesting pathways for relief and negotiation of self.

Having examined bilingual identity as reflected in the interviews, the next section turns to participants' sociocultural and personal identities, as observed in the role plays.

7.5 Sociocultural and Personal Identities

While participants' different types of identities occasionally surfaced in the focus group reflections on the performance and individual interviews, the most significant insights into cultural and collective identities emerged during the role plays.

Across the four workshops, four groups of participants contributed to this study with varying engagement in role plays. The first and second groups successfully created, shared and reflected on their role play experiences. The third group engaged in creating a role play but did not have the opportunity to share it, while the fourth group was unable to create role

plays due to time constraints. In the first workshop, three participants collaborated to create a single role play. In the second workshop, six participants were divided into two smaller groups of three, each developing their own role play. In the third workshop, five participants created one collective story. Consequently, Role Play 1 was produced by the first group; Role Play 2 and Role Play 3 by the second group; Role Play 4 by the third group. These details are also outlined in Section 4.5.2.

While this study initially sought to understand bilingual identity and related emotions, the role plays revealed how social, cultural and personal factors significantly shaped participants' identities. In the social and cultural dimensions, participants drew on meaningful past experiences that influenced their perceptions and decisions regarding others from Türkiye. Their cultural experiences shaped social connections, cultural expectations informed decision-making and perceived failures were experienced as social shortcomings, alongside a persistent search for trust in others. This close intertwining of social and cultural dimensions shows that examining them separately would risk fragmenting participants' lived experiences, as their understanding of themselves and their sense of connection, pride and trust were continuously informed by both cultural roots and social interactions. To capture this complexity, I analyse social and cultural influences in tandem, as well as the interplay of social and personal ones, since these dimensions emerged as inseparable in the data. In contrast, I address existential dilemmas as a distinct personal strand, given their unique orientation toward meaning and being. Together, these layers are examined under the overarching theme *Selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence*, which is elaborated in the following sections.

7.5.1 Theme 6: Selves in Connection, Trust, Pride, Gender and Existence

Through their role plays, the participants expressed significant personal meanings, uncovering aspects of their personal identity and their connections and/or disconnections with others from Türkiye, thereby revealing their cultural identities. The connection was observable also in their pursuit of trust, interestingly not to 'someone' in the story or in their lives, but to the story and storyteller. Furthermore, sometimes existential dilemmas surfaced in their role plays. With this characteristic, the role plays became self-narrative

tools through which participants wove together the personal, cultural, social and political threads of their lives into performative autobiographies (Ellis, 2004).

By engaging in embodied, aesthetic ways of knowing – what Barone and Eisner (2012) identify as central to Arts-based Research – participants moved beyond mere description, entering a space where meaning was simultaneously created and discovered. Their performances did not simply depict fictional scenarios; they revealed intimate self-truths, often through moments of vulnerability, doubt, failure and resistance. This openness resonates with Ellis's (2004) view that sharing personal stories requires vulnerability, inviting emotional exposure and a willingness to confront the self in communal spaces. Such disclosures were intentional, arising from the interplay between the performed narrative and the self, reflecting Pelias's (2016) idea that the purpose of these narrations is not explanation but resonance, enabling participants to move, become aware and connect. In this sense, the role plays functioned as narrative self-portraits: fully fictionalised portrayals grounded in lived truths, with the self functioning as the point of departure for inquiry even when expressed through symbolic characterisations (Leavy, 2020).

During data construction, four role plays were created in three overall participants group. My interpretation of the role plays and reflections led to the identification of Theme (6) *Selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence*. This theme features six subthemes: *connection, trust, pride, gender and existential dilemmas*, leading to three main categories: *Connection, trust, pride and existential dilemmas in sociocultural self; gender and pride in sociocultural and personal self and connection and existential dilemmas in personal self*. These are summarised in figure 7.3 below.

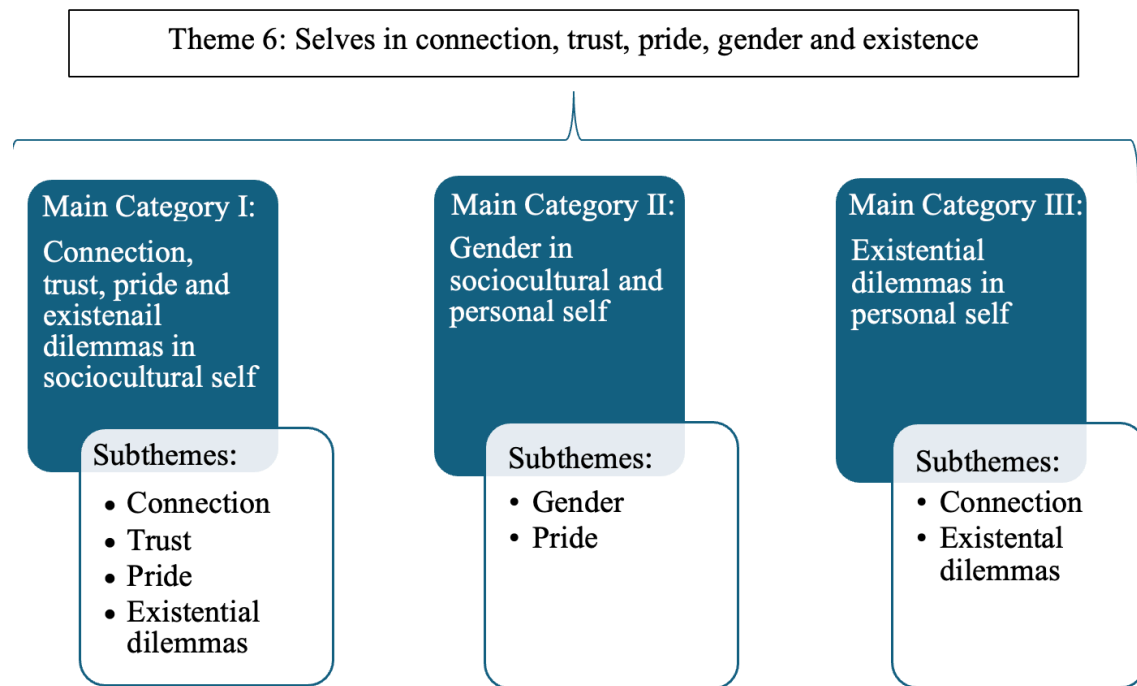


Figure 7.3. *Main categories and subthemes under the main Theme 6*

As the order above indicates, the main categories in sociocultural and personal selves move from relational to existential. This sequence resonates with Erikson's (1968) foundational theory of identity development, which suggests that identity construction begins with the relationship to one's primary caregiver, fostering trust or mistrust, before gradually engaging with deeper questions of purpose and existence in later stages. Similarly, this order aligns with Buckingham's (2008) assertion that identity is first negotiated within social relationships and cultural groups and only later extended into more internalised forms of self-understanding. Furthermore, it reflects Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, in which social relationships and trust correspond to safety and belonging needs, forming the foundational layers, while the search for purpose and meaning occupies the apex, closely intertwined with philosophical and existential inquiry.

Through this approach, this section presents four role plays, respectively, incorporating transcripts from both Focus Groups and individual interviews and discusses them in relation to sociocultural and personal identities, in line with the second sub-question.

7.5.1.1 Role Play 1: Alone and Silent Fish

The first group's role play, in the first post-performance workshop, was semi-structured. The scenario involved them playing fish in the Euphrates River – a famous river in Türkiye that flows through the country, Mesopotamia and several other countries – where they encountered a new fish they had never seen before. The participants were encouraged to develop and complete this scenario in ways they agreed upon together. Both in the role play the participants created and in their final reflections, their identity became visible within their striving for connection. In their role play, Ece and Giray, playing role as two curious fish, encounter a new, unfamiliar fish in their underwater world. Giray warns Ece that the new fish might be a bait set by fishermen, but Ece, eager for new experiences, insists on approaching it. Despite Giray's reservations, Ece swims over to greet the new fish, Jasmin, who recognises Ece from a dream. They briefly discuss friendship and the nature of sea creatures. However, their interaction is cut short when a human appears and captures them. This human was myself, Ebru, upon their assignment of the role to me after creating their role play. The fish are then placed in an aquarium, where their excitement fades into sadness and they never talk again.

In the plot, suspicion and caution, along with curiosity and wonder can be said to be universal themes in the face of meeting someone or something new. Suspicion and caution are evolutionary responses for self-protection under a potential risk brought by a new situation (Neuberg & Cottrell, 2013). Similarly, curiosity and wonder are the emotions that enable humans to learn and discover the world around them, including the social world (Geertz, 1973). On the other hand, the tension between wonder/curiosity and fear represents an existential dilemma. In this study, participants' accounts revealed a fear of making connections due to the possibility of specific harm, such as betrayal, rejection or exploitation. In Heideggerian terms (Heidegger, 1962), this corresponds to *Furcht*, or everyday fear, as distinguished from existential anxiety (*Angst*). Their narratives suggest that identity construction was, at least in part, shaped by this orientation toward everyday fear, highlighting how vulnerability in relational contexts informed their sense of self.

However, when their desire for ‘connection’ became evident in their reflections, maybe more than it was observable in the role play, significance of reflections grew more striking. This aligns with Piazzoli’s (2018) embodied pedagogy, where she suggests that activities that engage mind and body simultaneously should be followed by reflections to elicit deeper responses. In the reflections part, Jasmin conveyed a longing for connection, expressing deep disappointment at the low turnout, with only three participants in the first group. It became clear that she cherished the opportunity to engage in storytelling and workshops offered to Turkish-speaking adults, specifically those from Türkiye and expected others to share her enthusiasm. During the Focus Group, when I asked her to reflect on the role play they had created and their overall experience, Jasmin began her reflection from this point:

For example, in this performance [The Fertile Crescent], I felt that I was actually lonely here, that is, I was lonely as a Turk. It was specifically mentioned that Turkish was spoken and participation was very low. This has made me [feel] a little lonely, alone here. (Jasmin, focus group)

Following her reflections on Turkish traditions and Mesopotamia, Jasmin took her comments back to loneliness, the significance of which was evident:

Mesopotamia [...] the feeling of power... how vast and powerful the land actually comes from... and these are still in our traditions, we continue to do so. But we forget. In fact, we have all the power of Mesopotamia, but we are alone. (Jasmin, focus group)

Perceiving community as a source of strength and power, Jasmin expressed her feelings of loneliness, underscoring the challenges of maintaining a cohesive identity abroad. Jasmin’s reflection also evoked pride as a layered construct, situated at the intersection of history, culture and personal experience. By picturing Mesopotamia as “vast and powerful” and emphasising its continued presence in traditions, she demonstrated a cultural–historical pride rooted in a collective heritage, using ‘we’ – similar to Murat’s and Ahu’s use of ‘we’ and ‘ours’ in their reflections on the *requiem*. At the same time, her remark ‘we forget’ carried a sense of loss, suggesting that collective pride is shadowed by the act of forgetting. The paradox deepens in her statement, “we have all the power of Mesopotamia, but we are alone,” which simultaneously expresses empowerment and disconnection/isolation. This

complexity reveals that pride in Jasmin's account became a tool for sociocultural and personal negotiation. Ece confirmed a perceived sense of loneliness Jasmin uttered:

I can also agree with you in loneliness. (Ece, focus group)

Ece's brief comment on her perceived loneliness, despite being married to a Turkish man, supports Brown's (2021) notion regarding the human search for connection. She felt disconnected from other individuals from Türkiye and this feeling of loneliness underscores the importance of group memberships and belonging – two significant aspects of identity construction. Jasmin continued:

I shared this event with all the Turks I know here. It gave me a very nice feeling. When I talked to you [we talked after I shared the project in the WhatsApp group and invited the members], [learnt] Senem will speak in Turkish from time to time [...] I came. Her hands and arms rose and fell, these are all emotions, frankly. I also think that after migrating here, these feelings must have increased a little more. (Jasmin, focus group)

Referring to Senem's use of Turkish, Ece interjected, expressing her hopes:

So it will be unifying. (Ece, focus group)

Jasmin agreed:

Yes, that's why I thought it would be so crowded... for some reason. (Jasmin, focus group)

Giray then offered his observation:

As far as I have seen, Turks abroad don't like to come together. (Giray, focus group)

Jasmin echoed this sentiment:

Yes, I do not understand that at all either. (Jasmin, focus group)

Ece added a caveat this time:

Let's say it depends on the situation. (Ece, focus group)

Giray laughed at his own comment, then made a more pointed remark and referred to the moments in their role play:

They are avoiding each other because they are like fish in case it turns out bad. (Giray, focus group)

His statement not only highlighted the connection between his role play and his migrant experience and, consequently, his identity but also raised questions about his choice of the word ‘they.’ It is intriguing whether he used ‘they’ to refer to individuals from Türkiye and he did not count himself in or specifically to those who avoid coming together in Ireland. Unfortunately, this question could not be directly addressed due to the absence of an individual interview with Giray. On the other hand, Giray did not appear detached from his Turkish identity; in his Language Portraits (discussed in the previous chapter and depicted in his Language Portrait in Figure 6.21), he embodied the Turkish language as an integral part of his identity, in his whole body as veins, illustrating strong ties. He further commented “Turkish is very important for me,” as shared in Section 6.4.2.3. Since it is hardly possible to isolate culture from language – in other words, it is not logical to suggest that a strong emotional connection to language could exist without a corresponding connection to culture, at least partially – it can be inferred that Giray’s use of ‘they’ referred to those who shunned communal connections, much as he himself was doing, fearing they might be regarded as ‘bad fish’ by ‘them.’ Within these reflections, Giray seemed to be in a place where he sometimes felt *connected*, sometimes disconnected as he refrained and felt afraid. The refrainment appeared to stem from the fear of “a bad fish”, revealing an insecurity and vulnerability.

Likely not hearing Giray’s remarks, as she had much to say, Jasmin criticised:

Why don’t they like getting together? [recording not clear here] We could not create that community. Brazilians stick together, Indians stick together. But Turks, no. (Jasmin, focus group)

This time, Ece clearly disagreed with an attempt to suggest the ratio of the members in the communities could be similar, but as Brazilian and Indian people abroad are higher in number, their communities seem crowded:

If there are ten people, two of them are together, you see those two, but they are very crowded. [not clear] One in five seems few because we are few. (Ece, focus group)

Notably, Ece believed that the pattern of loose connections was not unique to the Turkish community but rather a general phenomenon, as a result of her observations, suggesting the significance she attributes to this issue. In this debate Giray supported Jasmin:

But what she said is true, because there were Turks in the school where I did my doctorate in America and people were grouped together. There were Turks I never talked to and there were Turks I always talked to. (Giray, focus group)

Jasmin continued:

I don't understand. It was like that in Türkiye, too. No, you can't talk to them. But there is no reason... 'Why?' 'They are useless.' It continues here too. (Jasmin, focus group)

With this comment, she drew a connection between Turkish attitudes in Türkiye and Ireland, highlighting their mutual disconnectedness. Moreover, her use of the word 'useless,' in Turkish *yaramaz*, takes this sense of disconnectedness to a more critical level, pointing to the perceived harshly critical tendency within Turkish culture – a tendency that, as discussed in Section 7.4.1.1 of this chapter, also emerges as a source of anxiety in bilingual identity formation. The term 'useless' is further examined in Section 8.2.5.1, where its additional meanings are discussed in relation to the chapter's focus.

At one point during her impassioned reflections, Jasmin revisited the topic of inviting others from Türkiye and reiterated her frustrations:

I wrote messages to at least 15 people [inviting them to the theatre], 10 of them were definitely coming; where are they? (Jasmin, focus group)

Jasmin's disappointment with the lack of interest in the events offered within the context of this study highlighted her strong sociocultural identity and commitment to her heritage, although she is Bulgarian-Turkish. Considering her intentions in joining the research was not to make new connections and she reached out to her personal network to increase the number of audience members and/or participants, her frustrations stemmed from the perceived loose connection among people from Türkiye living in Ireland – not from personal aspirations. Furthermore, her desire to unify the community through the performance, highlighted by her outreach efforts, reflected a deep-rooted need for connection and collective identity, in a place where she was *searching for connection*. While Ece also acknowledged feelings of loneliness, Giray observed the loose connections among adults from Türkiye living in Ireland, but their sentiments did not convey the same level of disappointment that Jasmin experienced.

At this point, Ece revealed her connection to her first language as she expressed a desire to communicate in it:

Well, as I said, there are people from South America in the language centre and when you speak Spanish to them [Portuguese], you feel good. I mean, I wish there was a Turk [there] and I could speak Turkish. It's like this with a Turkish person... It's a completely different thing. (Ece, focus group)

Furthermore, Ece's strong wish to speak Turkish resonates with her quest for social connection, highlighting her commitment to her cultural identity.

Overall Role Play 1 revealed that participants constructed their performances based on significant past experiences, particularly those that have shaped their perceptions and decisions in relation to others from Türkiye. Since identity is deeply intertwined with one's relationships within broader social and cultural groups (Buckingham, 2008), their role play became a window into their evolving sense of self. These performances not only reflected their lived experiences but also unveiled the nuances of their identity formation, particularly relating to meanings made in the subthemes *connection*, *trust*, *pride* and *existential dilemmas* between wonder/curiosity and fear, all in a through their membership or non-membership to a sociocultural group, represented under the main category *Connection, trust, pride and existential dilemmas in sociocultural self*. Meanings similar to these were elicited also in Role Play 2, which is discussed below.

7.5.1.2 Role Play 2: Making it Even

The Role Play 2, by Funda, Damla and Enes, centred on a pivotal moment in the performance, where Senem recounted a personal anecdote. As noted in Section 5.2.2, Senem narrated how she was dismissed from a production by theatre director, Cemal, after leaving her promising career as a scientist – a turning point that left her with frustration, disappointment, shock, self-questioning, betrayal and regret. Despite this challenges, she went on to become a successful theatre performer. Years later, once she had achieved fame, Cemal contacted her again to propose a new collaboration. Yet with the momentum now on her side, Senem refused his offer.

Building on this moment of refusal of Cemal by Senem – with, importantly, its undertone of a sense of accomplishment, rectifying frustration – the participants selected this moment for their role play. Duygu chose to play the actress, Senem, while Enes chose to play the director, Cemal. They enacted a telephone conversation after the long separation. Enes introduces himself as Cemal Joyce – a homage to Irish culture, recalling their previous work together on a musical based on *The Epic of Gilgamesh* that ultimately did not happen due to unfavourable conditions. Although Duygu initially struggles to recognise Enes, in a way belittling him and taking revenge, she eventually reflects on her shared experiences, expressing nostalgia for her past fun times in amateur theatre, in a bittersweet manner. Enes congratulates Duygu on her successful storytelling career and proposes a potential collaboration for a new project in Europe. Duygu responds cautiously, her inner voice telling her to say she is very busy, a way of showing off her importance, a moment of rectifying the initial loss of face. After a brief conversation, she suggests that Enes provide her assistant with the necessary information and she “will get back to him”, which is a sarcastic way of saying she will not, like the Irish expression “I will, yeah” – another moment of rectifying. As they wrap up their conversation, Duygu asks Enes if he has ever seen her performance, an attempt to make the right decision, while Enes responds by finding excuses that he could not.

As they were reflecting on her role play experience, Funda shared:

I associated some things within myself with Senem. That’s why I think it was so impressive. [...] We saw it there, how happy she was when Cemal called her, in fact, her ego was somehow satisfied, there was a human feeling there. (Funda, Focus Group)

Funda’s reflection on Cemal’s call captured a significant aspect of identity construction in the context of rectifying humiliation. Funda identified with Senem’s sense of satisfaction when faced with an opportunity for vindication. This moment reflects a broader human experience where rectifying negative past experiences is deeply intertwined with one’s sense of self-worth. Funda’s observation highlights how the role play mirrors this process, potentially showing how the need for rectification is central to reconstructing one’s identity. That human feeling, of trying to make things fair after an unfair treatment through humiliation, was also critical for Enes, as he shared:

Putting it on the stage and reenacting that scene actually strengthened that feeling [Senem's happiness] a little more. I felt Cemal's embarrassment a little bit [when he was acting]. [...] [Referring to actual performance] she still couldn't fully make peace with the past and he couldn't get over the feeling of not being accepted and when she encountered something like this again, her emotions were relapsed. (Enes, Focus Group)

Duygu confirmed:

I felt that, too... We felt a tension about the incident. [...] We also saw the insistence on demanding status for all these stories, which is also very humane. That growth story is not such a smooth thing. It was authentic in the sense that she showed it. (Duygu, Focus Group)

Duygu's reflections showed that she also found this quest for status very human, revealing her identity constructed through respect and success. Enes reinforced these by saying:

She hasn't gotten over the impact of being once hurt. I think it's better for her to stubbornly continue on his way. (Duygu, Focus Group)

Enes's identity was evoked first by the deep engagement with the narration as he picked or interpreted, subtle nuances, in that Senem still did not get over her rejection and then with the role play as he shared that he really felt Cemal's embarrassment, as a corresponding emotion to Senem's initial embarrassment. Through this experience, he found his own truths in the story and appreciated Senem's stubbornness, underscoring a key aspect of identity construction: the need to remain strong and resilient. Therefore, while commenting on Senem's story, Enes revealed that he saw success and self-assertion as crucial for fully reclaiming identity and rectify the previous injustices faced.

While the role play itself portrayed a simulated confrontation and reconciliation, going beyond the scene Senem created in taking the revenge from Cemal, the reflections of Funda, Enes and Duygu offered deeper insights into how these elements manifested in her interactions and personal experiences. In the role play, the group added the scenes that Senem saying she was very busy, suggesting he connect to her assistant and her sarcasm in saying she will call him, showcasing their strong desire to take revenge and 'become even'. But even in her pursuit of retribution, the performed Senem sought to remain fair by asking whether he had ever seen her performances. This question carried not only the weight of restoring dignity but also an undertone of seeking trust – a longing to believe that he

genuinely respected her achievements, rather than approaching her merely to capitalise on her later success, which also carried a broader social meaning.

Together, in Role Play 2, pride emerged as a multilayered force shaping identity. On a personal level, new portrayal of Senem demonstrated pride in resilience and success, showing how she had turned an early moment of humiliation into a source of self-assertion. This was not merely about revenge but about reclaiming dignity and affirming her worth. On a social level, her refusal of Cemal's proposal highlighted pride as a means of renegotiating status within relationships: once dismissed and undervalued, she now held the upper hand, using subtle irony and sarcasm to signal her regained status. In cultures with collectivist tendencies, such as Turkish culture, failures often carry heightened social weight, which suggests that the significance of this moment for the participants may have been deeply rooted in cultural meanings. Taken together, these layers indicate that pride is not a singular emotion but a sociocultural and personal construct shaped by lived experiences, relationships, status, success and cultural interpretations – ultimately allowing the participants to reconfigure earlier vulnerabilities into renewed strength. Additionally, a closer examination of this nuance in the role play reveals an attempt to extend trust to Cemal once more, highlighting how the participants' social and personal selves were constructed around the pursuit of trust, suggesting a desire to reconnect with a past significant figure. Furthermore, reframing Cemal as "Cemal Joyce" they weaved Irish cultural references into the scene created a playful intermingling of cultural contexts, showing that they were connected not only to Turkish roots but also to Irish heritage. Within these observations, Funda, Enes and Duygu appeared to construct their sociocultural and personal identities around pride, trust and connection. These dynamics were captured under the main category *Connection, trust, pride and existential dilemmas in sociocultural self*, with evidence pointing to the subthemes of *connection, trust* and *pride*, within the broader theme *Selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence*.

As a result, in Role Plays 1 and Role Play2, the subthemes *connection, trust* and *pride* became particularly observable, while *existential dilemmas* were additionally observed in role play 1, which became pivotal in the Role Play 3, as discussed in the following section.

7.5.1.3 Role Play 3: *Not Waiting for Godot*

This role play draws inspiration from Samuel Beckett's (1954) *Waiting for Godot*, based on Ahu's suggestion, where two characters sit on a bench waiting for Godot, whom they believe will bring hope and meaning to their lives. They wait for Godot, who never arrives, remaining in a state of utter passivity. *Waiting for Godot* is a masterpiece of existential literature, illustrating the human attempts to find meaning, the futile efforts to seek purpose in external circumstances and the absurdity of existence. Ahu referenced and Damla and Ferit agreed on linking *Waiting for Godot* with a particular moment in *The Fertile Crescent* scene, where Senem faced a critical choice between pursuing a career as an artist or a scientist in the United States, similar to Role Play 2 discussed in the previous section. This career shift, from academia to performance, reflects a profoundly existential theme. By leaving a stable, socially recognised role to pursue theatre, she embraced the challenge of aligning her life with personal passions rather than external expectations. This decision embodies both freedom and the anxiety of the unknown, reflecting a core existential dilemma. From an existential perspective, humans are fundamentally free to make choices, yet this freedom carries the responsibility of living authentically. In leaving a stable academic career for the uncertainties of theatre, Senem confronts profound ambiguity, embraces risk and actively shapes meaning in her life through her own actions rather than following prescribed paths. Later in the performance, Senem shared that she was dismissed from the theatre after choosing the path of a performing artist over that of a scientist, suggesting a sense of doubt or potential remorse over her decision. Upon agreeing that the scene affected them all, as a group, the participants created a role play around these moments.

Role Play 3 depicted Senem's initial decision-making, portraying her as torn between two conflicting inner voices. During the role play, it became clear that they valued the act of making a difficult decision itself, rather than the outcome – an interpretation that contrasts with the themes in *Waiting for Godot*. This scene perfectly aligns with the existential themes in *Waiting for Godot*, as existential dilemmas often relate to the opportunities encountered throughout life, whether in professional or familial contexts (Senkevich,

2016). Furthermore, both Senem's moment and the role play greatly echo Greene's (1973) emphasis on existentialism where she argues that everything is possible and nothing is guaranteed, however, people, by taking risks, are capable of creating their own realities (Greene, 1988). In this scenario, the three participants gave voice to Senem's inner conflicts, with Ferit portraying an inner voice in the third-person narration that insists Senem should choose her path as an artist. In contrast, Damla represented another conflicting inner voice, also in the third-person narration, urging Senem to pursue her promising career as a scientist. At the end of these discussions, Ahu takes the stage as a referee, navigating these divergent viewpoints.

Damla, speaking as the voice supporting the scientist Senem, emphasised that Senem had always been academically successful, with the potential to become a renowned scientist whose work could gain wide recognition. In these attempts to close the door for a career as a performing artist, Damla used the word "*artiz*" – a distorted form of the Turkish cognate '*artist*' for '*actress*' – specifically uttering "*Artiz olup napcaksın?*" which translates verbatim as "What will you do with being an artist?" In authentic usage, however, this phrase is an idiom from the 1980s generation, employed by parents to discourage children from pursuing theatre or film, carrying a devaluing tone toward the profession. This cultural framing was particularly salient for women at the time, as parents typically preferred their children to pursue careers as doctors or engineers, making acting a highly criticised and often socially constrained choice. Viewed through this lens, the utterance signals not only an existential tension around career and life choices but also highlights the gendered pressures that shaped participants' critical moments in Role Play 3. It thus exemplifies how cultural norms, gender expectations and existential dilemmas intersect in participants' negotiation of their sociocultural and personal selves. On the other hand, Ferit, representing the voice cheering for artist Senem, advocated for taking a risk by pursuing a career in acting, emphasising that this path would allow Senem to feel more alive and fulfilled, even if it meant facing failure. The debate was filled with contrasting perspectives: the scientist was cautious, focused on certainty and success, while the artist was driven by passion, urging Senem to be brave and embrace the possibility of failure. Ahu then entered as a character resembling Godot, observing the ongoing conflict. She pointed out that the two

sides of Senem were stuck in a perpetual cycle of blame and indecision, preventing any real progress. She suggested that, instead of remaining paralysed by indecision, it was better to embrace the freedom to experiment, make mistakes and learn from them. This, she argued, was the way to move forward in life, rather than remaining stuck in the same place, waiting for something external to resolve the internal conflict.

In the group's reflections, it became evident that they chose to create a role play around this moment because they found profound connections between themselves and the moment. In a sense, Senem's brave sharing of her vulnerabilities opened a door for the other participants to do the same. Damla reflected:

I identified myself with Senem a lot because I took drama lessons in primary school. I also attended theatre festival in secondary school. And our plays received six awards at the Ankara Theatre Festival and I wanted like to be an actress. Unfortunately, such a thing was not possible for me and I think I did not have a strong character. (Damla, Focus Group)

Damla's reflection revealed her continuing struggle with a challenge in identity, potentially with shame and guilt, particularly with the use of "I don't have a strong character", created by not making her own decisions for her future, leading to unfulfilled desires. Her connection with Senem, who faces a similar crossroads, once again brought the existential dilemma of choosing between paths that could define one's identity. Damla's reflections align with existentialism, as she bravely showed that her identity was constructed by the choices she made or did not make and the search for the meaning of life in aspirations. As existential psychology suggests, her identity was a combination of past ambitions, perceived failures and vulnerability to the manipulation of others (Senkevich, 2016).

Likewise, the moment resonated deeply with Ahu, as she shared:

I wanted to relate [Waiting for Godot] with Senem. [She is] taking action, because it reminded me of this. Because we can choose to take off our shoes instead of blaming our shoes [referring to the scenes in Waiting for Godot]. If we take off our shoes, we may stumble on the path we walk on, but it does not become a part of what we do not want and we do not blame it when we try to take it off. At least we can add some rationality. That's why I associated it so much with Senem's decision-making scene. (Ahu, Focus Group)

Ahu's metaphor of 'taking off one's shoes instead of blaming the shoes' underscores the existentialist view of identity as dynamic and continually shaped through action. Her reflections suggest that identity emerges not through passive acceptance but through active engagement with life's opportunities, including the freedom to make decisions, to fail and to learn from those failures. In this sense, Ahu emphasises self-compassion in moments of falling short, framing mistakes as integral rather than detrimental to identity formation. Her role as a 'referee' further illustrates her pursuit of justice, reflecting a shared effort to move beyond inadequacy toward a more just and fair existence.

Ferit also found some personal meaning in the scene they focused on their role play. In the interview, he stated:

What I played was actually the re-emergence of a question that I had left behind a long time ago and that was the question I was asking a lot when I was graduating from university. I am a software developer and a computer engineer, by the way. But I mean, I didn't want to work. But I had no idea what would happen. I was in such a romantic mood or something. [...] Such a thing is a person's responsibility, how much of his life you can change, how much you can't change. There is that part too because you have limits. But you also have those limits, [not clear]. There's something about you that affects and is affected at the same time. (Ferit, Focus Group)

Ferit's reflection, too, linked their role play to his personal experience, particularly the existential question of responsibility and agency in shaping one's life. His recollection of the uncertainty he faced upon graduating and his reluctance to conform to societal expectations, while not being fully happy about it, revealed by the critical tone in 'romantic mood' echoes the existentialist struggle between freedom and responsibilities (Reynolds, 2021). The existential struggle was also evident in the opening of his reflections, as he acknowledged that period predominated by an existential question, also hinting at the dynamic nature of identity: how it is both shaped by and shaped the decisions we make, in other words our agency. His experience with the role play allowed him to revisit these questions, reinforcing the idea that identity is not static but is continually evolving as we confront life's challenges and choices, particularly in a place where he did not meet the society's expectations, to embrace freedom.

As a result, in Role Play 3 and the accompanying reflections, Damla, Ahu and Ferit appeared to grapple with existential dilemmas during critical moments of decision-making – whether to move or remain, to take risks or avoid them, to embrace freedom or retreat from it. In engaging with Senem’s experiences, these participants also reconnected with themselves, identifying with her pivotal moments and allowing their own hidden emotions to surface, effectively holding up a mirror to their personal struggles and reflections. This also manifests a connection, to the self this time, as “true belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to [ourselves] so deeply that [we] can share [our] most authentic self with the world” (Brown, 2021, p. 433). With these observations, Damla, Ahu and Ferit appeared to engage with existential dilemmas in shaping their personal selves. This led to the construction of the main category *connection and existential dilemmas in personal self*, which represented the subtheme *existential dilemmas* under the overarching theme *Selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence*.

7.5.1.4 Role Play 4: Not Trusting Him

Echoing the second and third role plays, in the fourth role play, identities were reshaped around insecurities and sought to rectify a moment when the Goddess Inanna fell short. In their scenario, Arzu, Filiz, Duru, Serap and Müge focused on the moment when Gilgamesh was striving to find the plant of immortality, intending to give it to his beloved friend who was dying. However, in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh begins his search for immortality after losing Enkidu, who had been like a brother to him. His quest is driven by fear of the inevitable end, with no intention of sharing the plant with his society or anyone else. Despite this misunderstanding, the third group revealed how their identities were shaped by insecurities and a quest for justice.

Due to time constraints, this group could not perform the role play they had created but instead narrated their scenario. In their adapted version of the story, Gilgamesh kept the plant of immortality, which was eaten by a snake in the original epic, until he was on his deathbed, rather than giving it to anyone, as they believed the story suggested. In their retelling, Gilgamesh was not the only one playing tricks. Uta-napishti, who had aided him in finding the plant, introduced an unexpected twist: the plant granted youth, but at the cost

of one of a person's blessings. Although the group had not settled on all the details by the time we had to leave, the essence of their story was already taking shape.

As they reflected on their scenario, another critical point became observable, as they were engaging in a critical evaluation of the original narrative. They critically examined Gilgamesh's supposed good intentions in the final moments of the epic, highlighting how he is often depicted with malevolent qualities in the myth – such as acting as a merciless tyrant and destroying a sacred forest out of ego, at least from a contemporary perspective. They identified what they saw as inconsistencies, characterising Gilgamesh as “sneaky,” “bad,” “disgraceful,” and “greedy” – someone insatiable and unlikely to commit a selfless act. The group crafted a new narrative that reinterpreted his apparent goodwill as a hidden agenda, exposing his underlying destructive nature and ultimately forcing him to confront the consequences of his actions. This part of their reflections exposed their underlying quest for consistency in storytelling. In a sense, they wanted to trust in the honesty of the storyteller, not necessarily Senem and waited consistency, as Müge, who was the spokesperson, said:

And as Senem always tells us that he is this greedy, he is that greedy, he is this ambitious, he is that bad, we believed it. (Müge, focus group)

The group's strong desire for fairness surfaced again in another part of their scenario. After Gilgamesh becomes young but loses one of his strengths, the Goddess Inanna, who had initially proposed to him, teasingly remarks, “See what happened now? Look what happened”. This addition to the story highlighted their attempt to rectify moments they felt were lacking in the original narrative. Given the significance they placed on this incident, it likely held deep meaning for them. Notably, all members of this group were women and they created their role play as a unified group of five. This might explain why the powerful figure of Goddess Inanna resonated with their sense of pride as women. Despite Gilgamesh's strength and beauty, he remains a flawed human who, in their eyes, acted unjustly by rejecting a Goddess – a proposal that should have been an honour for him. Gilgamesh's unfairness extended beyond Inanna to the Gods, the forest and its trees, his society and nearly everything around him. Yet, the moment the group chose to correct was Inanna's rejection. This choice suggests that the group's gender identity played a crucial

role in their narrative decisions. As five strong women who had moved to Ireland, a life-changing decision requiring immense strength and resilience, their womanhood was likely stirred by Inanna's humiliation and revealed through their role play.

This plot and reflections revealed a strong existential undertone, centred on the search for justice, fairness and consistency in human action. The desire for narrative consistency and fairness can be read as a broader existential concern with trust: trust in stories and in the very possibility of meaning. In this sense, the meaning of trust in Role Play 4 differed from that in Role Play 1. While Role Play 1 centred on interpersonal trust – relying on or reconnecting with another person – Role Play 4 sought trust in the coherence of the story itself, making the concern more existential. At the same time, the group's adaptation of the myth through the voice of Inanna highlighted their gender identity, seemingly resonating with their own lived experiences as women who had faced the risks of migration and the challenges of reconstructing life abroad, while they were looking for consistency and trust in their relationships. In this perspective, gender intertwined with both their sociocultural and personal meanings. This performance thus wove together multiple layers of identity, represented in the main categories *gender in sociocultural and personal self* and *existential dilemmas in personal self*. These categories encompassed the subthemes of *gender* and *existential dilemmas*, situated under the broader theme *selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence*.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I addressed the second sub-question of the study. First, I presented a poem, *From Silenced Selves to Existence* to encapsulate the three themes: (4) *Fractured selves in English speech*, (5) *Bilingual voices under pressure* and (6) *Selves in connection, trust, pride, gender and existence*. Then I delved into each theme by first discussing oral fluency and accent anxiety and the ways they were eased. Then I examined translanguaging anxiety, coining a new term *Plaza Turkish Anxiety*, followed by a discussion on easing translanguaging anxiety. Finally, I discussed the role plays where I noted evidence of sociocultural and personal identities, observed to be constructed through *connection, trust, pride, gender and existential dilemmas*. In the next chapter, I shift the focus of identity

exploration to the performing artist's identity as a response to the third and final sub-question of the study.

Chapter Eight: Professional Artist Identity

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I address the third sub-question posed in the study: “How does *The Fertile Crescent*’s storyteller-artist construct her identity through her performances?” I introduce my use of the term *Professional Artist Identity* (PAI), at the core of Theme 7, beginning with a brief review of relevant literature. To articulate this concept more vividly, I present metaphor *Lotus of the atom, atom of the lotus*, which is connected to Theme 7, as a way of understanding the multilayered nature of Senem’s identity. I then outline the categories constructed from the data, and present the poem *Me, Unveiled*, which captures the essence of these findings through poetic expression. This leads into a detailed analysis and interpretation of the interview data with Senem, where I explore PAI with its dynamic interplay with *sociocultural identity*, *personal identity* and *bilingual identity*.

Tablet VII of *the Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000) marks a profound turning point in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. After the death of his closest friend Enkidu, Gilgamesh is overwhelmed by grief. His sorrow is raw and visible – he weeps openly and refuses to bury Enkidu’s body, struggling to accept the reality of death. This moment forces Gilgamesh to face his own mortality in a way he never has before. Beyond his personal grief, Gilgamesh arranges elaborate funeral rituals, offering sacrifices to the gods of the underworld in hopes that Enkidu’s spirit will find peace. Gilgamesh also commissions a statue to memorialise Enkidu, a lasting tribute meant to preserve his friend’s memory against the eroding passage of time. The tablet includes formal laments, expressions of communal mourning that recognize the fragility of life and the pain of loss shared by the community. Overall, the tablet shifts the focus of the epic from heroic deeds to the deeper themes of friendship, mortality and the human condition. Gilgamesh’s confrontation with death begins his journey toward understanding life’s limits and seeking meaning beyond his previous quests for glory.

Similarly, this chapter marks a profound shift from external descriptions to an intimate exploration of identity. Just as Gilgamesh mourns and seeks meaning in loss, Senem, the storyteller-artist, navigates her PAI through layered performances that both reveal and construct her sense of self. The metaphor *Lotus of the atom, atom of the lotus* echoes Gilgamesh's journey – highlighting the complexity, fragility and depth of identity as it unfolds. The poem *Me, Unveiled* serves as a ritualistic expression, much like Gilgamesh's funeral rites, capturing the emotional core of this identity work, sometimes with reiterated expression. The chapter's detailed analysis, like Gilgamesh's existential reflection, uncovers the dynamic relationship between artistic practice and identity, revealing how identity is an evolving, performative process deeply rooted in sociocultural, personal and linguistic memory.

8.2 Professional Artist Identity

I arrived at the concept of Professional Artist Identity (PAI) through an exploration of Senem's identity as a professional storyteller, viewed through the lens of her bilingualism. While reviewing the literature to establish a definition of PAI for this research, I observed that studies frequently treat professional identity and artist identity as separate constructs. Notably, much of the research has worked with professionals who integrate arts into their daily practices, such as arts educators (Hatfield et al., 2006; MacDonald & Moss, 2014), arts therapists (Akmane & Mārtinsone, 2016; Cota et al., 2022), art therapy students (Jue & Ha, 2018; 2021), teaching artists (Anderson et al., 2013; Cutcliffe et al., 2024) and artists who involuntarily changed their careers (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016).

The main focus of these inquiries seems to be exploring the reciprocal influence of professional and artist identities (MacDonald & Moss, 2014), examining the impact of arts practices on professional growth (Jue & Ha, 2021), understanding the consequences of involuntary career shifts on artists' professional identities (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016), comparing professional identity in different groups (Jue & Ha, 2018), investigating the professional experiences of teaching artists (Anderson et al., 2013; Hatfield et al., 2006), exploring the development of professional identity in art therapists (Akmane & Mārtinsone,

2016) and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on artists, with attention to online teaching and identity (Cutcliffe et al., 2024) as well as to wellbeing (Lindsey et al., 2021).

Yet, beyond the general challenges of defining PAI, the term *professional artist* itself remains contested and lacks a universal consensus. In Ireland, the Arts Council defines a professional artist as “an individual who identifies themselves and is recognised by their peers, as a practising professional artist” (Arts Council of Ireland, 2024). This definition highlights that earning a primary income from art is not required and that self-recognition, as well as recognition by peers, is central. Similarly, the Canada Council for the Arts emphasises peer recognition while adding criteria such as specialised training, commitment to devoting time to artistic activity and a history of public presentation or publication, defining a professional artist as one who possesses “specialised training in the artistic field”, is “recognised as a professional by their peers”, is “committed to devoting more time to artistic activity, if financially possible”, and has “a history of public presentation or publication” (Canada Council for the Arts, n.d.). Together, these definitions underline that professionalism in art is determined by both self and peer recognition within the artistic community and active engagement with artistic practice, rather than solely by financial remuneration. Aligned with these, Ždanovič’s (2021) thorough review shows that a professional artist can be broadly understood as someone whose creative practice forms a central part of their identity and livelihood, though definitions vary across income, education, peer recognition and self-identification.

Recognising these nuanced perspectives and to avoid potential confusion, I find it necessary to clarify my own understanding of the term. In the following section, I outline how I use PAI in this research.

8.2.1 My Use of the Term Professional Artist Identity

Informed by the nuances discussed in the previous section, I proceed to clarify my use of Professional Artist Identity (PAI) in this thesis. Before defining PAI, though, it is necessary to explain my use of the term *professional artist*, to establish a clear link to the PAI concept.

Beyond the variety of definitions for a professional artist, the notion of *artist* itself requires unpacking. As Ždanovič (2021) notes, “[...] the definitions of an artist remain vague and context-dependent” (p. 48). Examining the lexicon in more depth suggests that beginning the discussion with the concept of art can be beneficial. In this section, I start with my understanding of art and the artist, move to the notion of the professional artist and ultimately arrive at my definition of PAI.

In the contemporary world, almost any activity involving creativity – whether problem-solving in teaching, parenthood or entrepreneurship – can be described as an art. Beyond this broader public understanding, there are also established fields officially recognised as arts, such as martial arts or culinary arts. In this regard, Bain’s (2005) definition highly informs this research. She uses the term *fine arts* in her definition of a professional artist, proposing a broad understanding that encompasses individuals who: earn their living through artistic practice, hold a diploma in fine arts, teach at an art school, exhibit their work regularly or are recognised as artists by other professional artists. By extension, this could be carried forth to the arts, such as Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music, Dance, Poetry, Literature and Film. However, this definition still requires unpacking, particularly regarding what constitutes artistic practice.

For instance, holding a diploma alone is unlikely to be a sufficient condition for being identified as a professional artist, since creativity is a skill (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and all skills can diminish if not exercised (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Additionally, not all academic staff in art schools teach practical art; they may also instruct in theoretical modules, such as art history or research methods. Moreover, professional artists often need to work in other occupations, as earning a living solely through art-making can be challenging (Menger, 1999). Recognition by peers is important, yet self-identification as an artist may hold even greater significance (Wright, 2010). Both self-identification and at least partial income from art-making are crucial: self-identification fosters an artistic identity (Crossley, 2000), while income enables ongoing production and public recognition (Menger, 1999; Throsby, 2001). These factors can thus be considered necessary, though not sufficient, conditions for being identified as a professional artist. Based on these

considerations, a slightly refined definition of *professional artist*: a professional artist is anyone who self-identifies as an artist and earns at least part of their living through artistic practice in one of the seven arts, either by teaching an art-related subject or selling their artwork, while also being recognised as an artist by other professional artists.

Aligned with this definition and informed by the findings of this research , which are discussed in detail in the unfolding sections, herein I use PAI to denote an artist's perception of themselves – an individual who considers themselves an artist and earns at least a partial livelihood through arts practice, through teaching or commercialising their artwork, with recognition from other professional artists – in terms of values, beliefs, skills and competencies related to their professional artistic practices. Within this broad, yet clearly established understanding, PAI can intersect with other aspects of identity – what Crenshaw (2013) terms intersectional identities – such as sexual/gender identity, religious identity and so on. This approach thus merges the notion of professional identity with Erikson's (1959) broader conceptualisation of identity, situating it specifically within the context of artistic practice.

8.2.2 Senem's Professional Artist Identity

In the data interpretation, I observed that the construction of Professional Artist Identity (PAI) revolved across three categories: sociocultural identity, personal identity and bilingual identity. The data interpretation unveiled an interplay among these three categories, actively contributing to the formation of what I have termed PAI. To make sense of PAI, I use a metaphor borrowing from physics, specifically quantum mechanics – a fitting choice, considering Senem's career shift from the hard sciences to performing arts, described in 5.2.2, directly informs her identity. I chose to use the atoms, likening the harmonious interplay of sociocultural, personal and bilingual identities to the orbital dance of electrons around a nucleus, where interactions create a magnetic field. This analogy captured the dynamic nature of identities, akin to electrons in motion, encountering challenges and adapting to maintain momentum.

The nucleus symbolises PAI, influenced by Senem's background in science and engineering, while the orbiting identities, like electrons, resonate and interact with various categories, shaping the overall dynamic. However, the atom, in its essence, is cold, mechanical, predictable and devoid of emotional stimulation, presenting a stark contrast to the arts. As a result, it cannot adequately symbolise either Senem's love for the arts or the underpinnings of this research. Consequently, I chose to transform it into a lotus flower, which embodies renewal, resilience, creativity, spirituality and fertility – qualities that resonate with the elements of Senem's journey marked by new beginnings, perseverance in the face of challenges, the establishment of a storytelling centre and a unique performance, *The Fertile Crescent: Tales from the Orient*.

Yet, Senem continues to identify with her scientific background, describing herself on her webpage as: "A doctor who practices the art of storytelling as an embodied experience. In my offerings, I guide you to explore the colourful world of stories, to understand their different energies and absorb their medicinal qualities" (Donatan Mohan, n.d.). In her self-definition, Senem embodies both the *Lotus of the atom*, representing how the beauty and qualities of the lotus emerge from the fundamental scientific aspects of the atom and the *Atom of the lotus*, which illustrates that beneath the surface beauty of the lotus flower lies an essential, scientific truth. At the end, Senem's PAI is neither solely an atom nor merely a flower, but a synthesis of both – reflecting the fluid, meaningful and beautiful interplay of her multiple identities. These concepts intertwine seamlessly, as visualised in Figure 8.1 below.

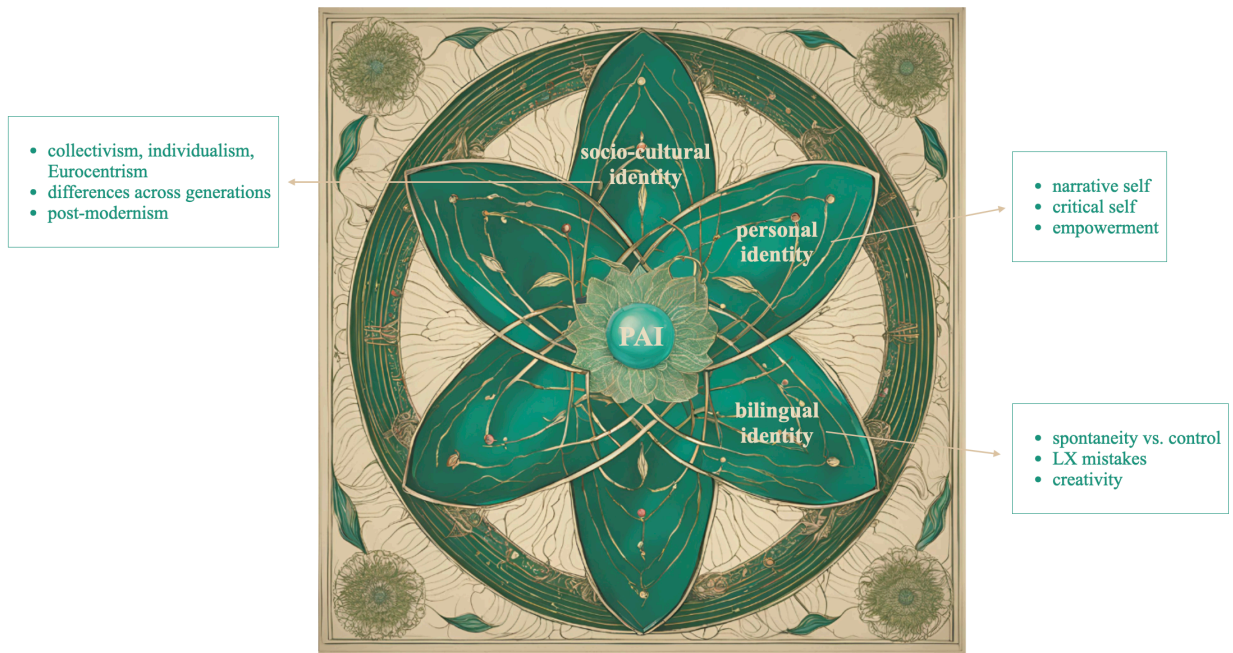


Figure 8.1. *Main categories and subthemes in PAI, as an atom and lotus flower.*

As depicted in Figure 8.1, PAI emerged through the dynamic interaction of sociocultural, personal and bilingual identities, all of which influenced one another, beautifully, in an artistic context. I sought to represent this fluidity using a colour that combines turquoise and green, by using the Canva software. I chose to blend the colours together instead of using distinctly different ones to create a more harmonious and integrated representation. This decision reflects the interconnectedness of identities and emphasises their fluidity. Additionally, I incorporated shades to illustrate the flux within these identities. The word *turquoise* comes from the French *turquois*, meaning Turkish, because the gemstone was historically brought to Europe via Türkiye, though it originated in Persia. In Turkish culture, turquoise has long been associated with protection, creativity and spiritual depth, often seen in Ottoman art and architecture. Green, on the other hand, symbolises Ireland, the *Emerald Isle*, evoking the lush, vibrant landscape and significance of growth and renewal. The merging of turquoise and green reflects Senem's continuous negotiation between these two landscapes, capturing the fluidity of Senem's bilingual identity as her identity draws on both Turkish and Irish influences.

Furthermore, the background of the illustration reflects the ancient history of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, alongside Senem's connection to the ancient cultures of Anatolia. Holding these meanings, metaphor *Lotus of the atom, atom of the lotus* emerges as a powerful aesthetic representation of Senem's multiple identities influencing her PAI, becoming the overarching theme, capturing the interplay between her personal journey, performances, roots and bilingual self.

In the sections that follow, I explore the elements embedded within this metaphor, tracing how Senem constructs and negotiates her PAI across the shifting spaces of the sociocultural, the personal and the bilingual.

8.2.3 Theme 7: *Lotus of the Atom, Atom of the Lotus*

The overarching theme observed in Senem's data is *Lotus of the atom, atom of the lotus*, referring to Senem's Professional Artist Identity (PAI), negotiated across selves, reflecting how the artist's professional self is continuously shaped and reshaped through sociocultural, personal and linguistic experiences. Within this broad theme, three main categories capture the key dimensions of Senem's identity construction.

The first category, *sociocultural identity*, highlights how collectivist and individualist norms, Eurocentric discourse, post-modernist perspectives and generational differences influence Senem's professional practices and self-perception. The second main category, *personal identity*, emphasises the interplay of narrative self, critical self and empowerment in shaping her professional persona. The third main category, *bilingual identity*, illustrates how additional language (LX) use, including the tension between spontaneity and control, the perception of LX mistakes and feelings of creativity, mediates Senem's professional expression. These nuances are delineated into subthemes, which provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the negotiation of PAI. The subthemes are as in the following:

- Collectivism, individualism, Eurocentrism;
- Post-modernism;

- Differences across generations;
- Narrative self;
- Critical self;
- Empowerment;
- Spontaneity vs. control;
- LX mistakes;
- Creativity.

As noted in the previous paragraph, the first three subthemes – collectivism, individualism and Eurocentrism; post-modernism; differences across generations – were observed in the interplay between *sociocultural identity* and PAI. The next three – narrative self; critical self; empowerment – were interpreted to be influential in *personal identity* and on PAI. The final three subthemes – spontaneity vs. control; LX mistakes; creativity – were identified through the relationship between *bilingual identity* and PAI. Together, these subthemes illuminate the nuanced ways in which PAI is negotiated across sociocultural, personal and linguistic selves, becoming the main categories, as summarised in Table 8.1 below.

Table 8.1. *Subthemes and main categories in PAI* (PAI: Professional Artist Identity, LX: additional language)

Lotus of the Atom, Atom of the Lotus (PAI, Negotiated across Contexts Subthemes)			
Main Category I: Sociocultural identity in PAI	collectivism, individualism, Eurocentrism	post-modernism	differences across generations
Main Category II: Personal identity in PAI	narrative self	critical self	empowerment
Main Category III: Bilingual identity in PAI	spontaneity vs. control	LX mistakes	creativity

Before proceeding with the detailed discussion of the negation across these notions in PAI, below I present the final research poem, *Me, Unveiled*, to express my findings through poetic mode.

8.2.4 Poem 3: *Me, Unveiled*

[Can you see what sometimes casting over my story?]
[Once my voice lost,] I complied with my tutor. Here, I proudly refused.
The younger generation today, difficulty in telling the children,
once *hikayeler* [never ended].
European in the family, pride from Anatolia – not from the “Middle East!”
[When not] stereotyped, here [my self] expressed, respected and loved.

Telling a story from your own life, created with your bias.
Other eyes, a mirror. Your tragedy becomes comedy, you [are] free.
Telling a story, I blathered, criticised myself, [feeling bad].
Perfectionism, inherited. Don’t mind now.
Mind the stories, beings, the word’s power touching our souls
I tell with respect and love.

Playing in the familiar fields. Improvise, rhyme. Then lost in my own chatty talk.
[In the less familiar], what if I can’t finish? All parts memorised,
[no games] in the playfields I like. Yet it keeps me in structure, in form -
never lost. But sometimes confused, the linguist noted, I correct in the next.
We don’t make the sentences like [they] make. Yet provide a perspective,
[create].

I crafted this poem by combining Senem’s original expressions with my additions, illustrated in brackets. The stanzas of the poem stands for the first, second and third main categories and their respective subthemes. These will be examined in the unfolding sections.

8.2.5 Sociocultural Identity in PAI

Senem's reflections revealed how Professional Artist Identity (PAI) was continuously shaped and negotiated through sociocultural influences. The sociocultural contexts of Türkiye and Ireland created contrasting meanings for her professional self, particularly through the tension or harmony she found in collectivist and individualist orientations in each country, as observed in her anecdotes. Elements of her family culture, which she defines "European", also contributed to this shaping, adding another dimension to how she understood and performed her identity as an artist. At the same time, discourse differences between Türkiye and Ireland entered into her PAI, especially when she perceived stereotyping through Eurocentric interpretations of her work. Beyond these immediate sociocultural contexts, Senem's reflections on her relationship with nature and with her body pointed to a post-modern orientation, which offered her ways of resisting fixed categories in the societies. These experiences generated a form of resistance that became integral to her artistic self. Finally, generational differences within her audience also played a role, as Senem's observations of younger and older audience members revealed shifting receptions of her performances, further influencing the development of her PAI. As a result, Senem's PAI was constructed with the influence of her *sociocultural identity*, through the subthemes individualism, collectivism and Eurocentrism, post-modernism and differences across generations, which are discussed separately in the following sections.

8.2.5.1 Individualism, Collectivism and Eurocentrism

Senem's reflections unveil intriguing dynamics, especially when these are framed within Hofstede's (2011) classification of cultures as individualist and collectivist. Before using these classifications to elucidate my findings, I wish to clarify that I am not approaching these terms from a Eurocentric standpoint, rather I am using them primarily because Senem directly drew upon individualist (sometimes Western and European) cultural influences. By using them I aim to illuminate prevalent tendencies, expectations and perceptions within specific social groups and hierarchies. I also find it necessary to articulate my position here. As a researcher from Türkiye, I appreciate many aspects of collectivism, yet I am critical

about some of its echoes in the culture; I take pride in fostering strong in-group bonds, provided they do not lead to undue pressure.

Similarly, I have reservations about certain aspects of individualism, such as the loneliness its extreme forms trigger. In this sense, recognising and navigating societal expectations, as well as understanding the reciprocal expectations between individuals and society, rather than encouraging high levels of individualism is crucial for well-being (Masten, 2025). Acknowledging the impact of family dynamics on shaping individualist and collectivist tendencies (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2014), recognising the diversity within a country's culture (Fatehi et al., 2020) and also drawing from my master's thesis where I extended my discussion on the specific group's potential reasons for exhibiting more individualist tendencies in the same society (Boynueğri, 2018a), my categorisations aim neither to reflect a potentially offensive Western perspective by idealising individualist cultures and stigmatising collectivist ones (2011), nor to generalise all individuals or groups within a country to the same context. Instead, I utilise individualist and collectivist notions when evidence directly relates to these dimensions in Senem's reflections or in her direct usage. Having clarified these, I proceed to analyse different context that influenced Senem's professional identity.

The collectivist culture prevailing in Senem's environment in Türkiye brought both advantages and disadvantages, although the former seemed very minor. With regards to the advantages of this collectivist culture, Senem expressed her confidence and success in engaging the young audience during storytelling performances for children in Türkiye, but she encountered difficulties in replicating this success in Ireland. While she did not explicitly pinpoint the source of the difference, collectivist cultures typically emphasise respect for hierarchical figures (Mugadza et al., 2019) and there exists a hierarchy between the artist and the audience (Moten, 2017). Additionally, in Turkish culture, children are generally expected to be quiet (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). For example, in the Turkish language, the term *yaramaz* is commonly used to describe children who are not very obedient, often being mischievous. It can be a synonym for a misbehaving child, but examining its syntax, it means 'useless'. In Turkish, the verb *yaramak* means to be useful, *yarar* means use, *yararlı* means useful and *yaramaz* means useless. This is a very harsh

label for a child and the word is so rooted in Turkish language that most of the people do not think of the word's etymology when using it. The term is also used for adults, as discussed in Section 7.5.1.1, however its target is generally children.

I interpreted Senem's challenge in her engagement with the children in her storytelling in Ireland and the high engagement in Türkiye within the similar context of power distance, which is usually high in collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 2011). In the current statistics, power distance is 28 in Ireland, whereas it is 66 in Türkiye (Hofstede Insights – an online tool). Yet, Türkiye is becoming more individualistic; in 2018, power distance featured as 37 (Hofstede Insights for year 2018, cited for that year in Boynueğri, 2018a), whereas now it is listed as 46. Power distance is important in this discussion because it discourages younger individuals from challenging those higher in the hierarchy (Meyer, 2021). In terms of hierarchy, although she might not have actively sought it, Senem held a dual advantage as both an adult and an artist. Given these factors, I applied this comparison of Senem's role in storytelling to children within these two distinct contexts. As a result, this difference among children in the two different cultures appeared to influence her Professional Artist Identity, but it did not lead to misalignment, as she expressed optimism about effectively managing children in Ireland in her future performances. Consequently, differences in this aspect emerged as an opportunity for development rather than a source of discrepancy between selves. Senem added:

I had a hard time at [a university] [in a storytelling session for children]. I mean, during that interaction. Because some never stopped, some did nothing. I mean, I could cope with even the most skittery child in Türkiye. Well, I couldn't do it there that much, but I think it's a cultural thing, so I think there's something missing [in her interaction]. So I think I'm missing something about culture. I will find it out inshallah.

However, expected respect in collectivist cultures can take the form of obedience, not only for children, also for adults. Similarly, unprompted, Senem shared an anecdote relating to her refusal to follow her mentor's suggestions in Ireland. This example was followed by her spontaneous comparison of Ireland and Türkiye, sharing that in the latter country she would have followed her mentor's suggestions in Türkiye, against her own wishes. This unwilling obedience of Senem in Türkiye can be considered an act rooted in the collectivist

inclination to preserve relationships and avoid face-threatening refusals (Goffman, 1955), aligned with the conscious effort in collectivistic cultures to safeguard interpersonal relations, even at the expense of individual preferences (Scollon et al., 2000).

Moreover, this unwilling obedience can reflect the high power distance in collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 2011). In this instance, the mentor-mentee relationship reflected a professional master-apprentice model, in line with Obara and colleagues' (2021) observation of the prevailing respect-the-mentor's-ideas-ethos in collectivist contexts. In contrast, Senem recounted an episode in Ireland where she confidently rejected a mentor's advice, highlighting a shift in her professional orientation aligning with social norms. In Ireland, her professional and identities converged, as her inclination for autonomy and self-expression prevailed over initial collectivist tendencies. This divergence from the Turkish context suggests that Ireland provided a conducive environment for her to reconcile her professional and sociocultural identities. Below I share her reflections, however, I am not sharing the specific suggestion of the tutor, as it is private, personal and confidential, although Senem did not make such a request:

My tutor suggested to [...] because she thinks [...]. She wanted me to [...] but I didn't want it. [...] I didn't do it and I'm proud of myself. [...] I started to express myself better here. [...] If it have had happened before, in Türkiye, I'd have said 'oh my tutor said it, of course my tutor' and do it. I didn't do it here. [...] I wanted to do it like that. I like it a lot like that. (Senem, individual interview)

In several instances, Senem shared the challenges she faced in Türkiye in expressing herself and in establishing her authentic self. While trying to find her voice there, the voices of others often left her confused. In contrast, Ireland liberated her from these constraints, allowing her to discover herself, become calmer and gain the respect she felt she had lacked in Türkiye:

In Türkiye, my energy, my mind used to get very confused. [...] While I was trying to please others, my efforts to find my authentic voice became more difficult [sig.] Here, it doesn't, I'm becoming something calm. [...] I found myself here. I think I needed to get away from Türkiye for a bit. [...] I'm in an environment where I'm respected and loved. There was love [in Türkiye] too, but respect was not, is it like that? Yes, [...] they didn't know borders. [...] Control, borders... they work for me. [...] I became free cognitively, emotionally.

In addition, Eurocentric discourse, as a sociocultural phenomenon, influenced Senem's PAI. Senem's reflections revealed that designation 'Eastern' had a notable impact on her PAI when there was a proposal to incorporate 'Stories from the Middle East' into the title of her performance. She reflected as in the following:

Unfortunately, [...] West has a view towards East [...] and they asked to [name the performance] as Tales from the Middle East. [...] I mean in this sense many people find me exotic. But exotic is also not a definition for me, [...] but they have a stereotype in their mind related to anything in the Eastern culture. Of course, I am not a type that fits to that. First of all, I am a person who grew up with European culture. (Senem, individual interview)

Although she did not mention it in the interview, she opted for the addition 'from the Orient' in a title of her performance during the times we met. This prompts a comparison between the terms 'Middle Eastern' and 'Oriental'. Geographically, Middle Eastern refers to Western Asia and parts of North Africa, encompassing countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and Syria. On the other hand, oriental, in contemporary understanding, typically denotes Central, Southwest, South and Southeast Asia or the Far East. Both terms carry a Eurocentric undertone, emphasising the geographical and cultural centrality of the West.

However, 'oriental' is generally considered outdated, culturally insensitive and it can even come across as offensive (Aspinall, 2020). Interestingly, the usage of the term in Turkish differs, as oriental is commonly employed to convey an allure in Eastern authentic culture. For instance, belly dance and its performers are referred to as *oryantal* in Turkish. The Turkish Language Society's definition of 'orient' as "related to Eastern civilisations, reminiscent of Eastern civilisations" (Türk Dil Kurumu Sözlüğü, 2022) adds another layer of misalignment to the discourse and also raises the question whether only civilised countries are categorised as Oriental. Yet, this addition also has potential to make the term more favourable. This positive understanding in Türkiye is likely to explain with Senem's embracement of the term. As a result, her decision reflected her agency in voicing her preferences and aligning PAI with her cultural identity.

It is important to note that, a year after the interview, during a meeting in which we discussed my findings for transparency, Senem shared that she had adopted the title *The*

Fertile Crescent: Tales from the Middle East. This incident illustrates how the meanings attached to certain notions can shift over time, sometimes leading to the acceptance of ideas that were initially strongly criticised. However, the discussion here remains based on the data constructed during the interview. When we reviewed my interpretation – which I have included in this thesis – Senem confirmed that my understanding of these notions was valid at the time of the interview. Nonetheless, this change is significant, not only for transparency but also as evidence of the fluidity of emotions, perceptions and identity, even strongly held ones.

In addition to these cultural tendencies, Senem's post-modernist views seemed to influence her PAI, as discussed in the next section.

8.2.5.2 Post-modernism

As it is revealed in her reflections, in Ireland Senem underwent another transformation, what I refer to as *post-modernism*, becoming a subtheme, this time distancing herself from the individualist culture of the country, as well as her family's, in relation to her perception of her nature and human body. Senem's profound love for nature was strongly evident in her reflections. She conveyed her sensitivity and love to all living creatures, articulating her love for animals that often disguised by many people:

The love I feel for life, I feel for people, I don't know, the love I feel for all living creatures... I mean, for example, I love frogs very much, what's that... Spiders, I love them. I love bees. I mean... Like these kinds of things, flowers, I don't know, mushrooms. Well.. Things like people can call yuck disgusting, ugly, I love them.

Another piece of evidence of her strong connection with nature was seen in the moments she passionately criticised the part of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* where Gilgamesh and Enkidu destroyed the Cedar Forest. She was also critical of several other themes in the story. Taken together, these elements were perceived so negatively by her that she reflected on the possibility of altering or even stopping, the story she narrates.

Oh friend let it go [playfully talking to Gilgamesh]. Why are chasing immortality? I mean, join the part of the cycle [sig.], [...] offer beauty instead of killing things, I mean, cutting down the trees, [...] instead of giving harm to environment. [...]

You can't do everything, you can't have everything. To that issue, I clearly believe it, I mean. [...] Maybe some parts of the story, I mean the whole story won't change, but definitely there will be some changes in the details, I think. May be I'll give up narrating this story. (Senem, individual interview)

Senem manifested a strong relationship with nature with regard to human body as well. She recounted that she loved body hair, as a natural element in human body. Before sharing her reflections related to this, I would like highlight another false cognate in Turkish. In Türkiye when we say epilation, we generally refer to laser epilation, and we say 'remove the hair' when we are referring to temporary removal. Therefore, the reflections of Senem that I share below is mainly related to permanent removal of body hair, as she take it as 'killing' something natural. In this light, this reflection was not a manifestation of a feminist view, in the sense of 'let women choose what to do with their own bodies,' but rather a manifestation of a strong connection with everything natural:

For example, I loved the hair. I loved the leg hair. I love. [...] And I don't understand why people [laser] epilate and kill... Like that... I mean, for example, I cannot understand these as well. [...] I always had a huge interest in what is natural, I mean, to something both belongs to us but also natural. (Senem, individual interview)

Not only Senem's deep connection with natural elements was evident in the reflection above but also her connection with human body. In another moments, she reflected profound connections with her own body, as she shared she was communicating with her toes and tuning her body, as well as expressing an interest in vibrating her bones by producing oral sounds. She also mentioned her interest in reflexology. This connection was also evident in the Language Portrait (LP) she created during the interview (Figure 8.2).

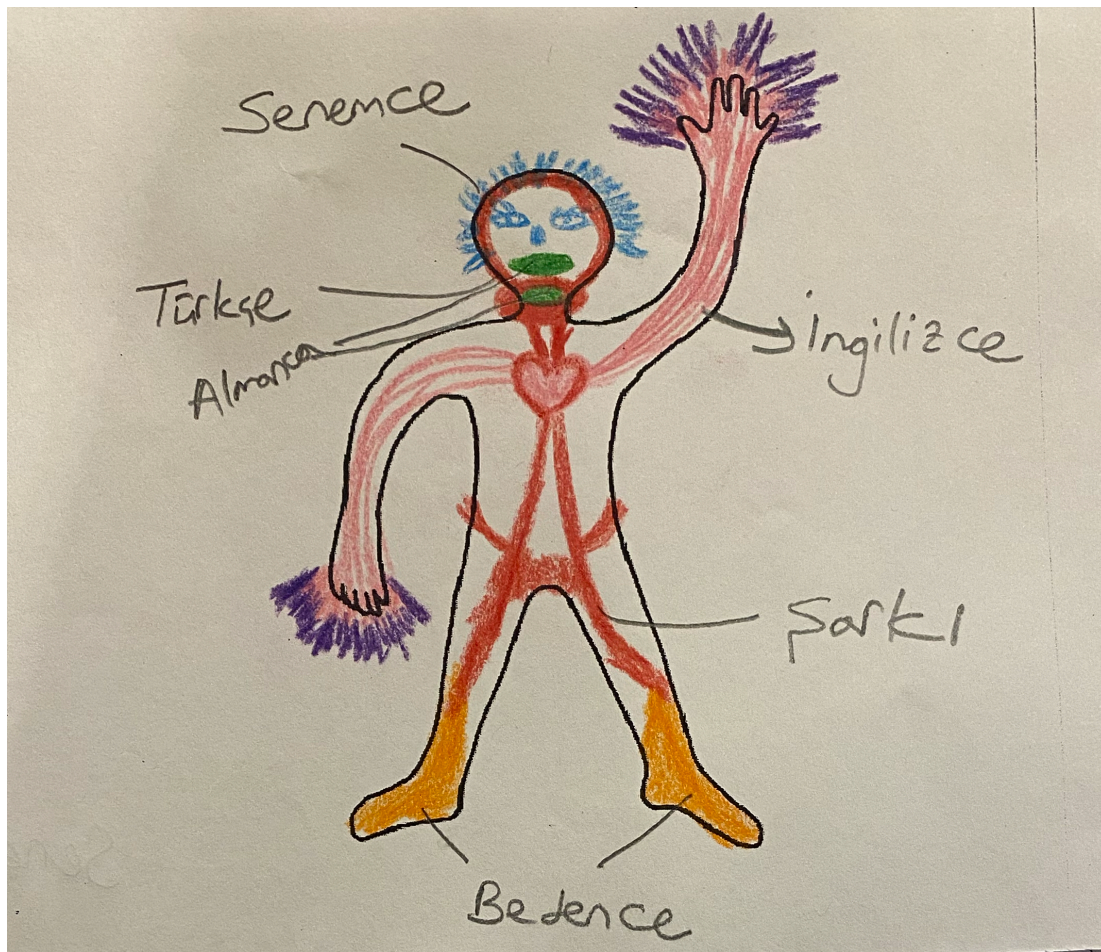


Figure 8.2. *Senem's LP.*

In her LP (Figure 8.2), Senem placed a heart in the middle of the chest, in red, framed solidly. Softer inside extend to both arms, extending beyond the fingers, ending with spiky purple, solid lines surrounding the red area, in both hands. From the heart, solid red lines extend vertically, two in each direction, the ones on the upper side reaching to the neck, framed with solid red, extending outside the neck. It is filled with dark green. The throat features a dark green ellipse; there is a small, light blue circle around the nose and eye shapes on the ocular area. Inside the head is surrounded with a solid red line and there are fringy blue lines around the outside of the head. Downward red lines extends until knees and reaches an orange area that covers the feet and extend to calves. The pelvic area is also filled solid red, with to curves on the right and left, reaching to outer mid abdomen. There is a line on the right of the head, reaching to *Senemce*, (Senem's language) two lines from

the mouth area, reaching to *Türkçe* (Turkish) and *Almanca* (German), an arrow from the elbow *İngilizce* (English), a line on the upper leg, reaching to *Şarkı* (song) and two lined from the feet, reaching to *Bedence* (body language).

Notably, the term *Bedence*, connected to the feet, is particularly relevant to this study. As illustrated in Figure 8.2, in her LP, Senem mentioned three named languages: *Türkçe*, *Almanca* (German) and *İngilizce* (English). As unnamed or unconventional languages or linguistic elements, she placed *Senemce*, which means language of Senem, as well as *Şarkı* (Songs) and *Bedence*. In her LP, Senem incorporated the ‘language of the body’ into her linguistic representation. It was not a synonym for body language, as she did not write *beden dili* (body language); instead she wrote *Bedence*, which can be translated to English as ‘Bodyish’. This suggests that Senem did not refer to her body as a means of communication with the terminology she crafted, rather a language that she communicated with her body. She felt *Bedence* particularly in her feet because her relationship with her body was transformed after she started loving her feet. She further openly shared that she engaged in activities like playing with her toes and conversing with them. As a result, *Senemce*, her self-fashioned idiom, extended beyond verbal, written and body language, embodying her conviction that the body itself could speak and participate in meaning-making beyond these aspects.

8.2.5.3 Differences Across Generations

The third subtheme I explored under the first main category is the differences across generations effecting attitudes of the young audience, therefore effecting Senem’s Professional Artist Identity (PAI). She thoroughly explored a comparison between the perspectives of older and contemporary generations, weaving together elements from both daily life and the storytelling tradition. This comparison stemmed from the challenges faced by a young audience in maintaining focus during the performance, consistently checking their watch. Senem skilfully connected her observations of the particular audience to the long-hours-tradition of storytelling, the tradition also approved by Alfreds (2007) by reporting they carried out a ten-hour performance:

I mean, that 13-year old girl came [to my performance, you remember?] she said it. I realised she was looking at her watch and so on now and then. Then [after the performance] she came to me and said ‘I liked [the performance] very much but I wanted to stand up and walk sometimes. [...] In the past, the stories were told for seven hours, imagine [...] until dawn. [...] The relationship with the time is very different [now] Today’s young people spend only a few seconds deciding to watch a video [due to how they] perceive and engage with the concept of time.[...] Because our relationship with time has changed.

In addition to the accounts shared in this section, PAI seemed to be influenced also by personal meanings. These are discussed in the section *Personal identity*, in the construction of PAI.

8.2.6 Personal Identity in PAI

My interpretation of Senem’s experiences highlights the interplay between personal identity and PAI, demonstrating how her sense of self both shapes and is shaped by her artistic practice. I explored personal identity across multiple dimensions, namely the narrative self, the critical self and the empowerment derived from ownership of her stories. Within this interpretation, these dimensions became subthemes under the main category *Personal identity in PAI*. Through reflection, rehearsal and performance, Senem navigated these dimensions to manage emotional intensity, cultivate artistic authority and assert agency over her creative work. These subthemes illustrate that personal identity functions as a dynamic resource, simultaneously grounding and transforming her PAI. Observations I made in these dimensions are discussed in detail in the following sections.

8.2.6.1 Narrative Self

The influence of the narrative self, as a subtheme, on Professional Artist Identity (PAI) became particularly visible in Senem’s collaboration with a tutor, who played a central role in regulating emotions and identity throughout the creative process. With the tutor’s guidance, Senem came to recognise the bias inherent in narrating her own personal stories and was encouraged to establish a critical distance from them. This distance was not about detachment or silencing her lived experiences but about creating enough space to shift perspective. In doing so, she was able to break the cycle of tension generated by

emotionally charged memories and to reframe her narrative. What had initially been experienced and performed as tragedy could, through this reframing, be transformed into comedy. For Senem, this transformation was not trivial but profoundly liberating, as she described in the following reflection:

So, I think during that process [of creating the story], there really needs to be someone with an outside perspective. Like in theatre, you have a director and all that and you need something similar here. Because you're creating a text and the whole text is shaped by your own biases. An eye from outside holds up a mirror for you in a way you can't do yourself. You know, we get stuck in our own thoughts, right? Someone from the outside helps you see what you can't see. It's a really important and healthy process and it's also kind of liberating. I mean, you take some distance from your emotions and when you look at them from distance, you can start making fun of them and indeed you free yourself. Things like, initially, for example... What's that... that seemed like a tragedy can turn into comedy. I mean in turn to comedy and sets you free. (Senem, individual interview)

This process of reframing marked an important step in the Senem's professional journey. By allowing her to distance herself from her most intense feelings, she could view her performance not only as a personal act of self-expression but also as an artistic and professional practice. The narrative self thus became a bridge between subjective lived experience and the professionalisation of that experience on stage. Her reflections suggested that this movement between tragedy and comedy was more than an artistic attempt; it was a potential mechanism that supported her different and possible selves and enabled her to grow as a performer who could hold her stories with greater flexibility and sometimes distance.

Senem further reflected that her identity was constructed primarily in relation to her own stories. As she practised and performed them, the stories became more familiar, more embodied and more comfortable, shaping her sense of self on stage. In this way, her personal narrative self operated as a foundation for her professional practice, grounding her in a sense of continuity and self-recognition. At the same time, Senem seemed to acknowledge that her personal identity in performance was never formed in isolation. While the story itself could be rehearsed until it fit 'like a dress worn in' the audience always brought a different energy that she could not fully control. Some audiences created resonance and ease, while others felt constraining or misaligned. These responses

introduced variability, yet they did not define her identity as much as they refracted it. Her personal narrative self remained the stable anchor, while the audience functioned more as a shifting backdrop that highlighted the adaptability of her professional practice. Senem shared:

Something else happens with the audience. Since I didn't have that experience in the first two performances [first two narrations of *The Fertile Crescent*, first in the Mermaid Arts Centre, second at the UL, for this research], I wasn't that comfortable inside the story. I mean, I was relaxed, okay, but in the third one I was much more comfortable, the fourth even more and by the fifth I was the most comfortable. If you ask me, the one I felt the most, like the most, most comfortable, it was the fourth. In the fourth I really felt at ease and in the fifth, a bit because of the interaction with the audience, I was like, 'Wait, is something going wrong?' or stuff like that. But, for me, it's my story, so it's not really about [the others]. [...] So the feeling I have inside; the feeling of hospitality, of sharing this story with people [...] but like I said, in the first two I didn't feel that comfortable inside the story. Think of it like a [tight] dress. You wear it, it opens up more and more on you and the story is the same, becomes more comfortable. (Senem, individual interview)

Although in the two observations shared in this section, a tutor and an audience may initially appear to belong to the social realm due to their inherently interactive nature, not all interactions are necessarily social in essence. In both contexts Senem described, it was her personal identity that came to the forefront, taking precedence over social or cultural identity. These interactions, though situated within professional spaces, primarily initiated processes of personal reflection and professional self-construction, rather than social or cultural positioning. For instance, her engagement with the tutor facilitated transformation of both the stories and the narrative self, while audience reception prompted an ongoing negotiation with her own self – her comfort, reflexivity and growing ease – which observed to be directly reinforce her PAI. In this way, the personal was foregrounded in her reflections, even as it remained inherently enacted in communication with others. At the end, the tensions mentioned by Senem illustrate how the narrative self, as a dimension of personal identity, provided both regulation and transformation, allowing her to distance herself from overwhelming emotions, to reframe her stories and to wear them as professional craft. However, particularly in Senem's reflections on the audience, another self, her critical self, became visible. Critical self, as the second subtheme in the main category of personal identity, is discussed below.

8.2.6.2 Critical Self

The critical-self became visible in Senem's engagement with the story she narrated and with her engagement with her audience. Senem's strong engagement with the story itself, cultivated through practice and rehearsal, consistently strengthened her sense of Professional Artist Identity (PAI). Each retelling allowed her to inhabit the narrative more comfortably, aligning personal history with professional performance. However, the role of the audience remained far less predictable. Their varying energy, responses and engagement could either affirm or unsettle her self-perception. When performances did not align with her perfectionist standards, the critical self magnified feelings of inadequacy, revealing how personal dispositions can permeate professional spaces. This observation particularly lied in the sentence:

I was like, 'Wait, is something going wrong?' or stuff like that. (Senem, individual interview)

Later in the interview, Senem brought her practice and her perfectionism together again, this time with an explicit link. However, this time Senem used these two as conflicting forces, by sharing:

I approach with a perfectionist mindset. [...] So, perfectionism has this side that really criticises a person for being too inactive, because you keep going over things again and again in your head, but in the end, for something to actually happen, you need to take action. That's what tales always tell us: you may not do it in the first time, you may not do it in the first time, but in the you may. You learn by making mistakes. That's simply part of learning – it's a principle of life itself. (Senem, individual interview)

The reflection above reveals her perfectionism through the voice of her critical self, while at the same time implying that 'practice makes perfect.' Yet, there is an irony here, as this insight also expresses a critique of perfectionism itself. Furthermore, the critical-self became evident in relation to her perfectionism and her tendency to be overly critical of her own performance. While such self-criticism stemmed from personal dispositions, it became a professional concern insofar as it affected how she perceived her competence and artistic authority on stage. The critical self thus functioned as a double-edged process: on the one

hand, it generated an inner tension that at times destabilised Senem's confidence; on the other, it pushed her to refine her craft and strive for artistic precision. In this sense, the critical self became both a burden and a driving force, sometimes unsettling but also fuelling her artist self. This dynamic also extended beyond her critical inner voice to the stories themselves, as she sometimes articulated – explicitly or implicitly – the power that resides in storytelling and in the storyteller. This observation is detailed in the following section, empowerment.

8.2.6.3 Empowerment

Another significant dimension in the negotiation of Senem's Professional Artist Identity (PAI) was the sense of empowerment she derived from her personal self. She described herself as an artist who firmly believed in the transformative power of storytelling, highlighting its capacity to convey meaningful messages that could reach audiences on both emotional and intellectual levels. This attribution of power extended to her own role as storyteller. At the same time, she acknowledged that she might one day cease performing the epic altogether, as she was uncertain whether she wished to continue transmitting its embedded messages – such as the dichotomies within the narrative and the destruction of the Cedar Forest through the heroes' abuse of power, as discussed in Section 8.2.5.2. Senem reflected:

Right now, I don't have anything specific in mind, but I am changing I mean, my perspective is changing. As my perspective changes, the way I tell the story will also change. The whole story itself may not change, but I think there will definitely be some changes in the details. How exactly, as I said, I have no idea. Or it could also be like this: maybe I'll even decide to stop telling this story altogether. [...] Because the word has a power. I mean, when you tell it like that [on the stage], people perceive it like that, too. (Senem, individual interview)

In fact, Senem had already reworked the epic by intertwining it with her personal anecdotes and inserting her own interpretations, including moments of imperfection and failure, which became integral material for her performances, as discussed in Section 5.2. Furthermore, by placing her personal self at the centre of her art, she challenged the conventional image of the artist as a flawless performer and instead embraced authenticity as a source of strength. Through narrating her own story, particularly the moments of

dismissal, failure, pain and frustration, Senem transformed her vulnerabilities into resources that strengthened both her sense of self and her professional presence in the eyes of the audience. This conscious act of choosing, reshaping and even potentially rejecting certain parts of the epic illustrates how empowerment was not simply about performing stories but about exercising critical ownership over them.

In addition to these influences I addressed within the scope of personal identity, I also observed interactions between bilingual identity and PAI. These interactions are discussed below.

8.2.7 Bilingual Identity in PAI

Analysis of Senem's experiences highlights how bilingual identity is deeply intertwined with her Professional Artist Identity (PAI), shaping both her creative processes and her stage presence. Creativity was evident in the ways she adapted her performances across languages: Turkish afforded spontaneity, playfulness and improvisational freedom, while English demanded control, precision and careful memorisation. The tension in English as an additional language (LX) were heightened by the challenges posed by mistakes, requiring Senem to continuously negotiate her PAI. When her unconventional use of English was perceived as a creative use of LX, rather than lack of fluency, it was transformed into as a strength in Senem's mind. These subthemes demonstrate that bilingualism functions both as a challenge and as a creative resource in professional fields and are discussed in detail below.

8.2.7.1 Spontaneity vs Control

In my analysis, I interpreted an interplay between spontaneity and control as a significant aspect of Senem's bilingual identity and, in turn, her Professional Artist Identity (PAI). She associated playfulness with spontaneity, noting that Turkish enabled her to improvise, play with connotations and generate rhymes more freely, whereas English required careful memorisation to maintain accuracy and fluency. This contrast illustrates how the same story

could invoke different modes of engagement depending on the linguistic context. Senem shared:

For example, playing with Turkish words, when telling a story, [...], turning sentences into one another... From that, I make rhymes, things like that. [...] in English, [...] I memorised those parts. Because in Turkish, there's no need to memorise; it can be improvised, since I have full command of Turkish. But in English, I don't yet have that level of control to improvise while keeping the rhythm and the flow of the narration intact. [...] Of course my playfield in Turkish is much wider.

On the other hand, on stage, repeated practice in English allowed her to gradually integrate more spontaneity, but the structure and control provided by memorisation remained essential for preserving the narrative's form, pace and coherence. However, as Senem shared in another moment, improvisation in Turkish, while offering creative freedom, occasionally caused her to lose the thread of the story, reflecting the dynamic tension between freedom and control in performance:

[...] telling [the epic] more often... I realised something. For example, by the third telling my shift into improvisation in English. I mean, it has already changed, it has increased. Maybe not in the third, but in the fourth one, I think. [...] I realised, yes, now I can move into it. I can improvise, even if only a little, of course. [...] (Senem, individual interview)

But I can also say this: because I do it in English, it also keeps me a bit within the form. In Turkish, for example, there were times when I lost the rhythm because of joking around. [...] In English, though, it keeps me within that rhythm, it keeps me in the rhythm of the story. (Senem, individual interview)

Overall, Senem's reflections illustrated that PAI is constructed not solely through linguistic proficiency or technical mastery but also through subjective experiences, reflections and the interplay between her different selves – specifically, her bilingual self and her artist self. The spontaneous use of English also occasionally influenced PAI through her LX mistakes. The ways in which LX mistakes shaped PAI are discussed below.

8.2.7.2 LX Mistakes

Being speaker of English as an additional language (LX) sometimes disrupted Senem's immersion in the story, influencing her Professional Identity (PAI), as her attention shifted between the narrative and the language itself. This tension illustrates how language confidence and artistic expression are intertwined: grammatical awareness, self-monitoring and correction momentarily pulled her out of full engagement with the story, revealing the challenges of performing in an LX. Although Senem felt creative about 'made-up' sentences and words, mainly due to the feedback she received, as shared in the previous section, she still refrained from making LX mistakes on stage. Her reflections suggested a three-step process in navigating these moments: initially being completely absorbed in the story without noticing mistakes, then recognising errors and self-correcting where possible and gradually achieving greater automaticity and fluency in performance.

Sometimes, for example, someone reacts, right? [...] Since I care a lot about the interaction in that moment, I think about their reaction. I mean, the language needs to open up a bit automatically. Of course, when it can't flow automatically... but now at least I can notice [the mistakes]. For example, if I said "his," I realise, "oh, that wasn't 'his,' it's another character," and I can switch to "her." That also happens a bit more naturally now because I use English more often. Senem, individual interview)

This iterative process of attention, self-correction and striving for accuracy could be traced back to her perfectionist tendencies, discussed in the *critical self* subtheme (Section 8.2.6.2). Yet, rather than remaining solely within the realm of personal identity, these tendencies were brought to surface and given form through the medium of bilingual performance. In Turkish, Senem could lose herself in improvisation, drawing confidence from her linguistic ease, as discussed in the previous section. In contrast, in English, her heightened awareness of accuracy and error triggered perfectionist expectations, which in turn found their echoes in bilingual identity. Thus, what was at stake here was not simply a personal drive for perfection, but a bilingual positioning that directly shaped her PAI. However, what might initially be perceived as a mistake in LX speech became a unique perspective and a creative contribution to LX use in Senem's mind, following feedback from an audience. This instance is recounted and further analysed in the following section on *creativity and affective engagement*.

8.2.7.3 Creativity and Affective Engagement

Creativity emerged as a significant element in the interplay between Senem's bilingual identity and Professional Artist Identity (PAI). While spontaneity and improvisation were more accessible in Turkish, as her first language (L1) Senem's narrations in English, as her additional language (LX) brought about a different form of creativity that was not rooted in linguistic mastery but in the distinctiveness of her bilingual expression. She described how her English performances, shaped by heightened awareness of grammatical accuracy and memorisation, constrained her spontaneous playfulness, as shared in the previous section. Yet, paradoxically, these same constraints opened new creative avenues.

Senem recounted that one audience member interpreted her unconventional sentences in English were perceived as uniquely creative, suggesting that her status as a speaker of English as an LX allowed her to use the language in ways that L1 speakers would not consider:

Look, a positive example came to my mind. [An audience member] came up to me and said, "You're not structuring your sentences like we do." [...] "You're not using it the way we do, but the way you use it opens a door for us." That is, they said it opened a different dimension, like, "Ah, look, it can be said this way too." For me, that was very meaningful; it was encouraging [...] At the beginning, I was really... I mean, I was afraid. You know, you're working on language, on the art of language, the art of words. And here you are, in a place where it's not your first language; how am I going to do this? There are some narrators, you know... they say things like, "Only someone who knows English should tell it in English," or things like that. There are those fanatic narrators who place so much emphasis on the language itself. But now, for example, I feel I can contribute to them because I don't see language that way, I look at it from the outside. I think there's a lot I can add to them. You are the same way, right? (Senem, individual interview)

In the same vein, Senem sounded happy in her use of the 'made-up' words in her daily life, particularly because of the feedback she received from her husband, She reflected:

And sometimes I even make up words. For example, I say "annoyment," but there is no such word as "annoyment," it's actually "annoyance." I notice things like that sometimes. [...] Peter [her husband] loves it. (Senem, individual interview)

These reflections demonstrate that perceived creativity was not confined to technical accuracy or complete fluency, but emerged through the divergence of perspective afforded

by bilingual expression. The ‘distance’ she invoked – viewing the language ‘from away’ – became a creative resource, enabling her to produce novel meanings and resonances. What might have been perceived as a linguistic error from a strictly structural standpoint was, in practice, reinterpreted as an aesthetic contribution to the performance, as well as to her daily conversations. In this sense, creativity in bilingual identity was not only about linguistic innovation but also about embracing difference, reframing it as a source of originality and integrating it into the broader performance of self as an artist. In these moments, the liminal space in which the ‘performer’ feels both inside the drama and outside of it, reflecting on their actions and emotions) arguably provided an aesthetic experience for Senem, highlighting how bilingual creativity emerges through both form and content, revealing identity (Piazzoli, 2018). By contrast, for the other participants, perceived or actual threats of criticism undermined their confidence, as discussed in 6.4.1, 7.4.1 and 7.4.2.

Furthermore, Senem placed English’s energy in her hands on her Language Portrait (Figure 8.2) as starting from the heart and extending to her fingertips. She shared that she felt that energy only when speaking English, not Turkish, while Turkish spoke from the mind. Senem reflected:

So, when I speak in English, it’s like... well, from my heart down to my arms and the tips of my fingers, sometimes the tips of my fingers go numb, you know? I feel as if energy is flowing from there. It’s often referred to as the heart meridian, and this area, the arms... yes. So the heart is actually... what’s it called... a kind of communication channel, I guess. That’s why, for example, handmade things are valuable, they’re said to come from the heart. It’s like energy is moving from my heart through my hands. Whereas when I speak in Turkish, it feels more... like it comes out of my mouth and throat, from the voice organs. In English, it feels like it comes from the heart and hands, like energy flowing outward. In Turkish, it feels like it comes from above, from the head area, more from the mind.

Senem’s reflection on the embodied differences she perceives when speaking English versus Turkish offers a rich window into bilingual identity as a deeply affective and embodied phenomenon. She experiences English as flowing from her heart through her arms and fingertips, a sensation tied to energy and affective engagement, whereas Turkish

emerges more from the head and vocal organs, associated with cognitive processing and articulation. This distinction suggests that her bilingual identity is not simply a matter of linguistic repertoire but is experienced differently in terms of bodily engagement, affect and self-perception. From a creativity perspective, the English-mediated channel, which she associates with heart-centred energy and bodily extension, seems to facilitate a more inventive, exploratory use of language. The embodied sensation of energy moving through her hands aligns with her creation of *Bedence*, her self-fashioned language of the body, and her performative engagement with language. In contrast, Turkish, emerging from more ‘head-centred’ regions, is associated with conventional articulation and perhaps more self-monitoring, reflecting the social and cognitive constraints embedded in her L1.

Senem’s reflection above also highlights a striking paradox in her bilingual experience discussed Section 8.2.7.1. While Senem must think more deliberately in English, requiring conscious planning, she experiences Turkish as more spontaneous and playful. Yet despite this ease, she still perceives Turkish as more cognitively oriented, emerging from head-centred channels and structured linguistic habits. English, by contrast, is felt more affectively and bodily, flowing from the heart through the arms and fingertips, supporting inventive, embodied and imaginative expression, even if it requires deliberate thought.

The affective dimension of English, or the sense of connection and energy she experiences, could plausibly be linked to multiple elements, such as her Irish husband, audience feedback or the perception of her own creativity. However, instead of drawing such conclusions, I suggest that these reflections illustrate that bilingual identity is a dynamic, complex and unique interplay of each person’s mind, body and affect, where each language affords distinct modes of creativity and self-expression. In this way, the cognitive structuring and spontaneity of Turkish coexist with the affective and embodied experimentation in English, highlighting how languages differently shape creative agency, identity and embodied linguistic experience.

In summary, my interpretation of PAI data revealed that professional identity was interwoven with *sociocultural*, *personal* and *bilingual* identities. These identities, central

to artistic expression, both influenced and shaped Senem's professional self across multiple dimensions, including cultural tendencies – both her own and those of the countries she has lived in – her perceptions and beliefs, her practices, her engagement with herself or others as a tutor or audience and shifts in her perspectives. When these aspects aligned harmoniously, they appeared to foster a sense of unity and empowerment for Senem. Conversely, when elements of her identity diverged, tensions arose, resulting in inner conflict.

8.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the findings derived from my interpretation of the data to address the third sub-question of the study. Drawing on relevant literature and on my analysis, I situated the term *Professional Artist Identity* (PAI). I then introduced the metaphor *Lotus of the atom, atom of the lotus*, and a poem, *Me, Unveiled*. Subsequently, I examined PAI across nine subthemes, developed through my interpretation of the data. These were organised under the main categories of sociocultural identity, personal identity and bilingual identity, all of which interacted with PAI. In the following chapter, I synthesise all the findings, offering a lens through which to interpret the data in relation to existing scholarship.

Chapter Nine: Discussion on Emotions and Identity through Bilingual Storytelling

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the findings by synthesising the seven research themes to give an overall answer to the overarching research question, integrating insights from the preceding chapters. In doing so, I distil the themes into six intertwined threads. Finally, I revisit two concepts: *Plaza Turkish Anxiety* and *Professional Artist Identity*.

In Tablet IX in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000), unable to accept the reality of death and his own mortality, Gilgamesh leaves the safety of Uruk and ventures into the vast wilderness in search of Uta-napishti, the only human granted immortality by the gods. His journey takes him far beyond the known world, to the distant Twin Mountains of Mashu, which guard the rising and setting of the Sun. At the entrance, he encounters formidable scorpion-beings who are initially shocked by his part-divine nature but ultimately allow him to pass. Gilgamesh then travels through a tunnel of absolute darkness stretching for twelve leagues. Along this adventure, his desperate pursuit gives way to moments of reflection that prepare him for the counsel he will soon receive. Upon emerging, he finds himself in a beautiful, paradisiacal garden by the sea. There he meets Siduri, a wise tavern-keeper who offers him counsel. She warns Gilgamesh that immortality is impossible for mortals and encourages him to embrace and enjoy the simple pleasures of life instead of chasing an unattainable goal. However, driven by grief and desperation, Gilgamesh refuses to give up and presses on toward his quest, not yet ready to accept her wisdom.

Like Gilgamesh's reflections in Tablet IX, this chapter brings together the data interpretation and the themes that have been constructed, grounding them in key statements drawn from the data. However, these statements are not intended as a final interpretation; rather, they serve as a foundation for the 'counsels' and suggestions that will be developed in Chapter Eleven, the Conclusion.

Like Gilgamesh's journey, these findings have taken shape through the experiences of others – participants whose emotional landscapes, linguistic repertoires and professional identities challenge and illuminate the questions at the heart of this research. The aim here is not to conclude, but to synthesise insights in the participants' voices – just as Gilgamesh, standing at the threshold of further revelations, begins to understand that meaning may not lie in overcoming mortality, but in embracing connection, voice and presence.

9.2 Making Meaning of the Three Sub-question to Address the Overarching Question

The current study addressed the following research question:

How do individuals who are speakers of English as a second language construct their identities across linguistic, personal, social and cultural dimensions?

This overarching question was addressed through three sub-questions:

1. How did a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland emotionally respond to the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent*?
2. What aspects of identity were revealed in a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland engaging with the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent*?
3. How does *The Fertile Crescent*'s storyteller artist construct her identity through her performances?

The data analysis and interpretation of this study lead to seven themes. Together, these findings indicated that participants, who are speakers of English as a second language, constructed their identities across linguistic, personal, social, and cultural dimensions, articulated through the following metaphors:

1. *Barefoot in the biting, yet reviving waters* – Emotional responses to English use, marked by a tension between vulnerability and vitality.

2. *Finding home in the world of the known* – Emotional responses to Turkish, experienced as comfort, relief and familiarity.
3. *Finding home in the universe of the felt* – Emotional responses to the requiem, where affect and sound created a sense of belonging beyond linguistic comprehension.
4. *Fractured selves in English speech* – Anxiety, and avoidance, associated with speaking, fluency and accent, alongside attempts to reconcile or ease these tensions.
5. *Voices under pressure* – Experiences of translanguaging, reflecting both discomfort and moments of linguistic expansion or relief.
6. *Existence in the connection* – Identity formed through connection, disconnection and existential negotiation, including past and gendered experiences.
7. *Lotus of the atom, atom of the Lotus* – Performer's professional identity, shaped through the interplay of sociocultural, personal and bilingual influences.

These themes were knit together into six threads: language and emotion; language and identity; possible selves as a bilingual speaker; Professional Artist Identity; unlocking the chain ball: from language anxiety to creative empowerment; and identity exploration through AbR. Each thread is discussed below, cross-referencing this synthesis with the existing literature.

9.2.1 Language and Emotions

The theme *Barefoot in the biting yet reviving waters* of English illustrated how participants were drawn into emotional spaces marked by anxiety, stress, worry, avoidance and vulnerability, spaces where things felt uncertain or overwhelming, when interpreted through Brown's (2021) theory on emotions. Yet, English also offered moments when *life was good*, often expressed through joy and love and a longing for connection (Brown, 2021). Turkish, in contrast, functioned as a home in the *world of the known*, evoking feelings of ease, relief, tranquillity and contentment (Brown, 2021). Sometimes, English served a functional purpose, as in the case of Damla, becoming a strength that allowed her to connect with a wider world. Beyond functional utility, the emotional resonance of Turkish – the *good life* it brought – was not solely due to communicative ease but also because of its central place in participants' hearts, affirming the well-established

connection between language and emotion (Dewaele, 2008; Garcia & Li Wei, 2014; Kramsch, 2009; Pavlenko, 2007).

Here, language, as both a practical tool and a cultural symbol, holds profound implications for bilingualism. For many participants, Turkish – their first language – was far more than a means of communication; extending beyond functionality to embody a sense of competence and belonging, highlighting that language is a marker of selfhood and cultural continuity. Sometimes, Turkish became the fingers clinging to life, such as for Damla, with the strength it provided, such as for Derya, Dinç and Funda. These connections are further detailed in the following section on the discussion of language and identity. Similarly, the requiem sung in an unknown language, letting the participants *Finding home in the universe of the felt*, particularly for Murat, Duru, Ahu, Filiz and Müge, where comparable emotions with Turkish surfaced, as they were able to understand the message easily and deeply, without any effort, particularly in the familiar tones in the piece and in Senem's mimics and gestures.

The cognitive and emotional challenges associated with maintaining fluency in both Turkish and English revealed a deep intertwining between perceived linguistic competency. Participants' struggles, for example for Aylin, Funda and Serap, with preserving monolingual Turkish fluency illustrate the appraisal of language as a symbolic resource intimately tied to cultural heritage and self-concept. This process aligns with Lazarus's (1991) and Clore and Ortony's (2000) theories that the significance individuals assign to experiences profoundly shapes their emotional responses. Here, the cognitive load required to uphold traditional Turkish norms involved conscious reflection on the potential loss of cultural heritage, evoking anxiety and feelings of incompetency. Such conscious appraisal resonates with LeDoux's (1998) distinction between automatic emotional reactions and those shaped by cognition, wherein the deliberate negative evaluation of translanguaging heightened emotions such as shame and anxiety. This is consistent with Sapolsky's (2004), Scheff's (2007) and Shuman and Scherer's (2014) work on how negative appraisals can trigger fight-or-flight or avoidance responses. In this context, particularly the audience-participants consciously appraised translanguaging – whether

shifting from Turkish to English or vice versa – negatively, resulting in avoidance behaviours akin to flight responses.

Similarly, the participants' strong desire to attain fluent, accent-free English stemmed from the high value placed on proficiency, such as for Aylin and Derya. Difficulties with English fluency and accent elicited intense emotional responses tied to feelings of inadequacy and reduced confidence, reinforcing the findings of Sevinç and Dewaele (2018). These emotional responses influenced behavioural outcomes: the appraisal of perceived linguistic competency often led to avoidance. Such avoidance at times arose from unconscious appraisal mechanisms, as participants did not overtly avoid communication but instead muted themselves to alleviate or escape anxiety and to conceal perceived incompetence. Conversely, when participants, such as Defne, perceived themselves as performing well, the importance they attached to fluency manifested as pride, sometimes coexisting with other conflicting emotions.

Furthermore, the culturally contingent nature of emotions such as shame and guilt, well-documented in the literature (Brown, 2021; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992; Tangney & Dearing, 2003), was vividly evident in participants' narratives. Reflecting collectivist cultural orientations described by Hofstede (1980) and Markus and Kitayama (1994), participants' concerns about maintaining Turkish language purity and cultural continuity represented a collective responsibility, such as for Bahar and Serap. The potential shame linked to failing societal expectations further deepened anxiety, especially when negative unconscious appraisals persisted (Bargh, 2014). This cultural embedding of emotion highlights how language struggles are not only personal but also social and collective experiences.

9.2.2 Language and Identity

As listeners, exposure to translanguaging emerged as a vital mechanism for constructing meaning and identity across languages. For example, Senem's use of both Turkish and English within her narration allowed participants to bridge linguistic gaps, facilitating deeper engagement with the narrative. This practice of translanguaging enabled facilitation of a bilingual repertoire to navigate complex social and cultural contexts, aligning with

extant literature on translanguaging as a resource for meaning-making (Cahyani et al., 2018; Beghetto, 2007; Kharkhurin & Li Wei, 2015; Nilep, 2006; Nguyen, 2019).

Nevertheless, translanguaging in their own speech brought a sense of incompetency and anxiety, affirming the literature (Sevinç & Backus, 2017). Located at the centre of this anxiety, purist beliefs, the ideology suggests that language should be preserved in its pure form (Woolard, 2020) and fears of social judgment posed significant barriers to fully embracing translanguaging. This tension between pragmatic language use and ideological purity reflected a broader identity struggle, as language mixing challenged traditional notions of linguistic purity and provoked insecurity. The challenge of translanguaging often required participants to balance personal comfort with societal expectations, where relief from cognitive strain was met with resistance from those prioritizing linguistic norms. This impacted on participants' sense of identity and belonging, underscoring the complex interplay between language practices and self-concept.

These dynamics are captured by the colloquial phrasing *Plaza Turkish*, a common expression referring to the use of English in Turkish speech by corporate professionals in Türkiye. This term was mentioned by one of the participants, Bahar, while she was reflecting on translanguaging in the interview. I encapsulated the accompanying anxiety in the term *Plaza Turkish Anxiety* (PTA), as explored in 7.4.2.2. In the discussion, PTA was observed to be rooted in the fear that the hearer will perceive them as 'showing off' their high status. However, translanguaging from Turkish to English was sometimes done willingly.

By contrast, the other form of translanguaging anxiety observed in this study, where Turkish words unintentionally slipped into English speech, was experienced differently. Rather than stemming from a fear of being perceived as pretentious, it was tied to an inward-facing sense of shame or guilt associated with the 'slipped' Turkish. In this respect, English-to-Turkish translanguaging was neither intentional nor conscious, and it was not favoured, whereas Turkish-to-English translanguaging was sometimes appreciated. The reaction to this type of translanguaging was notably more severe, as illustrated by Funda's

description of ‘closing [her] mouth as if [she] were cursed.’ Accordingly, although I examine translanguaging anxiety bidirectionally – both from L1 to LX and LX to L1 – I suggest that these processes share similarities yet diverge in important ways. In that, in both directions speakers reported feelings of ‘incompetency’ in either L1 or LX. However, L1-to-LX shifts tended to be more context-dependent and could be mitigated, whereas LX-to-L1 ‘slips’ elicited deeper and more enduring self-responses, marked by shame that appeared independent of context.

Identities were also constructed in the moments of humiliation and these negative experiences were tried to be rectified when the time came, providing an opportunity to reunify with the self. This ‘quest for justice’ was also echoed in gender identity, potentially reflecting feminist views. Sometimes the ‘search for justice’ was transformed into a request for a consistent story, stemmed from desire to trust to the narration and to the narrator, leading to rectification of inconsistencies, building trust to the story by themselves. More importantly, sometimes ‘taken-to-be-sorted-out’ issues emerged, creating the realisation of the fact that those issues or dilemmas were still lingering. In those moments, self and identity was reconstructed through the reflections, with the acknowledgement of the hidden, unconscious emotions. Likewise, sometimes long-standing self-criticisms were embodied in the words, opening another space for reconstruction of identities as the vulnerabilities were shared with the others. These also potentially opened the door self-compassion.

In essence, bilingualism, in its various strands, was observed to be both a challenge and a strength, a source of anxiety and excitement, akin to the guardian of the Cedar Forest, Humbaba. Yet, just as identities are constantly in flux, the fate of Humbaba shifts here: does not die, but grows stronger, forever safeguarding the deeply rooted, sacred trees of languages living together in the forest – not as isolated entities, but as intertwined, vibrant, unified presences.

9.2.3 Possible Selves as a Bilingual Speaker

The finding that participants refrained from translanguaging into English within their Turkish communication the ambivalent position of bilingual practices within migrant identity construction. On the one hand, translanguaging represents an expanded linguistic repertoire and an embodied sign of language learning progress (Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Garcia & Lin, 2017; Li Wei, 2018). On the other hand, in this context it was perceived as a threat to solidarity within the heritage group and a potential trigger for negative social judgement. This tension illustrates how possible selves are not simply individual aspirations but are negotiated and constrained within specific social and cultural frames (Markus & Kitayama, 2003).

Participants' reluctance to use English in their Turkish conversations aligns with De Fina's (2015) emphasis on the relational and performative dimensions of identity: language choices are not just about competence, but about managing impressions and social positioning within particular audiences. By deliberately avoiding translanguaging, participants performed an identity that signalled loyalty to the Turkish-speaking in-group, implicitly rejecting any appearance of pretension, assimilation or inauthenticity. Here, the imagined possible self of 'the improved bilingual' collided directly with the feared possible self of 'the incompetent speaker' – an identity that could be confirmed and reinforced by the group's critical remarks.

Crucially, this interplay between individual agency and collective expectations echoes Erikson's (2007) observation that agency is never exercised in a vacuum but is always mediated by social and cultural constraints. While the possible selves framework highlights how individuals imagine themselves as future actors who can shape their own trajectories (Markus & Nurius, 1986), Erikson reminds us that this sense of agency is deeply interwoven with the social fabric that either enables or restricts how far these imagined futures can be realised. In this study, participants' agency was profoundly shaped by the collectivist orientation of Turkish culture, which places high value on group harmony and conformity. Many participants explicitly described how other Turkish speakers policed their language choices or made disparaging comments that implied their English was not

good enough, intensifying feelings of incompetence and undermining confidence in their own abilities. This pressure worked to erode their sense of competence, reinforcing the feared possible self of ‘the incompetent speaker’. This created a powerful disincentive to practise or display English skills openly. The collective judgement participants experienced thus became a significant social constraint on their agency, narrowing the range of possible selves they could comfortably enact.

This cultural dimension underscores that possible selves are inherently social products (Markus & Kitayama, 2003): the range of selves migrants can envision is not purely a matter of personal aspiration but is embedded in the meanings, expectations and normative pressures of their communities. In a collectivist context like Turkish culture, where maintaining solidarity and in-group acceptance is prioritised, the cost of translanguaging can feel disproportionately high. Participants’ avoidance of English insertions into Turkish thus reflects not a lack of desire to demonstrate competence, but an agentic decision – shaped by social constraints – to protect belonging, even if this choice simultaneously limits their visible progress in the host language.

The participants’ broader avoidance of English communication – including their reluctance to ask clarification questions – further demonstrates the powerful interplay between negative possible selves and constrained agency. Instead of seeing everyday interactions as opportunities to practise and incrementally strengthen their English, participants positioned such interactions as high-risk identity performances in which any error or hesitation could confirm an unwanted self-image of incompetence. Markus and Nurius (1986) argue that possible selves can act as motivational bridges, but here the bridge was blocked by the fear of realising a stigmatised identity. This resonates strongly with Oyserman and Markus’s (1990) point that negative possible selves generate anxiety and withdrawal, reducing engagement in precisely those contexts that would help transform the feared self into a more confident and competent version.

The emotional charge attached to these imagined selves – pride in English improvement, yet shame in revealing it; hope for greater fluency yet fear of exposure – demonstrates how bilingual identity construction is deeply affective, narrative and relational. As Clark and

Isen (1982) highlight, emotions such as embarrassment and fear shape the behavioural choices that sustain or hinder learning. When migrants internalise social scripts that frame visible bilingualism as pretentious or incompetent, they face a dilemma: show evidence of progress and risk negative judgement or withhold progress and protect group belonging. Here, some of the participants overwhelmingly prioritised maintaining acceptance within the Turkish-speaking community over making their developing bilingual identity visible. This reveals the double bind migrants often face: to develop a confident, future-oriented possible self as a competent English speaker, they need opportunities to use English openly, yet the very act of doing so risks confirming a feared incompetent self under the gaze of peers. As Erikson (2007) argues, agency is fundamentally social: it is expressed through the ways individuals navigate the constraints and affordances of their communities and cultural norms. The participants' hesitation to utilise translanguaging or to speak at all is not a linguistic deficit, but a protective act of identity maintenance within a collectivist logic – one that highlights the relational and affective dimensions of what it means to become, and be seen as, a bilingual migrant. The last but not the least, the overall findings suggest that participants did not simply bear fixed identities shaped by external forces; rather, their identities are constructed and expressed through self-narrations with subjective, multiple dimensions and social functions that reflect an ongoing negotiation of meaning across time and context, supporting similar suggestions in the literature (such as Gregg, 2011; Poppi, 2025; Smorti, 2011).

9.2.4 Professional Artist Identity

Senem's experience, shaped by her diverse cultural, personal and bilingual influences, provided new insights into the role of language in shaping *Professional Artist Identity* (PAI).

In this study, PAI is suggested as an artist's professional identity, connected to their work as an arts practitioner or educator within the seven arts, and shaped not only through artistic performance but also through the interconnected influences of sociocultural, personal and bilingual dimensions.

In Ireland, Senem navigated an individualist cultural environment that showcased how a supportive context could significantly enhance self-expression and identity affirmation. The lower power distance and emphasis on respect and freedom offered a sense of empowerment, allowing her to integrate her multiple identities seamlessly into her artistic practice. This mirrored audience-participants' findings that suggested supportive environments contributed to a stronger sense of self and greater confidence. The safety and acceptance she experienced in Ireland reflected similar patterns observed, where positive cultural contexts fostered personal and professional growth. Conversely, her interactions with children in Türkiye, influenced by collectivist norms, revealed the complexities of balancing cultural expectations. These norms provided comfort but also posed challenges in adapting to different expectations. This echoed findings that cultural expectations could both support and constrain identity expression.

Senem's engagement with post-modernist themes, particularly her relationship with her body and with nature, revealed important nuances in PAI. Her articulation of *Bedence* (language of the body) opens a space for reconsidering the relationship between language, embodiment and self-communication. Unlike conventional body language, which functions as a communicative tool directed outward to convey meaning to others, *Bedence* represents communication inward, with the self, through the body. In invoking *Bedence*, Senem positioned her body as a language-bearing entity capable of participating in processes of healing (as inferred from her reference to reflexology), self-exploration and affective connection through intimate embodied practices of self-care and recognition.

In this sense, *Bedence* does not operate within the domain of semiotic representation but within that of affective embodiment, allowing the body itself to emerge as a site of secure dialogues with the self. Just as she found security in her body, she also found security in her art, where her ability to navigate stereotypes and biases reinforced earlier observations about the importance of creative freedom and adaptability. Furthermore, her reflections on generational differences in storytelling, which disrupted traditional practices, underscored the tension between the cultural heritage of the art and adapting to contemporary demands,

mirroring earlier findings on the challenges of sustaining cultural dimensions of arts in evolving environments.

These findings from Senem's personal identity in PAI align with the literature. The narrative self, as observed in Senem's work, supports the argument that storytelling functions as both a medium for self-expression and a mechanism for professionalisation (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Pasupathi, 2001). By establishing critical distance from emotionally charged memories, Senem was able to reframe her narratives, transforming personal tragedy into performative comedy, as a tool for self-regulation and resilience. Similarly, the critical self resonates with studies on perfectionism and self-reflection in creative professionals, highlighting how internal critique can simultaneously generate tension and drive refinement in performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

Finally, the theme of empowerment underscores the importance of agency and authenticity in artistic identity construction. Together, these findings demonstrate that personal identity, through the narrative, critical and empowered selves, is central to the development of PAI, mediating the complex interplay between lived experience, self-perception and professional performance. This reinforces the view that PAI is not merely a reflection of skill or technical mastery, but a dynamic construct shaped by the negotiation of multiple, intersecting dimensions of the self.

Senem's experiences illustrate how bilingual identity shaped her PAI by mediating creativity, control and audience engagement. Her L1 Turkish facilitated improvisation and spontaneity, while her LX English imposed constraints that paradoxically opened new creative avenues, echoing research on multilingual creativity and cognitive flexibility (Vygotsky, 1971; Pavlenko, 2014). LX mistakes, while challenging immersion, fostered reflective engagement and metalinguistic awareness, aligning with studies on translanguaging and identity negotiation (García & Li Wei, 2014). Audience perceptions, as well as her husband's, of her nonstandard English as creative further highlight the socially mediated dimension of bilingual performance (Norton, 2013). These findings

suggest that bilingualism functions not only as a technical challenge but also as a dynamic resource, enabling novel expression and contributing to the construction of PAI.

9.2.5 Unlocking the Chain Ball: From Language Anxiety to Creative Empowerment

Senem's experiences further illustrate the interplay between creativity and anxiety in translanguaging practices. When her unconventional English sentences were positively received, whether through an audience member's appreciation or her husband finding her invented words 'lovely', she experienced affirmation and a heightened sense of creativity. In these moments, nonconventional language use became a source of empowerment, aligning with her broader engagement in embodied and affective practices such as *Bedence*, the language of the body.

Bedence can be understood as deeply intertwined with performance and the creative arts. As a professional storyteller and performer, Senem treats her body as an instrument of expression, enacting micro-performances through playful interactions with her feet, toes and other embodied gestures. These acts mirror broader artistic practices in which the body communicates meaning, conveys emotion and constructs identity beyond conventional verbal or written forms. *Bedence* functions as a site of creative experimentation and improvisation, allowing Senem to explore language affect, and selfhood simultaneously, much like a performer testing new narrative forms or movements on stage.

Importantly, her artistic engagement does not operate in isolation: the affirmation she receives from audiences and the recognition of her creative innovations reinforce her linguistic agency, fostering a sense of freedom, affective empowerment, and identity affirmation. This interpretation is grounded in Senem's own acknowledgment of her 'perfectionist' tendencies, which she explicitly discussed in the interview (see Section 8.2.6.2), suggesting that engagement in the arts, when coupled with recognition and validation, can be particularly impactful in enabling a positive bilingual self. However, *Bedence* also encapsulates the complexity of identity. Senem's experiences reflect broader bilingual dynamics, where English was perceived as more affective and embodied, flowing from the heart and hands, while Turkish, though allowing spontaneity, remained more

cognitively oriented, despite English requiring structure and memorisation and Turkish facilitating creativity through its spontaneity. These experiences illustrate how each language affords distinct modes of creativity, identity construction and affective engagement.

By situating *Bedence* within the context of creative arts and bilingual identity, it becomes evident how embodied engagement provides a potential medium for empowerment, which is realised within a supportive, motivational environment, leading to the emergence of inventive and creative bilingual practices. In this sense, creativity in bilingual identity involves embracing modes of expression that diverge from convention, shaped both by the self and by the environment, where the latter can transform the former. Consequently, this process is influenced not only by the unique language the body speaks to itself and the distinctive ‘made-up’ sentences emerging in the bilingual’s repertoire, but also by social feedback, which affirms, encourages and reinforces these practices. Thus, I suggest that *Bedence* represents the sense of creativity and empowerment that arises from being attuned to, listening to and engaging with our bodies in ways that shape and express our unique language, while performing our bilingual identities in supportive environments that value nonconventional linguistic expressions, while avoiding the labelling of translanguaging as *yarım yamalak* (unpleasantly incomplete), as Serap described. In this process, both current and possible selves can be constructed in unique, unpredictable, unexpected and sometimes even contradictory ways.

In this sense, *Bedence* may serve as an antidote to *Plaza Turkish Anxiety*, and to other forms of language anxieties, which reside in *fractured* and *silenced selves*. This understanding is visualised in the digital collage depicted in Figure 9.1, specifically in the detail of the chain ball being unlocked – encapsulated in the title of this section, ‘unlocking the chain ball’.



Figure 9.1. *Collage of audience member participants' and Senem's LPs with the broken chain*

Figure 9.1 above is the merging of the audience member participants' composite embodiment of English in their LPs (Figure 4.4) with Senem's representation of English, where, with a minor twist on the original LPs – the chain connecting the ankle to the ball, as described by Jasmin, is broken through *Bedence*, allowing bilingual identities to be reimagined with greater creativity, freedom and affirmation.

9.2.6 Identity Exploration through Arts-based Research

In this transdisciplinary study, adopting an Arts-based Research (AbR) approach proved instrumental in accessing dimensions of participants' experiences that might otherwise have remained unarticulated. As Bresler (2011; 2021), Greenwood (2012, 2016, 2019) and Leavy (2020) note, AbR integrates the creative arts not simply as illustrative tools, but as central modes of inquiry capable of engaging intellectual, latent, emotional and embodied

ways of knowing. In this research, this methodological choice was not incidental; rather, it directly shaped the depth and scope of what emerged. In keeping with Piazzoli's (2024) observation that AbR can operate in a symbiotic relationship with practice, the arts as methods of inquiry and analysis became mutually reinforcing sites of meaning-making.

Within this approach, Research-based Theatre (RbT) facilitated this research profoundly accompanied by various arts-based data construction methods. This conceptualisation aligns with Belliveau and Lea's (2016) depiction of theatre as a dynamic art form that fosters exploration and creative reflection. The immersive and interactive qualities of RbT engaged participants cognitively, emotionally and physically, supporting Conrad's (2012) assertion that theatre can access embodied and empathetic dimensions beyond intellectual engagement.

Positioned within the broader context of AbR, as outlined by Eisner (2002) and Leavy (2020), RbT embodied a dual characteristic encompassing both rigorous academic inquiry and artistic practice (Belliveau & Lea, 2011). The strength of this RbT lied in this intersection, where three-dimensional representation and emotional evocation – key theatrical elements identified by Mieniczakowski and Moore (2008) – facilitated exploration of both conscious and unconscious emotions and identities through role plays. This approach also empowered individuals to express and negotiate their identities in a creative and meaningful way.

In this vein, the workshops that followed the theatre experience offered participants a space to process and creatively express their responses, facilitating new insights into their experiences and perspectives. To elicit personal and collective experiences, while enkindling emotions, senses and cognition, and providing safety at various levels, as discussed in Section 4.8.3, I aimed to acquire a collection of oral reflections with a depth, yet adhering to the principles of sensitive research, as discussed in Section 4.6.10. I envisioned these narratives as a window into participants' "private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies, thus providing an insider's view of the processes" (Pavlenko, 2007, p. 164), related to language use and the connections between these processes,

emotions and identity. Although Pavlenko explores these dynamics within the context of language learning, her insights are also valuable for understanding how language processes intersect with emotions and identity formation in broader contexts, making them particularly relevant for exploring bilingual experiences.

This study contributes to RbT literature by offering insights in the use of theatre as a pretext (O'Neill, 1995) to explore complex and immediate emotional responses, elicited in the subsequent workshops with the creation of Language Portraits (LPs), channelling these responses into a tangible, visual form. As in Busch's (2012, 2016) and Melo-Pfeifer's (2015) work, LPs functioned not merely as mappings of linguistic repertoires but as interpretive spaces where participants could negotiate the personal and cultural intersections of Turkish and English. What became evident was that LPs, when immediately situated in emotionally charged moments, enabled the articulation of a far broader affective range than is typically documented in bilingualism research. This extended beyond language anxiety (Horwitz, 2010; Sevinç & Backus, 2017; Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018), translanguaging as a way to facilitate communication with the use of full linguistic repertoires, including the first language (García & Li Wei, 2014; Vogel & García, 2017), and encompassed a wide range of emotions.

Furthermore, by layering the RbT with a second dimension, positioning the initial performance within the retelling of a moment through role plays, the study occasionally accessed aspects of the self that are typically veiled from conscious awareness. By providing a safe space for vulnerability and reflection, role plays encouraged participants to confront, accept or at least ease internal struggles simply by discussing them in a supportive environment. This process enabled participants to reconnect with their past while reshaping their present identities for future growth. These reflections reveal the intensity of the bonds formed through this arts-based research, even within the relatively short time spent together, demonstrating how the arts fostered connection and empowerment.

Regarding dissemination, RbT can demonstrate considerable potential to bridge academic and non-academic audiences, supporting claims by Lea (2012) and Lea and Belliveau (2023). The translation of findings into accessible, embodied performances extends research beyond textual limitations, addressing communication gaps highlighted by Rossiter et al. (2008). This approach aligns with Richardson's (2003) emphasis on research that resonates socially and fosters transformative impact. Ultimately, although so far being performed only in *Viva Voce*, the performative dissemination of data through RbT embodies the empathetic power noted by Mienczakowski (2001) and colleagues, with their potential for emotional engagement that deepens understanding for both participants and audiences.

9.3 Conclusion

This chapter brought together the findings through a synthesis of the key research themes, integrating insights from previous chapters. The synthesis weaved together six threads, each capturing a central aspect of the participants' emotional and identity-related experiences. In the following chapter, I extend the discussion to a Reflexive Coda – a reflective account of how embodied research methods deepened my interpretation of the data.

Chapter Ten: Reflexive Coda on Data Analysis

10.1 Introduction

In this brief chapter, I present a reflexive coda on the ways I analysed and interpreted my data, framed as a reflexive discussion – a meta-reflection offering an additional lens on the analytic process. Rather than incorporating this discussion into the previous chapter, I have chosen to dedicate a separate chapter to it, given its highly distinct nature. While the previous chapter focused on the findings and their discussion, this chapter focusses on the research process itself.

In Tablet X of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000), following Siduri's counsel to abandon his fruitless quest for immortality, Gilgamesh is instead directed to find Urshanabi, the boatman who can take him across the Waters of Death to reach Uta-napishti, the immortal flood survivor. Gilgamesh locates Urshanabi, but in a moment of frustration and despair, he damages or destroys the sacred "Stone Ones" – enigmatic objects believed to be magical oars or navigational aids essential for crossing the deadly waters safely. Without the Stone Ones, Urshanabi cannot steer the boat across the perilous sea, forcing them to improvise. Together, they cut 120 long poles to manually propel the boat, punting it across the Waters of Death in a slow and strenuous journey. Upon arrival at Uta-napishti's island, Gilgamesh recounts his entire journey: the heroic battles, the devastating losses and his deep longing to escape the finality of death. However, Uta-napishti challenges Gilgamesh's assumptions, emphasising that immortality is reserved for the gods and that humans must accept their mortality. Despite his persistent hope, Gilgamesh begins to confront the inevitability of death and the importance of cherishing the life he has. This tablet marks a pivotal moment of reckoning and self-awareness on Gilgamesh's part, balancing his heroic quest with emerging wisdom about the human condition.

Much like in Tablet X of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, where Gilgamesh, weary from his long and arduous journey, encounters Siduri, the alewife, at the edge of the world, this chapter marks a deliberate moment of pause and counsel. Siduri does not grant Gilgamesh

immortality; instead, she invites him to reconsider what it truly means to live well – to find meaning not in the relentless pursuit of what lies beyond reach, but in embracing the life that is present: fleeting, fragile, yet deeply full. In the same spirit, this unfolding coda does not aim to generate further analysis or conclusions but to step back and reflect on the journey that has unfolded so far. It is a turning inward – an intentional moment of reflexivity to consider how my own positionality, emotions and creative sensibilities, particularly my immersion in arts-based methods, have shaped and influenced this work. Here, standing at the threshold between the intellectual core of the research and its final conclusion, I find myself like Gilgamesh beside Siduri's tavern – pausing, listening and allowing the echoes of this journey to speak back to me, both as a researcher and as a human being.

10.2 Why a Reflexive Coda?

This reflexive coda serves as a reflective window into a specific aspect of the data analysis and interpretation. It offers a broader contemplation of how my positionality and embodied engagement with the imagery shaped the study's analytical development. In contrast, the reflexivity section in Chapter Four focuses on systematically interpreting the data – constructing themes and arguments grounded in participants' voices and evidence. Integrating reflexivity alongside visual and affective elements in that chapter could blur the boundary between participant-centred analysis and researcher-centred reflection, potentially complicating analytical clarity. Overemphasising personal or creative reflexivity within the analysis risks diverting attention from participants' data and diluting the focus on themes and findings. Consequently, while reflexivity in the methodology chapter is tightly linked to making sense of participants' voices and ensuring analytic rigor, the reflexive coda is personal, creative and embodied. It moves beyond analytic transparency to explore my responses and the arts-based dimensions of the research. This chapter, therefore, offers a broader, narrative reflection on my journey as a researcher, rather than functioning as a methodological checkpoint.

With these in mind, this chapter, shared after the discussion, aims at providing a dedicated space to elaborate on the deeper, richer layers of subjectivity and creativity without interrupting the flow of analytic interpretations. In this way, ending with the reflexivity

coda can allow to absorb the intellectual insights first, then engage with my personal and artistic reflections as a form of closure. It invites readers into my world – as a researcher whose self and creative process are continually evolving – leaving a lasting impression that goes beyond traditional academic writing. Furthermore, while moving to the conclusion of this thesis, this reflexive discussion highlights how the thesis itself is an act of identity and artistry. Situating this at the end can further underscore the journey taken, both intellectual and personal and this is a retrospect to the beautiful journey, marked not only with the research itself, also by my evolving identities.

10.3 My Evolving Identities as a Researcher

Writing this thesis has been, above all, an act of identity – one that reaches far beyond the production of academic knowledge. It is a process of embodiment and articulation of my bilingual, professional, cultural and personal selves. My voice, often caught between languages, cultures and social roles – as a late bilingual, teacher, researcher, artist, migrant and woman – here a space for authentic expression, one marked by defiance, vulnerability and self-definition. Therefore, this research has been both an academic inquiry and a personal journey of identity construction.

Migrating to Ireland to do this Arts-based Research (AbR) was an act of self-definition, challenging both conventional cultural expectations from a 38-year-old woman in many countries, including Türkiye and academic expectations in writing a thesis in the Western mindset. Migration has further shaped my researcher identity. Initially detached from the Turkish community in Ireland, I saw integration as an individual rather than communal process. However, research interactions unexpectedly reconnected me with cultural identity. This oscillation between detachment and belonging mirrors broader migrant researcher experiences. My participants – adults from Türkiye, engaged in self-exploration and artistic inquiry – further highlight the selective nature of cultural belonging in transnational spaces. Ultimately, this thesis became a mirror of self; embracing fluidity, creativity and reflexivity, while resisting the rigid structures in different contexts. It reaffirmed that identity is not only constructed but also performed through teaching, writing, researching, presenting and continually transforming, through experience.

My teacher self is shaped by perfectionism, language anxieties and the pressures of professional commitment. It is an identity marked by care and responsibility but also by restraint and self-doubt. In contrast, my researcher self feels freer, less scrutinised and more exploratory – yet it, too, carries its own vulnerabilities. Both identities exist within a broader cultural and emotional matrix that continually challenges and reconstructs them. The experience of migration and bilingualism deepens these tensions, layering them with questions of belonging, representation and voice. Within these shifting influences, the interpretations I made were inevitably shaped by my positions. However, through this journey, I realised that my efforts to create artistic representations led to aesthetic and thus reflective and reflexive experiences. In this sense, the process itself became a mode of deep reflexivity. I discuss the ways my engagement with the research material through digital images enhanced my reflexivity.

10.4 Digital Images Facilitating My Reflexivity

Digital illustrations offer a unique way to communicate research findings, often competing with other visual methods such as photography, traditional drawings and hybrid digital techniques (Rose, 2022; Stanczak, 2007). One of their key advantages lies in their ability to distil complex ideas into clear, accessible visuals in a practical way (Hyerle, 2008). For example, unlike photography, which captures reality as it is, illustrations allow for selective emphasis, making them particularly effective for representing abstract or theoretical concepts. Their flexibility also means they can be tailored to different audiences and formats, from academic publications to social media, enhancing engagement and accessibility (Lee & Kwak, 2012). Furthermore, the iterative nature of digital illustration allows for continuous refinement, encouraging researchers to critically reflect on their findings throughout the visual creation process (Gray & Malins, 2016).

Digital illustrations can be viewed as a more practical approach to traditional drawings. Although both methods share fundamental qualities that make them powerful tools for visual representation, involving composition, layering and intentional detail placement to guide meaning-making, digital graphic illustrations offer practical advantages that make it

particularly effective for research dissemination (Smiciklas, 2012). One of its key strengths is flexibility – elements can be easily moved, resized, recoloured or adjusted without needing to start over. This is particularly useful when fine-tuning complex metaphors or aligning visuals with research themes. Digital tools also allow for layering with precision, offering the ability to create depth and dimension without the physical constraints of traditional media. However, the interpretative nature of graphic illustrations also presents certain challenges. Given that realism is one of the key concerns in visual communication (Wang, 2022), when compared to photography, digital graphic illustrations may lack a sense of realism, potentially creating a degree of detachment from the subject matter. While photography can evoke emotional depth through its direct connection to reality, illustrations are inherently constructed, raising questions about authenticity (Edwards, 2021). Hybrid approaches that blend photography with digital elements attempt to bridge this gap, but their surreal nature can risk distorting rather than clarifying research insights (Mitchell, 1994). Ultimately, the choice between graphic illustrations and other visual methods depends on the nature of the research, the intended audience and the balance between clarity and depth in representation.

In this research, I used digital tools to create visuals that represent the metaphors I developed at different stages. Through my iterative attempts to generate and refine these visuals, the tools themselves became reflexive methods – especially in my exploration of Professional Artist Identity and of participants’ responses to the storytelling theatre. These processes are discussed below.

10.4.1 Digitally Visualised Professional Artist Identity

The decision to represent Professional Artist Identity through a graphic illustration stemmed from the unique nature of the metaphor itself – an imagined fusion of an atom and a flower. Since this concept does not exist in the physical world, it could not be captured through photography. Graphic illustration offered the creative freedom necessary to construct the visual metaphor in a way that accurately conveyed its intended meaning. The choice of background and colours (see Figure 8.1) was intentional, crafted to deepen the conceptual impact of the image. Additionally, the medium allowed for numerous sketches

and drafts, a process that would have been challenging to communicate with a traditional artist. It provided the flexibility to experiment with the image at my own pace, instantly adjusting elements as needed. This made the process more efficient, economical and accessible, giving me greater control as the researcher.

In making meaning of the data, I used the metaphor of the ‘atom’ to represent artistic identity, which is discussed in Chapter Eight. The metaphor worked well on paper, but when I translated it into a visual representation, it failed to convey what I intended. After attempting numerous versions of the same metaphor using Canva, I realised that it wasn’t the visual itself that was the issue, but the metaphor. I began to reflect on why it was not working by focusing on the visual rather than the picture in my mind. Upon examining the image, I identified the issue, which led me to combine two different types of metaphors – one scientific and electron(ic), the other nature-based and emotional. This transformation initiated a reflexive process in how I engaged with the concept. Initially, I assumed my choice of a cold, scientific atom stemmed from an unconscious focus on Senem’s PhD scientist identity, perhaps overshadowing her artistic self. However, with deeper reflection, I realised that the real reason lay in my own emotions towards her. Despite feeling a connection from the start, I had unconsciously restrained my playful and friendly side, striving instead to maintain a professional demeanour. I feared that I would have been taken childish or inexperienced. This hesitation was rooted in my own professional insecurities. Additionally, I became aware of other emotional blockages, shaped by past experiences, that were transferred to this relationship. Neither Senem nor her art was as grey and mechanical as I had initially represented in the metaphor. This transformation found its echoes in the poem I created from her data as well, leading to a more layered and vivid depiction of her inner world. Furthermore, this realisation not only reshaped the metaphor but also altered my relationship, with both her and myself. Through this process, the visual representation of the metaphor I chose became not only a method of presentation but also a method of interpretation, as the metaphor itself changed how I understood the data.

10.4.2 Digitally Visualised Bilingual Identity and Emotions

After coining the metaphor *biting waters of English*, I turned my focus to the emotions evoked by the Turkish use of Senem. This interpretative process led me to the metaphor of *home*, which surfaced through several recurring elements in the data. I later translated some of these metaphors into a graphic illustration, initially created for presentation at the Arts and Humanities Research Festival 2024, hosted by the Trinity Long Room Hub at Trinity College Dublin. However, the act of translation itself became more than a presentation tool: it evolved into a reflective and reflexive mode of inquiry. Engaging with the draft visually and emotionally allowed me to navigate meaning-making in a way that was both analytical and intuitive. In this process, I found myself aesthetically engaged with the work, deepening my interpretative insights through a form of embodied scholarship.



Figure 10.1. *A visual illustration of the initial themes in bilingual identity and emotions.*

In Image 10.1, I tried to convey ‘the biting waters of English’, with its steel grey colours and home, represented by Turkish, as a pleasant place in the distance. The surrounding trees represented a particular song sung by Senem, which evoked emotions similar to those stirred by her use of Turkish, even though the song’s language was unfamiliar to the audience. However, the visual highlighted a disconnection between these metaphors, which stood in stark contrast to Senem’s seamless, simultaneous use of both languages and singing – and to the translanguaging theory that suggests languages blend fluidly in the mind. Moreover, ‘home’ appeared as a destination to be reached, which did not align with the data. Additionally, the human eye naturally seeks a shadow, as it is highly unusual for there to be none in real-world lighting.

After reaching that place, the image implied that ‘home’ was the final destination after a challenging journey and that returning to the water would mean doing so with shoes on, regardless of the reason for not wearing them before. Although walking on biting waters instead of sharp gravel made sense visually in the digital image, the idea of the participant returning to the same discomfort did not align with the data. This created yet another disconnect between the themes in Senem’s seamless, continuous translanguaging and the theory itself. Additionally, there was another sense of disconnection in the visual: reaching home required walking along a long path of sharp gravels. Realising these tensions through the digital collage shifted my perspective in interpreting the data. I consequently revised the metaphor of home to *Finding home in the world of known* – a space where participants could find comfort with the known for a while before returning to the biting waters. With this in mind, the new visual collage was created, as shown in Figure 10.2.



Figure 10.2. *A digital illustration refining themes in bilingual identity and emotions.*

In the poster draft above, the bilingual speaker is depicted standing in the biting waters of English, with one foot resting on a grass island, with the caption “Moments of home when walking barefooted on the gravels”. My intention was to convey the idea that the pain had not yet ended, as one foot remained in the water. However, this time I soon realised that the visual felt incomplete, as the pain could endure while both feet were still in the water. I had intended to symbolise the simultaneous use of English and Turkish by placing one foot in each area, but it still posed some degree of disconnection. I also realised that the grass island, which initially seemed small under one foot, should be larger, reflecting the place

of comfort and rest for participants. With this in mind, I adjusted the visual one more time, to show a grass island large enough to support both feet, while still symbolising the cold waters that continued to bite the wet feet. However, the grass island was not the only aspect of discomfort in the poster. The dry jeans did not accurately reflect the immersion into English and the trees surrounding the riverbed felt too distant, acting as though they belonged to a separate universe.

Additionally, the anonymous figure left me feeling disconnected from the research and as though I was not honouring the participants' voices. Despite spending considerable time on the visual, I had an instinctive sense that it did not fully capture the metaphor I wanted to convey. This prompted me to take a real photograph, which resulted in a more authentic and bodily experience, leading to a deeper data interpretation of the data.

My efforts to present my findings artistically through photography unexpectedly opened up a new window for data interpretation, offering fresh insights and deeper engagement with the meanings embedded in the research. In Figure 10.3, I am on a green island, symbolising Turkish, surrounded by the *biting waters of English* within a lush artistic universe. The creation process of the visual was rigorous. We first had to dig out a large patch of grass with its thick soil layer from a park, then find a riverbed that was both accessible and shallow enough to hold the grass island, all while ensuring the surrounding trees matched my envisioned setting. This endeavour led to 5-6 hours of work, over 500 photographs and a thoroughly soaked me until the head. While showing my commitment to Arts-based Research and my communication with the data in emotional level, the photo experience initiated a transformation, by shifting the meaning-making process from a visual-cognitive experience to a bodily-cognitive one – engaging sensations and feelings. Being soaked in cold water was entirely different from looking at a carefully composed stock image. My freezing feet made me viscerally aware of the physical struggle, mirroring the cognitive challenge participants described. We kept shooting in different locations and angles, much like how participants navigated ongoing cognitive stress. Finally finding the capture I believed that reflected what I wanted to convey, I coloured the biting waters in grey, as seen in Figure 10.3 below.



Figure 10.3. *A photograph illustrating final themes in bilingual identity and emotions*

As a final touch to the poster draft, I initially retained the caption in Figure 10.2: *Moments of home when walking barefooted on the gravels*. However, similar to the visual itself, the caption felt incomplete. Unsure of how the image would be received, I consulted with colleagues Nemo Castelli S.J. and Dr Neha Talli to explore what meanings the caption might convey to an audience. The outcome, to my surprise, was disappointment. My original concept lacked even a single reference to language – the very central themes of my research – and the caption appeared obscure and disconnected.

After explaining my intended meanings, I proposed several alternative captions that attempted to foreground language. Yet, most of them failed to communicate the emotional and conceptual depth I was aiming for. In response, the three of us independently generated our own sets of suggestions and then reflected collaboratively on each one. Through this iterative, dialogic process, we arrived at a caption in the form of a question – one that invites engagement and interpretation: *Living in an English world, can a third, unknown language feel like home?* This final revision, as shown in Figure 10.4, reoriented the poster's message and restored not only its intended meaning but also its emotional resonance.

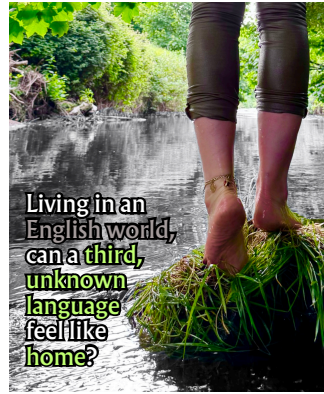


Figure 10.4. *Final version of the poster presented at the Arts and Humanities Research Festival, exhibited at The Long Room Hub, Trinity College Dublin, 2023-2025).*

Just as they could not fully relax in Turkish due to the looming presence of English, I could not find true comfort on the grass island because of my cold, aching feet. These transformed my metaphor of “biting waters of English” and the “comfort of Turkish” into something more nuanced: I felt the aliveness and freshness of the water surrounding me, realising its essential nature. In this vein, a photographer’s heightened awareness of the surroundings, noticing details and perspectives, experiment with the light, exposure seeking and unique approach to something seemingly obvious or ordinary, as a researcher I became more aware of the data and different perspectives by being exposed to a data-driven metaphor at a bodily level, enlightening me and providing a new perspective to what I had interpreted as obvious.

This experience evokes Greenwood’s (2012) question of “whether overall findings are by design or accident” (p. 4), by contributing to the refinement of my findings. My embodied experience not only validated my themes and metaphors, but also prompted critical reflection on areas of misalignment, ultimately leading to their improvement. This refinement emerged not from photography as a static artifact but from engaging in photography as an embodied, reflexive process. Later, while I was reflecting on the experience, I recalled my supervisor’s words: “Ebru, the picture cannot be that gloomy” referring to extensively negative picture I painted. Together, also with the realisation through the transformation of gravel metaphor to waters, these made me return to my data

with a new perspective, finally noticing the revitalising aspects of English, which I had previously overshadowed with its overwhelming effects. Suddenly, everything found its place – in my mind and in my gut.

As a result, in line with Leavy's (2018) framing of AbR, digital illustrations in this study were not merely tools for representation but also served as interpretive and reflexive methods. The iterative process of creating and refining visuals allowed for critical engagement with the data and the metaphors developed at different stages, enabling insights into both participants' experiences and my own reflections, as the researcher, on both audience member participants' and Senem's, the storyteller's, responses. As Leavy (2018) emphasises, such artistic processes extend beyond conventional analytic techniques by fostering generativity, resonance and accessibility, allowing findings to be conveyed in ways that are simultaneously intellectually rigorous, emotionally engaging and aesthetically meaningful. Through these digital illustrations, the research was able to balance fidelity to participants' voices with creative expression, making the findings both comprehensible and evocative for diverse audiences.

By translating its findings into arts, this study also embraced AbR's commitment to public scholarship by ensuring accessibility both in process and in dissemination, as suggested by Leavy (2018).

10.5 Conclusion

This chapter offered a reflexive account of the decision-making process informing a specific aspect of the data analysis, that is, the role of digital visuals and photography in helping me crystallise the metaphors and embodied meanings emerging from the data. This reflexive coda invites a pause to acknowledge how my own positionality and creative engagement shaped the interpretation of the data, before closing this thesis in the following Conclusion chapter.

Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

11.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I share the implications of this study and what they imply for migrants' identity construction in multilingual and multicultural contexts. I reiterate the aims of the study, continuing with a summary of key findings and closing with the implications and limitations.

In Tablet XI of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000), Uta-napishti recounts the story of the Great Flood, a divine catastrophe sent by the gods to destroy humanity. Forewarned by the god Ea, Uta-napishti built a great ark, preserving life. After the floodwaters receded, the gods regretted their decision. Enlil, who had ordered the destruction, was appeased when Uta-napishti and his wife offered sacrifices. As a reward, they were granted eternal life but were exiled to the far side of the world. To test Gilgamesh's worthiness, Uta-napishti challenges him to stay awake for six days and seven nights. Gilgamesh immediately falls asleep and Uta-napishti's wife bakes a loaf of bread each day to mark his failure. Moved by pity, she persuades her husband to offer Gilgamesh a consolation prize: a plant that restores youth. Gilgamesh retrieves the plant and intends to bring it back to Uruk. However, while bathing, a snake steals the plant, thus gaining immortality for its kind. Defeated, Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, where he proudly shows the boatman the city's great walls – a lasting testament to human achievement. At the end, Gilgamesh comes to understand the futility of his quest for literal immortality, realising that eternal life is beyond human reach. This recognition is a turning point where he accepts his mortality. Instead of continuing to chase the impossible, he finds meaning in the legacy he leaves behind – symbolised by the great walls of Uruk – which stand as a testament to human achievement and endurance.

This concluding chapter parallels Tablet XI of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in significant ways. Just as Gilgamesh ultimately accepts human limitations and the inevitability of loss, this chapter reflects on struggles and perceived “incompetence” as expressions of human limits

– often experienced through anxiety, and avoidance, within the context of bilingual identity. Like Gilgamesh’s moment of insight, the participants come to understand their challenges as part of a broader negotiation of meaning in diverse oral communication contexts – whether through English, Turkish or even the unknown language of a requiem. Moreover, these struggles can be reconciled through acceptance, as explored in the implications section. The central themes of human limitation and acceptance in Tablet XI resonate with the study’s own openly acknowledged limitations and the commitment to future development. Finally, just as the epic imparts wisdom in valuing legacy over the futile pursuit of eternal life, this chapter honours the enduring legacy of literature on bilingual identity – a complex, ongoing process where struggle, loss and regeneration coexist within personal and cultural meanings. It recognises identities as fluid, never fixed, continuously constructed and reconstructed

11.2 The Research Question

In this PhD research, I examined bilingual identities and emotions of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland, based on the following overarching question:

How do individuals who are speakers of English as a second language construct their identities across linguistic, personal, social and cultural dimensions?

Operationalised through three sub-questions:

1. How did a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland emotionally respond to the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent*?
2. What aspects of identity were revealed in a group of adults from Türkiye living in Ireland engaging with the bilingual performance *The Fertile Crescent*?
3. How does *The Fertile Crescent*’s storyteller artist construct her identity through her performances?

My interpretations lead to three poems, one per sub-question, and seven key themes, further distilled in six interwoven threads.

11.3 Key Findings of the Study

This transdisciplinary study revealed that the 22 adults who participated in this study, 21 audience participants and the performing artist, faced significant challenges with English, regardless of their language experience. While they struggled with English, they also found value in the connections it allowed them to form. Participants expressed relief when communicating in Turkish, appreciating the ease and comfort it provided. They experienced similar emotions to those associated with Turkish when engaged with a song that, despite being in an unknown language, resonated with familiar melodies and deep artistic expression. However, they also faced anxiety around their oral communication, accented speech and translanguaging, often leading to avoidance behaviours.

Participants' emotional responses echoed those associated with uncertainty or being overwhelmed, particularly with the use of English in the theatre, during everyday conversations, with their accented English and translanguaging, in Brown's (2021) groups of emotions. These anxieties were encapsulated under the term *Plaza Turkish Anxiety*. By this term, I referred to the anxiety the speakers experienced when they integrated English elements in their Turkish speech, in the fear of being perceived as pretentious, instead of approaching the act as drawing on their full linguistic repertoire to enhance communication.

The study further explored the dynamic interaction between Professional Artist Identity (PAI) and cultural, personal and bilingual identities, exploring how various dynamics in different identities interacted with each other, shaping artist identity. Additionally, the study revealed that participants' identities were largely shaped by pivotal moments in their past experiences, existential themes and their conscious efforts to take responsibility for their lives. This included feelings of inadequacy and the connections – or lack thereof – that they sought to establish with other Turkish people in Ireland. Ultimately, the study compared bilingualism to Humbaba, the awe-inspiring guardian of the Cedar Forest, a figure whose presence inspires both fear and wonder, anxiety and empowerment.

11.4 Implications and Suggestions

This study has implications for multilingual and multicultural contexts. Inherently, these implications have suggestions for policy-makers, educators and other professionals working for migrants, particularly who are users of English as LX. These include the importance of:

- *Addressing cognitive and emotional challenges.* Educators and policy-makers should recognise the cognitive and emotional challenges that multilingual individuals face. Training programs and counselling services aimed at reducing language anxiety can significantly improve learners' confidence and overall language experience. By offering support tailored to the emotional needs of language learners, institutions can help alleviate anxiety and enhance learning outcomes. In this regard, the findings on the ease and relief brought by listeners' use of their first language (L1) suggest that integrating translanguaging practices into educational settings can play a vital role in reducing anxiety and fostering greater learner engagement. Allowing the use of L1 – particularly when teachers employ it strategically for clarification, jokes, cultural references and visualisable descriptions – alongside English may help to alleviate cognitive strain, facilitate clearer communication and enable learners to remain connected to their roots, enhancing understanding.
- *Utilising arts-based methods.* Incorporating arts-based methods such as theatre, storytelling and poetry can be beneficial in research contexts. The arts offer valuable insights into emotional experiences and identity construction, providing a platform for self-expression and exploration. Arts-based practices can enhance engagement and help individuals navigate their linguistic and cultural identities in a creative and inclusive environment. Engaging with these methods in educational and research settings can facilitate reflection and enrich understanding of linguistic and cultural experiences. In those environments, educators should value and incorporate students' linguistic backgrounds, creating spaces where diverse cultural identities are acknowledged, respected and constructed.

- *Supporting social integration.* Facilitating the use of first languages in social interactions can improve social integration and reduce feelings of isolation among bilingual students. Encouraging the use of first languages can boost confidence and enhance social skills, contributing to a more inclusive and cohesive educational experience. To understand the intricacies of such an environment, teacher training programs should emphasise the importance of cultural competency, including the benefits of translanguaging and the emotional realities of language learning.
- *Addressing accent, fluency and translanguaging concerns.* Interventions aimed at reducing anxiety related to accent and fluency can help language learners build confidence. Providing opportunities for practice and addressing accent discrimination can improve learners' communication skills and self-acceptance. supporting migrants' bilingual development and possible selves requires more than encouraging translanguaging or praising individual motivation. It demands careful attention to the social, relational and cultural contexts in which language use is performed and judged. Creating safe spaces for translanguaging and visible L2 experimentation can help migrants bridge the gap between feared and hoped-for selves, allowing them to enact new identities without fear of eroding their belonging.
- *Implementing post-modernist approaches.* Adopting post-modernist approaches that bring together body, mind, nature, sensations and free expression, going beyond cognition, can create safe spaces that respect cultural diversity and connect with nature and the body. These approaches support identity construction by fostering environments that embrace heterogeneity and holistic understanding.

By addressing these implications, educators, policymakers and professionals can create more supportive, inclusive, and empowering environments for multilingual individuals, enhancing their language learning experiences and supporting positive identity development. Encouraging AbR projects will not only allow individuals to share their

experiences but also address and rectify perceived injustices in their narratives, contributing to positive identity construction.

11.5 Limitations of the Study

This study faced several methodological limitations that shaped both its scope and execution. The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges, reducing the effective research period and, due to administrative restrictions, preventing any extension of the timeline. Time constraints further affected the workshop phase, as the venue's early closing hours and limited scheduling flexibility frequently interrupted the sessions and curtailed planned activities, notably the role play in the final post-performance workshop.

Similarly, the performance space allocated within the *Innovation Academy* was not well-suited to the demands of storytelling and despite efforts to adapt the classroom into a stage, spatial limitations remained evident, potentially hindering full immersion. The primary reason for not being able to provide a professional stage in Dublin was financial constraints. These limitations also restricted the research design by preventing the rental of a theatre in Cork to broaden participation beyond a single city. In addition, due to the same constraints, the lack of professional recording equipment reduced the quality of the audio data, particularly in the first group, where unclear recordings made transcription challenging and resulted in an incomplete dataset. Together, these factors placed limits on the methodological scope of the project.

Moreover, the absence of video recordings of the workshops and a comprehensive research diary – relying instead on voice-memo reflections recorded on event days – limited the depth of reflexivity and analytical rigour. Incorporating these tools would have further substantiated the findings and enabled a more thorough and nuanced analysis. Despite these limitations, the participants offered numerous insights, resulting in valuable data for the study.

11.6 Conclusion

This exploration on emotions and bilingual identity brought together stories told within stories, stories around the stories, and stories from stories. Senem, the performing artist involved in this project, interwove her personal narrative with a story from ancient times, creating a seamless connection between the two. I then adopted her story as a lens through which to understand the experiences of the research participants, who recounted their own narratives around Senem's narration. By analysing their accounts, I explored the emotions and identities expressed within their stories, uncovering the deeper layers of meaning embedded in their overall narratives. Ultimately, the study underscores that the interplay between possible selves, migration and bilingual identity is a deeply social and cultural phenomenon. This research, like Gilgamesh's journey, began in a search for something beyond the 'obvious', continued to discover meaning and ended in the recognition that within the self resides a world that is constantly beginning anew.

Afterword

This Afterword parallels the final tablet of the myth, Tablet XII of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (trans. George, 2000) – a reflective, post-epic moment in which the boundaries between the living and the dead blur. When a treasured drum of Gilgamesh slips into the underworld, Enkidu offers to retrieve it. Gilgamesh warns him of the strict taboos that must be observed below, but Enkidu ignores them and is seized by the grip of death. Gilgamesh’s cries to the gods meet silence from Enlil and Sin, yet Ea and Shamash take pity, breaking open the earth so that Enkidu’s ghost may return. In their final meeting, Gilgamesh questions his friend about what lies beyond life’s boundary and Enkidu’s solemn words sweep away any false hopes of beauty in the afterlife.

This ending leaves the epic balanced between what can be known and what remains a mystery, with its hero confronting the limits of human life. Like Enkidu’s brief return from the underworld, this final chapter revisits the journey from a changed vantage point. It does not offer resolution, but resonance – a way of dwelling with what has passed and what remains. In this reflective space, the thesis becomes not just a record of research, but a site of becoming, where memory, emotion and meaning are held in quiet conversation, where time moves at its own pace.

Somewhere between myth and method, between diagnosis and data, between my Turkish roots and my life in Ireland, this research took me apart and put me back together in ways I could never have anticipated. Reading *The Epic of Gilgamesh* again and again, watching Senem’s performance dozens of times – live and online – I found that the myth was not just a story I encountered, but one that mirrored me. Its existential core, which had once seemed ancient and remote, became ever-living – living with me, like a testament to my becoming; a reflection of grief that did not paralyse but moved me to act; a record of joy discovered in the quietude of writing and listening; a spiritual and intellectual convergence that refused the artificial boundaries often imposed in academia. There was no dichotomy between researcher and researched, mind and body, intellectual and intuitive. These were always the same pulse – interwoven, fluid and beautifully powerful together. This is the existence, this is the meaning.

Throughout this thesis, moments of introspection and positional awareness have unfolded gradually. It began in the methodology chapter as a research-focused, analytical reflexivity, grounded in ethical awareness, interpretive responsibility and attention to participants’ voices. This deepened in the reflexive coda on data analysis, where creative and embodied expressions emerged, navigating the tension between personal insight and scholarly clarity – acknowledging the porous boundaries between self, study and scholarly voice.

In this Afterword, however, the movement gives way to something quieter and more reflective: a pause to look back, not to analyse, but to understand. Here, the emphasis is no longer on methodological rigour or researcher positionality, but on meaning-making born of experience. The writing shifts into a life-focused, narrative mode – one that honours the

emotional, intellectual and existential transformations that accompanied this research journey.

Reflecting on similar themes years ago, in a class on existential psychotherapy during my master's in Educational Psychology, our lecturer posed a question that lingered with me: "What would you do if you knew you had only a month to live?" Among the diverse responses from classmates—dreams of travel, marriage or reconnection – I found myself answering, quite simply, that I would finish my long-procrastinated master's thesis in English Language Teaching (ELT). It may have seemed unremarkable to my much younger classmates, but for me, it was a source of joy and purpose. My research mattered. The voices I wanted to understand mattered. They gave shape to my days and weight to my presence in the world. That sense of purpose re-emerged forcefully – and painfully – when I lost my dear Mom in 2018. Her sudden passing left a wound I still carry, yet just 37 days later, I defended my thesis in ELT. I didn't know it then, but I was affirming, through action, that research was my way of staying alive in the face of grief. Later that same year, in September, I defended my second thesis, in Educational Psychology. Each milestone, though academic in nature, was infused with a deeper emotional truth: my pursuit of knowledge was also a pursuit of self.

Life tested this commitment again in December 2022. During a Christmas visit to Türkiye, just after finishing the final round of focus groups, a suspicious lump in my breast was discovered. The diagnosis was stage-2 breast cancer. What followed was a vortex of surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and ongoing hormone therapy. Fear, despair, anger – all arrived, uninvited. And yet, even then, I could not suspend my studies and I insisted on continuing my interviews. I needed to. Research became my lifeline, tethering me to structure, to meaning, to something still mine amidst the chaos of treatment and uncertainty. I reread transcripts through blurred eyes. I found metaphors in the language of others even as I struggled to make sense of my own meanings. And still, I kept writing. I kept listening. Because this was not just a PhD. It was a way back to myself.

The structure of inquiry, like the carved walls of Uruk, held me upright. The themes that run through the Gilgamesh myth – friendship, connection, grief, fear, hope, the futile desire for immortality, the urgent need for meaning and acceptance and resilience – are not just metaphorical threads. They are lived truths. I saw them not only in my whispers, also in the voices of my participants as they navigated the spaces between languages, between homes, between emotional terrains. I heard them in the silence they held, in the metaphors they chose, in the drawings they embodied, in their willingness to open up their vulnerabilities to me, in their acts of moving forward, of taking risks, of seeking connection and presence in existence.

And as I carved meaning from their challenges, I rediscovered joy in every word I wrote. Like Camus, who gazed upon the bombed-out ruins of Europe and saw the world begin again in light, I, too, came to see each day as a quiet rebirth. "O light!" he wrote. "This last resort was ours, too and I knew it now. In the middle of winter, I at last discovered that there was in me an invincible summer" (Camus, 1968, p. 166). This was not mere metaphor – it was survival.

In this study, neither the audience member participants, nor Senem waited for Godot to arrive. Instead, they each forged their own paths, bravely facing challenges in pursuit of their dreams. By coming to Ireland, they confronted moments of uncertainty, overwhelm and feelings of inadequacy, all while searching for connection – sometimes finding it – in their quest to make Ireland a home where life can flourish.

I, too, am not an exception to this journey. Moment by moment, word by word, as a striving migrant or a thriving cancer patient, I found light in my own existence. This, too, is my cry. Not of despair, but of becoming. Not of finding answers, but of finding the courage to carry the questions forward – alive, uncertain, unafraid.

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Appendix A: Sample Language Portraits Shared with the Participants



Retrieved from <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/3239/4452>

Appendix B: Post-Performance Workshop Prompts

[Translated into English from Turkish]

1. Let's close our eyes. Move our neck, shoulders, open and close our hands, feel the ground under our feet, Take a deep breath, hold it and release [three times].
2. Now, let's go back to Senem's narration. Think about her English and Turkish use. Where do you feel Turkish and English in your body? [followed by Language Portrait creation and reflection].
3. Let's go back to Senem's narration again. Which moment influenced you the most? You can close your eyes if you would like to. [Followed by reflection.]
4. We will revisit the theatre for the last time. What symbols in the theatre took your attention? [Explaining what symbols means.] Why?
5. Now as our final activity, we will create role plays. As a group, decide on a moment that affected you all. Then recreate this significant moment with your interpretations.

Appendix C: Individual Interview Prompts

[Translated into English from Turkish]

1. Before I proceed with my prompts, would you like to share anything, not necessarily related with this research?
2. What do you think about the activities you were engaged in? Did you revisit them in any occasion?
3. In your Language Portrait, [...], can we talk more about it?
4. In the focus group, you said [“.....”] Can you elaborate on that?
5. We talked about your emotions related to Senem’s Turkish use. How is it in your general life?
6. What do you think about accent?
7. Do you sometimes use English words in your interactions in Turkish or vice versa?

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Appendix E: Translation of Individual Interview

Given the length of the interviews (an average of 9,000 words per interview) rather than including the full interviews, this section includes excerpts from of six individual interviews – with two interviews selected from each of Groups 2, 3 and 4. The fully interviews were not included in order to protect the anonymity of participants: even with all private information removed and the data anonymised, sharing interviews of this length could increase the risk of participant identification, particularly given the relatively small number of people from Türkiye living in Ireland. Six extended excerpts below were purposefully chosen to illustrate different examples and perspectives.

E1: Translation of an excerpt from Duru's Interview

Recording in progress.

Ebru (the researcher)

Thank you for making time on the day of the event, and again today, and for your valuable contributions to my work.

Duru (the participant)

Thank you.

Ebru (the researcher)

Thanks so much.

Duru (the participant)

As I said...

Ebru (the researcher)

Sorry, the [connection] was cutting in and out.

Duru (the participant)

That's okay. The workshop itself was really enjoyable. We got to meet each other, and it was lovely. The storytelling part was great too, and even what we did afterwards [going to a pub] was really nice. It made us reflect on a few things. You created a kind of awareness, so I also want to thank you.

Ebru (the researcher)

Thank you. Your comments are very valuable.

Duru (the participant)

Did it cut out again?

Ebru (the researcher)

No, not at all. I heard you clearly. It slows down a little at times, but so far there hasn't been any problem. [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

Just this last bit [not clear]... [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

Um, you said, "it created awareness for us too; it drew attention to certain things." What kind of awareness did it create? After the conversations we had following the event, did you notice any feelings in yourself or shifts in language, that you'd like to share?

Duru (the participant)

In moments when the language was overwhelming me. [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

I realised we actually have a lot in common. I saw we were all sharing the same emotions. [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

And I also thought about this: where do I feel it the most? The struggle of using a second language or not being able to use my *mother tongue*. Its effect, its sadness... [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

I really asked myself where I feel it most strongly. [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

And then something came to mind. [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

One day... [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

I got a call from one of my sons' schools. [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

"They need you to come urgently. [Your son] fell while playing football, landed on his shoulder, and you need to come immediately." So I asked, "How is he, is it really urgent? What's his condition now, how's his shoulder?" [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

The secretary on the phone said, "I don't know." [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

She just said, "I was told to tell you to come urgently." [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

Of course, not having an emergency plan prepared was my own shortcoming, but you can't really know until something like this happens. I went straight to the school, they directed me somewhere, so we went there, but it turned out the teachers had misdirected us. That place didn't actually treat kids under 12 or 16, something like that. [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

Anyway, everyone was really kind and attentive, but they said, "We're sorry, we don't

treat underage children. We understand your situation, but we can't help you. We'll refer you to another hospital." They handled things, they were supportive. One doctor even said, to comfort us... [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

"Shall we bring some ice?" Well, actually I asked, "Could we get some ice?" Because no one had put any ice on my son's shoulder yet. [short silence]

Duru (the participant)

And also... My [son, name deleted] is a bit delicate. He was holding his arm like this, absolutely not moving it. [...]

E2: Translation of an excerpt from Damla's Individual Interview

Recording in progress.

Ebru (the researcher)

My dear, first of all, thank you. You're really making such valuable contributions to my work. The contributions you made during the group work after the performance or let's say, the focus group interview, and here in the individual interview, are really valuable. Thank you. Shall we start with a general conversation first? I have a few topics I want to continue with afterwards. But first, when you look back at Sinem's performance, the workshop afterwards or the [not clear] and drama activity – do any moments come to mind? Any moments that made you more aware of speaking in Turkish or English or moments that made you more aware of your feelings?

Damla (the participant)

Yes. When Sinem turned from English to Turkish during her performance, it triggered a kind of emotional response for me. Focusing in English and then suddenly turning to Turkish... it was like remembering the place you came from all of a sudden. Or remembering your *mother tongue*. It stirred similar feelings in me. This happens in daily life too. During the day, I speak English, then I meet a Turkish friend and start speaking Turkish. Or if I hear Turkish while walking somewhere... at that moment, like Sinem did, turning suddenly from English to Turkish triggers a sense of place or identity. Even if I've been exposed to English all day, Turkish comes out and in that moment, I remember who I am. That's what it does.

Ebru (the researcher)

Okay. I remember, you said you enjoyed the shift to Turkish during Sinem's performance, that it created positive feelings. Do you feel the same when you hear people speaking Turkish on the street? What do you feel when you hear someone speaking Turkish while walking?

Damla (the participant)

After speaking English all day, when I hear a group speaking Turkish, it makes me feel that there are people who share the same *mother tongue*, that I'm not alone. That I'm not struggling by myself... I feel like I could somehow get help from them. That's the feeling I have. Sometimes I live with a sense of loneliness. But, as I said, maybe I wouldn't feel the same way in another country because there are so many Turks here. During the day, on the bus, the train, many places, I hear Turkish. I meet Turkish people or talk to my friend in Turkish. I think it's partly language-related, because the Turkish population here is relatively high. But as I said, at work, I speak only English all day. Suddenly hearing Turkish on the street creates that emotional response. I don't know... it's emotional, but it makes me remember where I come from, and of course, it creates a feeling.

Ebru (the researcher)

Yes, exactly. We're talking about feelings. I'm trying to understand exactly what those feelings are. Thank you. Looking at my notes from the day of the activity... I'd like to leave Language Portrait to a later moment... but you said that while listening to Sinem's

performance, your mind shifted to Turkish. Language is certainly one of the factors that triggers feelings. For people living here and speaking two languages, language has an effect on us. But besides language, during Sinem's performance, the *yazma* [traditional Turkish scarf] she used as part of the set, why did that catch your attention? Are there images or artifacts that remind you of Türkiye in any tangible form? Not necessarily "Turkish" things, just anything that reminds you of Türkiye or Turkish... in your surroundings?

Damla (the participant)

Thinking about my surroundings, for example, seeing the guy playing the *bağlama* [Turkish folk instrument] in Grafton, that immediately makes me think in Turkish... or when I go to a restaurant and it's a Turkish restaurant, eating there reminds me of Turkish. I went to a Croatian restaurant recently and ate *dolma* [stuffed peppers – traditional Turkish food]. Even though it's not Turkish there, I immediately thought in Turkish, "I'm eating *dolma*." While speaking English, Turkish food comes to mind. Similar things happen in Dublin; things that trigger memories of Turkish culture and language.

Ebru (the researcher)

You said you thought in Turkish, that caught my attention. Sometimes I notice myself expressing things in English internally, and sometimes in Turkish. I guess what you're saying is related to that. So normally you think in English, but in those moments, like before eating *dolma*, did you turn to Turkish while speaking to yourself?

Damla (the participant)

Yes, I turned to Turkish. While talking to the woman at the restaurant, I said to myself, "I'm eating *dolma*," and such. That's why I experience this, suddenly turning from English to Turkish, and it also happened with the *yazma*. Seeing the scarf made me immediately think in Turkish, a direct shift from English to Turkish.

Ebru (the researcher)

Do you think it's in your own voice or do you sometimes, without realising it, using Turkish words while speaking?

Damla (the participant)

It happens. In the restaurant I work at, with many American guests, sometimes my mind just drifts and a Turkish word slips out. I immediately try to correct it during the day. I think it could also be cultural, I don't know. Or maybe when expressing something with an interjection, a Turkish word comes out. [short silence]

Damla (the participant)

Like "Ne," ["What?"] or something like that. I think, "I shouldn't have said that in Turkish, I should speak English." It can happen suddenly.

Ebru (the researcher)

It's important that it especially comes out in Turkish. Very valuable, thank you. You said it happens with Americans. Does it also happen with Irish customers or mostly with Americans?

Damla (the participant)

Mostly we have American guests, that's why I gave that example.

E3: Translation of an excerpt from Murat's Individual Interview

[...]

Ebru (the researcher)

Okay, yes. In your *Language Portrait* [uttered in English] there is no Turkish at all. That was quite surprising for me. Why is that?

Murat (the participant)

Umm, actually I explained the reason for that at length a little while ago. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

The colourfulness here, the richness... [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

Abilities, empathy... [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

Things like helpfulness, many qualities like that. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

These exist in the geography of Türkiye. I mean, I am a citizen of the Republic of Türkiye. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

So, I didn't want to express this on paper with any colour. I feel this because, outwardly, I didn't want to, so to speak, oversimplify it by reducing it to a single colour. Yes, it would have been an oversimplification. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

This is simply my own interpretation, no other reason. Why should I confine it to one colour? Yes, the colour of our flag is crimson red and white, that is fine. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

But I didn't want to reduce it to a single colour because... you know in language learning there is 'learning' and there is 'acquisition'. If you just learn it, for example by taking an 8-month course, but you don't acquire it, then it doesn't become a habit, and you forget it within six months. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

So, a skill you haven't acquired or many things we haven't truly acquired... [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

Since other languages were acquired later in life, I feel that they never carry the same real sense as the language one grows up with. That's why I didn't want to give it a colour, as if 'this is the colour of the language.' [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

I didn't want to assign a colour just for the sake of saying a language has a colour. [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

I see, thank you. That's a very different and refreshing perspective. Thank you. [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

Let me ask this: in Senem's performance we were all very moved by the *requiem*. As someone who has watched that performance five times, each time it has really stirred my emotions. [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

We talked about the music in that *Focus Group* [uttered in English] session. [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

And you also mentioned then... ah sorry, again in the focus group discussion on Senem's performance, you said something like... [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

That actually in the moments when she was silent, she was communicating the most. Like, she stopped... waited... then looked into our eyes. [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

And you said those were actually among the moments that moved you the most. Now again, just now, you said 'in our hometown *Ardahan* [a city in Türkiye], when we say 'I love you' or 'I don't love you,' we say it by looking straight into each other's eyes.' [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

These are a bit beyond spoken language. Yes, music is a language, body language is a language too, but they're not *verbal language* [uttered in English]. As far as I understand, these have a very important place for you. Could we talk about that a little? [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

Yes, actually I have a special interest in music. I believe that sound has its own colour, its own breath. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

Not just the breath that produces the sound, but that the sound itself has a breath. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

Because... really, music, notes, are very valuable. Very powerful, but... Yes, the sound... meaning the acoustics. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

This is still related to the topic, but I'll go on a little. [short silence]

Murat (the participant)

Acoustics is very important to me. People who know me well know that many times, without any hesitation, if someone asked me 'Where are you going?' I never explained. If I had in mind a place because of its acoustics, I just left the house saying nothing. I always went.

E4: Translation of an excerpt from Ferit's Individual Interview

Recording in progress.

Ebru (the researcher)

Mr. Ferit, let me ask this first: during these activities or rather, the things we discussed and exchanged ideas about... [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

[Not clear] In terms of our bilingual situation here, are there any moments you remember or any situations where you noticed your feelings toward your own bilingualism or the emotions you experienced in between? [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

Did you notice any differences or situations, anything you were aware of?

Ferit (the participant)

It's mostly passed, nothing really stands out. [short silence]

Ferit (the participant)

It would be good to refresh. [short silence]

Ferit (the participant)

Also... [short silence]

Ferit (the participant)

What I remember most from the activity was drawing a picture. It was about placing languages on various parts of the human body, and so on. [short silence]

Ferit (the participant)

That's the thing I remember very clearly. So how it is now... [short silence]

Ferit (the participant)

Speaking in a *non-native* language requires a lot of... processing. It requires a lot of thinking. Especially since I still don't feel fully comfortable in English – I'm working in a workplace where English is spoken, but each of my sentences, if I prepare them in advance... I first think about them, sometimes wonder... Can I express this nicely, etc. So, it's still an extra process for me, I haven't fully immersed myself in the language. I had a similar experience in French. I was a bit more comfortable in French because I graduated from a Francophone school. I studied French for many years, so I was more at ease. I had the chance to practice. I know what it's like to really go into a language, but I don't have that in English yet. That's what I remember, and those were my first impressions. Other than that, speaking reflexively isn't really possible in a *non-native* language. I don't even speak Turkish very quickly or comfortably. English makes it a bit extra harder, so those are my memories. That's about it. This [reflections] will expand with conversation a bit.

Ebru (the researcher)

Yes, thank you. [...] from after the activity until now, when you've been speaking English or Turkish have you ever had moments where you discovered your own feelings or reflected on yourself, thinking "we discussed this during the activity"?

Ferit (the participant)

Uh... I can't answer this easily. Mm-hmm. I think from that perspective, it might have passed for a while, but over a long time it has passed. Now I've thought about it, immersing in the atmosphere of the language. Yes, there was a bit of that. Not thinking about the language. The feeling I generally experience in English now is mostly anxiety. There hasn't really been a varied output from me, I guess.

Ebru (the researcher)

How about French? You speak French, right? How do you feel in that language?

Ferit (the participant)

Uh, it's been a long time since I spoke French. Back then, I had a French girlfriend, and... I had similar struggles at first, but later it became more like a second language. Spontaneous reactions began to emerge, like the French would start to overcome certain things. Interjections started coming naturally, but of course, it never had the comfort of a native language. That lasted for a long time. Something similar... [short silence]

Ferit (the participant)

Honestly, now I would have to evaluate from scratch. I haven't had the chance to get prepared [for the interview] much in the past two days. [short silence]

Ferit (the participant)

I'm busy with work. [upon overlapping speech] Sorry, please continue.

Ebru (the researcher)

No problem, it's not something to get prepared. [...] By the way, congratulations on your new job. When we last spoke, you were looking for work, right? Trying to find a job?

Ferit (the participant)

Thank you. Yes, finally.

Ebru (the researcher)

Congratulations... Similar to what you have just said, you mentioned a similar thing on the day of the activity [data construction day]: you feel alienated from your own reactions. [...]

Ferit (the participant):

Yes, there's some resistance there. I don't know... maybe not everyone feels it, but it's like I'm doing something outside of myself. Or it feels like I'm just imitating something, but I guess that's one of the ways to learn. I don't really know... it's like I'm trying to settle there with my own authentic self, my English self, but it doesn't quite work that way, I don't know. Maybe it will over time, but this whole imitation thing... I guess it's a bit of a childish precaution or something like that, I don't know. The reactions I see, I can't quite hold them back and I don't think I'm supposed to.

E5: Translation of an excerpt from Aylin's Individual Interview

[...]

Aylin (the participant)

Actually, language should not be subject to imposed education. But because here it is subject to an imposed form of education, when the child doesn't learn it, when society doesn't learn it, later on in life they go into a state of "ah, I can't learn this," and it creates a kind of insecurity.

Ebru (the researcher)

Thank you, Hilal... [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

Now you've started to get a bit more used to Ireland and to English. Your English has improved. [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

I wonder, when you speak with people from Türkiye, like now for example, do English words come out? If English words slip in, how do you feel? And do those feelings change depending on who you're speaking to?

Aylin (the participant)

Well, yes, it depends on who I'm talking to. Sometimes in Turkish I forget the Turkish word and say the English one instead. And sometimes I even pretend as if I've forgotten the word just to avoid saying it in English. [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

So... English... yes, I forget, but the English word comes to mind. Sometimes I just say the English one. Sometimes I don't say anything at all. [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

When I'm speaking with close friends... [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

It becomes funny, you know, we laugh about it, we tease each other. When I'm with my family, they actually like it. They say things like, "Well, that's why you went there, good, good, keep forgetting [Turkish]." But when I'm talking with people I'm not so close with, and if I forget a word, then it's not pleasant. It feels as if I'm showing off, like "look, I'm in Ireland, sometimes I forget." [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

That doesn't feel nice. [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

So in those cases what I do is... [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

I act as if I've forgotten what I wanted to say and wait for the other person to complete it for me.

Ebru (the researcher)

Again, a kind of fear of being judged kicks in.

Aylin (the participant)

Exactly, exactly, thank you. I have one last question for you.

Ebru (the researcher)

You're a bit of an Instagrammer. You like sharing Reels. [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

Sometimes you post your Reels in Turkish, sometimes in English. Is that a strategy, something you do consciously or is it just however you feel in the moment? Because on your Instagram profile we really see a bilingual presence. What's the dynamic there? If you're aware of it, would you like to share?

Aylin (the participant)

I think today was a very good example. [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

Today is Mother's Day in Ireland. [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

But we celebrate Mother's Day in the second week of May. I shared a photo of my mother and wrote in English: "Today is Mother's Day in Ireland. I love mom. Happy Mother's Day." Then underneath I wrote the same in Turkish: "Today is Mother's Day in Ireland. I love you. Happy Mother's Day." [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

So actually this is... [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

As I've started living in Ireland, I now have foreign friends too. So, I also make posts with them in mind, to reach out to them. Because, you know, sometimes when they share in their own languages... [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

It's like, "We're here too." [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

Anyway, most people write in English. Sometimes you feel like, "just post it in English." But then for example I have a friend living in the US who never posts anything in Turkish. [short silence]

Aylin (the participant)

So, to them you want to say, "Look, you're Turkish too, share some things in Turkish as well." For me, I try to keep a balance between the two [laughs]—sometimes in English, sometimes in Turkish. It depends a bit on who I want to reach. Today, for example, since

it's Mother's Day in Ireland, I wrote it that way so that the people here would understand.
[...]

E6: Translation of an excerpt from Derya's Individual Interview

[...]

Derya (the participant)

At first, of course, I didn't understand some things. For example, when they said grand [uttered in English], we thought it must mean something like great [uttered in English]. After coming here, for instance, when talking with my husband about our life in America...

Derya (the participant)

I actually came back to Turkey kind of running away, but still, I lived there for nearly one and a half years. And I feel like now, if I went back, I'd really feel it's one of my 'places'. Not exactly like my home in Türkiye, but still, one of my places.

Ebru (the researcher)

Well, it's familiar after all.

Derya (the participant)

And when I leave Ireland, I feel the same way about Ireland too. While living here, sometimes it feels like I'm not completely at home, but once you leave, I feel like, at least for me, this place also becomes one of my 'places'.

Ebru (the researcher)

Yes, thank you. One last question before we run out of time. You mentioned that your child once called someone mom [uttered in English, following-up on a previous reflection of Derya] at the crèche or maybe at home.

Ebru (the researcher)

That's quite interesting for me. Does that create any particular feeling for you, as a mother? [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

An emotion, a thought?

Derya (the participant)

Well, his English has really improved now. For example, at home, he almost never really talks. His speaking level is behind his peers.

Ebru (the researcher)

Is he a boy?

Derya (the participant)

Yes, a boy, in Turkish too we notice that.

Ebru (the researcher)

Boys sometimes... my nephew only started speaking properly around three. We were already getting worried. And being bilingual [uttered in English], both male and bilingual [uttered in English], it gets delayed. In our case, his dad always spoke English at home.

Ferit's [my brother-in-law] English is good, his accent is good, because he stayed four years in America. So we were starting to worry. Yours will also suddenly pick up a lot.

Derya (the participant)

[laughs] Even now, in Turkish it's like o o ü ü, babbling nonsense, but his English is a bit better. We even went to a crèche recently. I kind of hid myself so he didn't see me, and hearing him talk to the teacher in English.. it really made me happy. [short silence]

Derya (the participant)

You know the feeling, like, I never quite managed this English thing myself, but he will. He won't feel disabled like me.

Ebru (the researcher)

He won't suffer [like you]?

Derya (the participant)

Yes, he won't suffer, exactly. In that sense I'm happy that he's growing up bilingual. But at the same time, I also feel a bit uneasy. Like, what if he ends up like those Alamancılar [potentially an offensive term for Turks abroad with mixed language]? [laughs]

Derya (the participant)

God, I hope not. [short silence]

Derya (the participant)

For example, at home we speak Turkish, and he speaks Turkish words as much as he can. But I really hope that in the future, when we speak Turkish to him, he doesn't reply in English. [short silence]

Derya (the participant)

Because that happens a lot, I saw it before in America too. By high school, for example, the parents ask something in Turkish, but the child replies in English, because by then English has basically become their mother tongue. [short silence]

Derya (the participant)

I really hope it won't be like that. I hope he can speak fully in Turkish at home, it would be much nicer, I feel. [short silence]

Ebru (the researcher)

And what is that feeling for you, when the whole house is Turkish-speaking? Like, completely? [in a monolingual way]

Derya (the participant)

Yes, it's like you're in your comfort zone. Because sometimes when he says something in English, we don't understand. And since he's a child, his pronunciation isn't clear either. We just nod along. [short silence]

Derya (the participant)

You try to figure out what he's saying, sometimes he repeats it and still I can't get it, then he gets annoyed, like eeehhh, and gets cranky. [short silence]

Derya (the participant)

Whereas even if he says something broken I Turkish, you understand him. So yes, in that sense, it would be much better. [...]

Appendix F: Ethics Submission and Approval

ET7259-202122 RESEARCH ETHICS

Review Submission History: April 7th Ethics Submissions and Resubmissions

Assignment Instructions	Assignment Details
School of Education, Trinity College Dublin <i>Application for Ethical Approval of Research Proposals</i> Title of Research _____ Inside Storytelling Theatre: Exploring Translanguaging, Identity and Emotions with the Turkish Community in Ireland Researcher Name(s) _____ Ebru Boynuegri Trinity Email Address _____ boynuege@tcd.ie Supervisor Name (if applicable) _____ Dr. Erika Piazzoli Supervisor Email (if applicable) _____ erika.piazzoli@tcd.ie Category of Proposer (please tick) Student ☐ Principal Investigator (Staff) ☒ Course of Study (please tick) BMusEd ☐ PME ☐ MEd ☒ DEd/PhD ☐ ASIAP ☐ CertC21T&L ☐ Please indicate the level of approval required (See Code of Practice for the School of Education Research Ethics Committee document on https://www.tcd.ie/Education/research/ethics/ for description of levels)	MARK LAST MARKED ATTEMPT Approved ATTEMPT 2 29/03/22 12:34 Approved Submission Ethics Amendment Final Ebru Boynuegri.docx