

DREAMING IN MANY TONGUES: THE COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES OF POLYGLOT DREAMS

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Abstract- This paper explores the fascinating phenomenon of multilingual dreaming among fluent multilingual speakers and polyglots. It examines how emotional memory, identity, language acquisition, cultural immersion, and interpersonal relationships influence the language in which dreams occur. Drawing from psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, bilingual cognition studies, and memory research, the study analyzes how multilingual individuals often dream in the language associated with the person, emotional context, or environment represented in the dream itself.

The paper argues that language is not stored in isolation within the brain but is deeply interconnected with emotional experiences, relationships, autobiographical memory, and identity

formation. Through both existing scientific research and personal multilingual experiences, the study demonstrates that dream-language selection often reflects emotional encoding, contextual memory retrieval, and cognitive activation patterns linked to multilingual life experiences. The paper also investigates code-switching within dreams, emotional congruence in multilingual cognition, and the implications of multilingual dreaming for intercultural communication, translation studies, diplomacy, identity research, and neuroscience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dreams have long occupied an important place within psychology, philosophy, and neuroscience. However, the

phenomenon of multilingual dreaming remains relatively underexplored despite the increasing number of multilingual individuals globally. Polyglots frequently report dreaming in different languages depending on the emotional context, people involved, or recent linguistic immersion. For multilingual individuals, languages often become linked to distinct emotional worlds, relationships, memories, and identities. A multilingual speaker may dream in Italian when recalling family heritage, Portuguese when engaging with siblings, English when interacting with children, or French during periods of professional immersion. Such experiences suggest that the multilingual brain organizes language not merely as a communication system but also as a relational and emotional framework. This paper explores how dream-language selection occurs and why multilingual individuals experience language shifts during dreams. It integrates cognitive science, emotional memory research, REM sleep studies, and multilingual identity theory to better understand how the subconscious mind navigates multiple linguistic systems simultaneously.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research in psycholinguistics demonstrates that language processing is closely tied to emotional memory and contextual encoding. Marian and Neisser (2000) found that bilingual individuals recall autobiographical memories more vividly when retrieved in the same language in which the memory was originally encoded. Neurolinguistic studies further suggest that multilingual speakers activate overlapping but partially distinct neural networks depending on the language being used. Languages learned in emotionally rich environments become neurologically linked to those experiences. REM sleep plays an important role in emotional processing and memory consolidation. During dreaming, the brain reconstructs emotional experiences, unresolved cognitive patterns, and identity-related material. For multilingual speakers, these reconstructions naturally activate the language associated with the emotional context of the dream. Code-switching in dreams is also

common among multilingual individuals. This reflects the brain's ability to fluidly move between linguistic systems based on emotional relevance, cognitive accessibility, and contextual associations.

III. EMOTIONAL ENCODING, LINGUISTIC IDENTITY, AND DREAMS

Before examining personal multilingual dream experiences, it is important to understand that multilingual individuals often develop emotionally differentiated linguistic identities throughout life. Each language learned is rarely neutral; rather, it becomes associated with particular social environments, emotional experiences, historical periods, cultural frameworks, interpersonal relationships, and dream patterns. Researchers in bilingual cognition suggest that languages are stored not only as linguistic systems but also as emotional and autobiographical networks. Consequently, multilingual speakers may unconsciously associate one language with childhood safety, another with professional authority, another with

intellectual performance, another with intimacy or heritage, and even specific dream states or emotional subconscious processing.

Dreams become particularly significant because the subconscious mind often retrieves the language that most closely matches the emotional atmosphere, memory structure, and relational dynamics being processed during REM sleep. For multilingual individuals, dreaming is therefore not random linguistic activation, but rather a reflection of emotional encoding, identity organization, memory consolidation, and cultural belonging. This phenomenon is especially common among individuals who have lived internationally, experienced cultural transitions, or regularly navigate multiple linguistic environments. Dreams become subconscious spaces where identity, memory, emotion, culture, and language converge fluidly.

IV. PERSONAL MULTILINGUAL DREAM EXPERIENCES

One particularly revealing observation within this study is the role of relational

identity in dream-language selection. For example, dreaming about a grandmother may naturally occur in Italian due to emotional and familial encoding associated with heritage and ancestry. Conversations with a sibling may unfold in Portuguese because that language represents familiarity, humor, and shared childhood experiences. Dreams involving one's children may occur in English because English dominates the emotional environment of motherhood and daily life. During periods of professional immersion in French, dreams may shift predominantly into French due to heightened cognitive activation.

These observations align closely with context-dependent memory theory and bilingual activation research. Emotional attachment, frequency of use, and interpersonal dynamics appear to significantly influence dream-language selection.

V. RELATION TO EXISTING RESEARCH

The findings presented in this paper strongly align with existing research in

bilingual cognition and emotional memory retrieval. Studies by Pavlenko (2005) demonstrated that multilingual speakers often associate different emotional intensities with different languages. Similarly, Dewaele (2010) observed that bilingual individuals frequently report varying emotional expression capacities depending on the language being used. This paper differs from some earlier research by emphasizing the relational and identity-based dimensions of multilingual dreaming. While previous studies focused primarily on cognitive mechanisms, this paper highlights how languages function as emotional ecosystems tied to specific human relationships and life roles. The findings also support Grosjean's (2010) theory that bilingual individuals do not simply switch languages mechanically but activate entire linguistic and cultural systems depending on context.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

The implications of multilingual dreaming extend far beyond sleep studies. Understanding how language,

identity, and emotional memory interact may contribute to fields such as psychotherapy, intercultural communication, diplomacy, education, interpretation, and cognitive neuroscience. For therapists and psychologists, multilingual dream analysis may provide insight into emotional processing, trauma retrieval, identity conflicts, and subconscious relational patterns. In diplomacy and intercultural communication, multilingual dreaming reflects how deeply language shapes emotional understanding and cultural belonging.

For translation and interpretation studies, the phenomenon highlights that language is not simply lexical substitution but also emotional and cultural embodiment. The findings may also contribute to artificial intelligence research focused on multilingual cognition and emotionally adaptive language systems. Scientifically, this paper contributes to a broader understanding of how multilingual brains organize memory, identity, and emotional cognition across linguistic frameworks.

VII. LIMITATIONS

This study contains several limitations. First, multilingual dreaming remains an under-researched field with limited large-scale empirical data. Much of the evidence currently available relies on anecdotal accounts, self-reporting, and qualitative interpretation. Second, multilingual experiences vary greatly depending on age of acquisition, cultural immersion, language proficiency, emotional attachment, and neurological diversity. Therefore, generalizations across all multilingual populations remain difficult. Additionally, dream recall itself is highly subjective and inconsistent. Participants may not accurately remember the exact linguistic structure of dreams, which may influence interpretation. Future empirical studies involving sleep laboratories, neuroimaging, longitudinal bilingual studies, and controlled linguistic immersion experiments would significantly strengthen this field of research.

VIII. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should explore

multilingual dreaming through interdisciplinary collaboration between neuroscience, linguistics, psychology, artificial intelligence, and intercultural studies.

Potential research areas include:

- Neuroimaging studies analyzing brain activation during multilingual dreaming.
- Emotional intensity comparisons between dream languages.
- Studies examining whether heritage languages appear more frequently during emotionally significant dreams.
- Cross-cultural studies among multilingual diplomats, interpreters, immigrants, and third-culture individuals.
- Research on how trauma, migration, and identity influence dream-language selection.
- Artificial intelligence models simulating multilingual cognitive switching.

Further experimental work involving REM sleep observation and linguistic immersion patterns could provide valuable empirical support for current

theories.

IX. AUTHOR REFLECTION AND BIOGRAPHY

This paper reflects the lived experiences and professional background of Beatrice de Salles, a Global Affairs and Cultural Diplomacy Specialist, multilingual interpreter, international journalist, and cultural heritage advocate with experience across more than 65 countries.

Born in Brazil and educated across Switzerland, Europe, Asia, and the United States, Beatrice de Salles has lived within multiple linguistic and cultural realities throughout her life. Her experiences speaking Portuguese, Italian, English, French, Spanish, and other languages across different emotional, professional, and intercultural environments provided the inspiration for this study.

As a multilingual individual deeply engaged in diplomacy, interpretation, education, and intercultural communication, the phenomenon of dreaming in different languages became

not only a personal observation but also a reflection of how language shapes identity, emotional memory, and human connection.

This research embodies the intersection of multilingualism, neuroscience, psychology, cultural diplomacy, and human relational experience.

X. PERSONAL REFLECTION: DREAMING AS A POLYGLOT

As a multilingual individual and polyglot myself, I began noticing over the years that the language of my dreams shifts naturally depending on the people, emotional environments, and cultural contexts present within the dream itself. This observation became one of the most fascinating and deeply personal inspirations behind this study.

I realized that when I dream about my grandmother, the dream almost always unfolds in Italian. The emotional atmosphere, family warmth, childhood memories, gestures, tone of affection, and cultural intimacy associated with her seem inseparable from the Italian language itself. In these dreams, Italian

is not merely a communication tool; it becomes the emotional architecture through which memory and identity are experienced.

Similarly, when I dream about my brother, the conversations naturally occur in Portuguese, the language through which much of our shared humor, emotional spontaneity, familiarity, and sibling connection were built. The emotional rhythm of our relationship appears neurologically tied to Portuguese in a way that feels automatic and deeply subconscious. When I dream about my children, however, the dreams predominantly occur in English. English represents not only our primary language of communication, but also my maternal role, daily responsibilities, caregiving identity, and contemporary family life. Because much of my present emotional reality as a mother unfolds in English, my subconscious mind seems to retrieve English naturally during dreams involving them. I also observed that during periods of intense professional work or immersion in French-speaking environments, I begin dreaming extensively in French. This appears to

reflect what researchers describe as heightened cognitive activation and linguistic priming. Languages that are actively and frequently used during waking life remain neurologically accessible during sleep, often influencing dream-language frequency.

- What became increasingly evident through these experiences is that multilingual individuals do not simply store languages as separate vocabularies within the brain. Rather, languages become emotionally encoded systems connected to specific relationships, environments, cultural identities, memories, and even distinct versions of the self.
- In my own experience, each language carries its own emotional landscape:
- Italian often represents ancestry, heritage, emotional warmth, intimacy, and family memory.
- Portuguese reflects sibling connection, Brazilian identity, familiarity, emotional spontaneity, and humor.

- English represents motherhood, leadership, modern daily life, communication, and professional navigation.
- French embodies intellectual immersion, elegance, professional focus, and cultural refinement.

These observations align strongly with existing research in psycholinguistics, multilingual cognition, emotional memory encoding, and neurolinguistics. Studies suggest that multilingual brains organize language through interconnected emotional and autobiographical networks rather than through isolated linguistic compartments. During REM sleep, the brain consolidates emotions, memories, identity processing, and relational experiences. For multilingual individuals, dreams therefore appear to “select” the language most emotionally congruent with the people and experiences represented within the dream. This phenomenon demonstrates how language functions far beyond communication

alone. For polyglots, language becomes a living archive of relationships, emotional history, identity, and cultural belonging. Dreams reveal how seamlessly the multilingual brain navigates among these overlapping identities beneath conscious awareness.

XI. CONCLUSION

Dreaming in multiple languages offers a profound glimpse into the architecture of the multilingual mind. The language selected during dreams often reflects emotional memory, interpersonal relationships, cultural identity, and cognitive activation patterns rather than simple linguistic dominance. For polyglots, languages become emotional landscapes attached to specific people, experiences, and versions of the self. Dreams reveal how seamlessly the brain navigates among these identities during subconscious processing. As multilingualism continues to expand globally, understanding multilingual dreaming may offer important contributions to psychology, neuroscience, diplomacy, translation studies, and intercultural understanding.

Ultimately, multilingual dreams remind us that language is not merely communication—it is memory, identity, emotion, and human connection itself.

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