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Little chance for divergence: The role of interlocutor language constraint in online bilingual accommodation

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Drawing on communication accommodation theory, the present paper explored how affective (i.e. identity related) and cognitive (i.e. comprehension related) motives drive young Swedish-speaking Finns to use Swedish in online communication when interacting with Finnish speakers. Questionnaire data were collected among Swedish-speaking secondary school students (N = 124). A Bayesian moderated mediation revealed that the use of Swedish was guided both by cognitive and affective motives. Furthermore, affective motives were stronger predictors of language behaviour in cases where participants did not perceive they were restricted by interlocutors' competence in Swedish. However, a similar effect was not detected for cognitive motives. Findings and their theoretical implications are discussed with respect to bilingual accommodation.

KEYWORDS

bilingualism, accommodation, Swedish in Finland, online communication

Baserat på teorin om kommunikationsanpassning fokuserade den här undersökningen på hur affektiva (dvs. identitetsrelaterade) och kognitiva (dvs. förståelserelaterade) motiv styr hur unga svenskspråkiga i Finland använder svenska när de kommunicerar med finskspråkiga online. Enkätdata samlades in bland studenter i två svenska gymnasier i Finland (N = 124). En Bayesiansk modererad medierande analys visade att användningen av svenska styrdes av såväl kognitiva som affektiva motiv. Affektiva motiv hade en större inverkan på språkanvändningen i sådana fall där respondenterna upplevde att deras språkval inte begränsades av samtalspartnerns kunskaper i svenska. En likadan effekt kunde dock inte upptäckas för kognitiva motiv. Resultaten och deras teoretiska implikationer diskuteras med utifrån teori om tvåspråkig anpassning.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Scholars of bilingual accommodation (Sachdev, Giles, & Pauwels, 2013) have asserted that in bilingual contexts, i.e. situations where two languages are present in the local environment, communication between members of the different ethnolinguistic groups serves not only to exchange referential information but also to manage social distance between them. Indeed, in cases where language emerges as a key aspect of identity, speakers typically use language and language related communicative behaviour as a means to establish and maintain a positive ethnolinguistic identity and sense of psychological distinctiveness (see e.g. Giles & Johnson, 1987; Stell & Dragojevic, in press). As a consequence, members of the different ethnolinguistic groups often define and treat each other in terms of ethnolinguistic group membership, and the interactions between them usually have an intergroup dimension to them.

Communication accommodation theory (CAT; Gallois & Giles, 2015; Giles, 1973, 2016; Dragojevic, Gasiorek, & Giles, 2016) explains how, when, and why people adjust their communicative behaviours (e.g. language use) during social interaction and what social consequences result from those adjustments. The theory accounts for adjustments that take place during both interpersonal encounters, i.e. when people define one another primarily in terms of their personal identity and intergroup encounters, i.e. when people define one another primarily in terms of their social identity (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014). CAT has been applied across a wide range of cultures and languages and has frequently been used to predict and explain language choice in bilingual and multilingual contexts (e.g. Bourhis, 1984, 1991; Bourhis & Sachdev, 1984; Landry & Allard, 1994; Stell, 2012; Stell & Dragojevic, in press).

According to CAT, individuals can adjust their communicative behaviour relative to their interlocutors' in three ways. *Convergence* involves altering one's communicative behaviour to be more similar to another's, such as adopting the language spoken by one's interlocutor. For example, Bourhis (1984) found that when a female confederate approached Francophone pedestrians in downtown Montreal, Quebec, and asked for directions in English, nearly all Francophones responded in English (i.e. converged to the confederate's language). *Divergence*, in contrast, involves altering one's communicative behaviours to be more dissimilar to another's. For example, Bourhis and Giles (1977) found that when an English person threatened Welsh participants' ethnolinguistic identity, they broadened their Welsh accent and introduced Welsh vocabulary in their responses as a way to distance themselves from the outgroup speaker and emphasize their ingroup identity. Finally, *maintenance* refers to a strategy whereby individuals sustain their "default" way of communicating, without adjusting for others. In bilingual contexts, this typically results in linguistically mixed interactions. For example, in the Bourhis (1984) study cited above, when the confederate voiced her request in French, nearly all Anglophone pedestrians nonetheless responded in English (i.e. maintained their default language).

CAT distinguishes between two main groups of motives driving adjustment: affective and cognitive. *Affective motives* refer to speakers' intentions to manage social distance, highlight identities, and express attitudes via their communicative adjustments. Consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), CAT assumes that the self-concept consists of personal identity (i.e. idiosyncratic characteristics) and social identity (i.e. social group memberships) components, and that people are motivated to create and maintain positive personal and social identities. Given that communication conveys not only referential information, but also social and relational information, CAT contends that people can use communicative adjustment to regulate social distance between themselves and others, and to positively reinforce their own personal and/or social identity (Dragojevic et al., 2016). Convergence is primarily motivated by a desire for social approval. In line with the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), CAT posits that speakers can increase personal and social liking and gain their interlocutors' social approval by becoming

communicatively more similar to them (i.e. converging). For example, in bilingual contexts, speakers can adopt their interlocutor's language to signal a shared identity and/or express positive attitudes toward their interlocutor's ethnolinguistic group in an effort to secure their social approval. Conversely, maintenance and divergence are primarily motivated by a desire for positive distinctiveness (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1986). CAT posits that speakers can use maintenance and divergence to emphasize their distinctiveness and positively differentiate themselves from relevant outgroups and individuals. For example, in a bilingual context, speakers can adhere to their own language to emphasize their own ethnolinguistic identity as a means to positively differentiate themselves from their interlocutor. Speakers are especially likely to engage in maintenance and divergence when they identify strongly with their ethnolinguistic ingroup and perceive it to have high or increasing vitality (for a discussion, see Dragojevic et al., 2016).

Cognitive motives refer to speakers' intentions to facilitate comprehension and effective information transfer. For example, in bilingual settings, speakers may adopt their interlocutor's language as a means to facilitate comprehension. However, if they lack proficiency in their interlocutors' language, they are likely to continue to use their own language. When both interlocutors lack proficiency in each other's native languages, they may choose to mutually converge to a shared lingua franca in order to maximize communicative efficiency. Affective and cognitive motives do not operate separately; rather, they operate simultaneously and dynamically, and can either support or challenge each other. For example, if one interlocutor is not proficient in the other's native language, cognitive motives are likely to prevail over any affective concerns (Stell & Dragojevic, in press).

Although the historical focus of CAT has been on micro level processes, that is, on interactive turns in face-to-face communication dyads, we believe that the theory and the underlying assumptions also have the capacity to explain and predict higher-level language behaviour. Specifically, and as has been argued elsewhere (Vincze & Gasiorek, 2016), individuals living in bilingual environments progressively and gradually develop certain general language practices based on language choice in different situations and contexts. These *accommodative tendencies*, defined as habitual language practices with members of the ethnolinguistic outgroup, can be meaningfully examined.

2 | THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The present research focused on the socio-psychological processes underlying the language choices of Swedish-speaking Finns when they interact with Finnish-speaking interlocutors online. In particular, we were interested in whether individuals raised in Swedish-speaking families would differ from individuals raised in bilingual, Swedish-Finnish speaking families in their accommodative tendencies and motives for language choice. In addition, we also wanted to examine how individuals' motives interacted with contextual constraints (i.e. their Finnish-speaking interlocutors' Swedish skills) to influence language choice.

We addressed language choice from the perspective of Swedish speakers' desire to promote the use of Swedish through online interactions with Finnish speakers. While this behaviour may be considered both as maintenance (when the two interlocutors communicate using different languages) and divergence (both interlocutors use Swedish), we will refer to this behaviour as divergence to emphasize language choice relative to an interlocutor's language.

As a context for studying language choice, we focused on online communication between Swedish speakers and Finnish speakers. Today, communication increasingly occurs via internet-based tools (such as email, Skype, chat and others), which may both complement and extend, as well as substitute and replace, face-to-face communication, especially among young people (see e.g. Walther, 2011). This is thus an important and relevant domain in which to study language use and choice. Although there are a number of unique features, constraints and affordances of online communication that have received extensive attention by scholars of language and communication, we contend that language choice by bilingual speakers should operate similarly in online and offline settings. As in face-to-face interactions, online communication in bilingual settings offers the possibility of using more than one language, implicating issues of language choice. CAT has been applied to predict and explain communicative behaviour in a wide

range of settings (Soliz & Giles, 2014); in this study, we apply it to online interactions, via a variety of different media, by young adults in Finland.

Finland is a bilingual country with two national languages, Finnish and Swedish. Although, Swedish speakers constitute only 5.4% of the total population of the country, Swedish has official status, underpinned by strong institutional support. Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers are taught each other's languages from grade 7 of elementary school onwards, and in bilingual municipalities, institutions of public administration offer services in both languages. Accordingly, at a national level, Swedish has relatively high ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). However, at the local level, the vitality of the Swedish language is more variable. Currently, Finland has 32 bilingual municipalities and 14 of these have a Swedish-speaking local majority, which, according to regulation provided by the nation's Language Act (423/2003) represent geographic areas where Swedish has the strongest position in the country. Our ultimate goal was to examine language choice as a strategy of divergent communicative behaviour; thus, we collected our data in geographic areas where Swedish has the highest vitality throughout the country, making divergence and maintenance more likely (see Sachdev et al., 2013; Stell & Dragojevic, in press).

2.1 | Hypotheses

This study examines three hypotheses, which are summarized in Figure 1. First, we reason that in bilingual contexts, individuals raised in monolingual and bilingual families are likely to differ in their proficiency in the two languages, as well as their identification with the two language groups. Individuals who grow up in Swedish-Finnish bilingual families, where both surrounding languages are present, are likely to develop good competencies in both languages, as well as relatively high identification with both language groups (Duff, 2012; King & Fogle, 2013; Landry, Allard, & Deveau, 2009). In contrast, individuals socialized in Swedish-speaking families are likely to have more limited competency in Finnish, lower identification with the Finnish language group, and higher identification with the Swedish language group. (Lojander-Visapää, 2008; see also Vincze & Gasiorek, 2016). Accordingly, compared to individuals from bilingual families, individuals from Swedish-speaking families are likely to have higher affective and cognitive motivation to use Swedish with Finnish speakers.

Hypothesis 1. *Individuals socialized in Swedish-speaking families will be more motivated to use Swedish both for affective and cognitive reasons than individuals socialized in bilingual Swedish-Finnish families.*

Next, as discussed above, CAT posits that accommodative behaviour through language may dynamically be guided by *both* affective and cognitive motives (e.g. Sachdev et al., 2013; Stell & Dragojevic, in press). In bilingual contexts, communicative adjustments may serve multiple identity-related (i.e. affective) functions. For instance, a Swedish-speaking Finn may insist on the use of Swedish to emphasize the importance of his or her identification with the Swedish language group and to increase the social distance to the Finnish language group. A Swedish-speaking Finn can also choose to use Swedish in order to express negative attitudes towards Finnish speakers. Conversely,
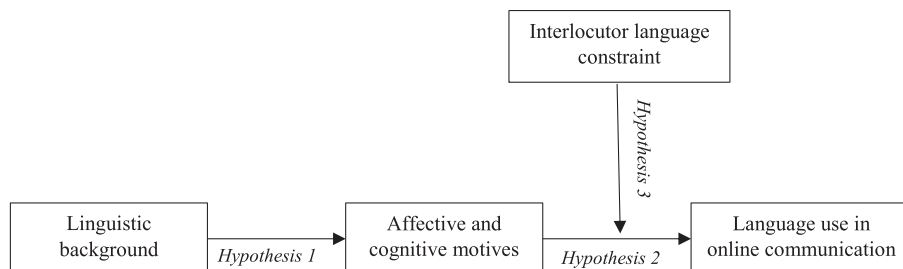

FIGURE 1 Schematic representation of the hypotheses

he or she could choose Finnish to express positive attitudes towards Finnish speakers. However, not all language shifts are necessarily identity-based. When mutual understanding is a common goal of both interlocutors, and they belong to different language groups, language choice may be a pragmatic decision based on what can be understood most readily by both parties (and as such, may be influenced by the language competencies of both interactants). Taken together, we expect that both affective and cognitive motivations will guide communicative practices, and thus mediate the effect of individuals' linguistic background on their actual language use.

Hypothesis 2. *Higher cognitive and affective motivation to use Swedish will promote more frequent use of Swedish in online communication.*

Finally, as argued elsewhere (Vincze & Gasiorek, 2016) we contend that affective and cognitive motives can be stronger predictors of language use when individuals are given "free hand" by their interlocutors – that is, when they are unconstrained in their situated language choices. In the context of the present study, this is determined by inter-locutors' skills with Swedish. Following previous findings, we expected that speakers' cognitive and affect motives will predict Swedish use in online communication with Finnish speakers when those Finnish-speaking interlocutors' skills in Swedish are strong enough to enable and permit the use of Swedish. However, if the Finnish-speaking interlocutors have poor skills in Swedish – constraining the possible choices for a shared language in which to communicate – this may attenuate the relative importance of individuals' personal motives. In other words, if individuals suspect that Finnish speakers do not have sufficient skills in Swedish to communicate effectively, pragmatic concerns are likely to drive language choice.

Hypothesis 3. *Cognitive and affective motives for the use of Swedish will be stronger predictors of the actual use of Swedish in online communication when individuals do not perceive that they are restricted by an interlocutor language constraint.*

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Participants

Participants were students in two Swedish language secondary schools in Finland. Respondents who had two Finnish-speaking parents were removed from the dataset. The final dataset included $N = 124$ respondents. Participants were asked about the mother tongue of their parents. Approximately 74% of the participants came from Swedish-speaking families, while 26% came from bilingual, Swedish-Finnish families. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 19 years old ($M = 17.65$; $SD = 0.57$). About 49% of the participants were female and 51% male (four participants did not indicate their gender).

3.2 | Materials

For the most part, the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) consisted of items scored on 5-point Likert scales. The items were presented in Swedish; the English glosses shown below and in Appendix 1 are translated by the first author.

3.3 | Measures

3.3.1 | Linguistic background

Linguistic background of the participants was defined based on the mother tongue of their parents. The variable was dummy coded as 0 = bilingual (Swedish-Finnish) family background, 1 = Swedish-speaking family background.

3.3.2 | Motives for divergence in online communication

Participants were asked why they use Swedish in online communication with Finnish speakers. Affective motives were measured with three 5-point items (e.g. "because I identify myself as a Swedish-speaking Finn", "because Swedish is an important part of my identity"); the scale had good internal consistency, α = 0.87. Cognitive motives were also measured with three 5-point items (e.g. "because it is easier to express myself in Swedish", "because I have difficulties understanding Finnish"), and the scale had good internal consistency, α = 0.79. All items ranged from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree, thus higher scores indicate higher endorsement of the given motive to speak Swedish.

3.3.3 | Interlocutor language constraint

The degree to which participants use Finnish in online communication because of their Finnish-speaking interlocutors' lack of competence in Swedish was assessed with three items (e.g. "because Finnish speakers have poor skills in Swedish"; "because Finnish speakers would not understand if I communicated in Swedish"). The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, α = 0.78. The items ranged from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree; accordingly, higher values indicate greater perceived constraint.

3.3.4 | Language use in online communication

Four 5-point bipolar items were used to measure what language participants use with Finnish speakers in different forms of online communication. The scale had good internal consistency, α = 0.78. The items ranged from 1 = only in Finnish to 5 = only in Swedish, as such higher values indicate more use of Swedish (i.e. divergence from Finnish).

3.4 | Procedure

A paper-and-pencil questionnaire in Swedish was administered to students in two Swedish language secondary schools. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous. Participants completed the questionnaire during regular classes; the process took about 10 minutes. The schools were located in two municipalities, Raseborg/Raasepori and Korsholm/Mustasaari, where Swedish speakers constitute local majorities.

3.5 | Analysis

The hypotheses were tested by specifying a Bayesian moderated mediation model (Wang & Preacher, 2015) in Mplus Version 7.3. (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2015). Generally speaking, the basic difference between traditional and Bayesian statistical inference lies in the estimation of the unknown parameters. Whereas in traditional (Gaussian) statistics, unknown parameters are supposed to be fixed (i.e. there can be only one true parameter in the population), in Bayesian statistics they are treated as uncertain, and as such they can be determined only by a distribution. As a consequence, in contrast to traditional statistics, Bayesian statistics do not provide one particular estimate for an unknown parameter but rather an interval and a corresponding probability that this interval encompasses the given parameter (for an introduction to Bayesian statistics, see van de Schoot & Depaoli, 2014; van de Schoot et al., 2014).

Bayesian statistics are often favoured because they can directly incorporate knowledge from previous research in the analysis (in the form of *priors*). However, Bayesian methods have also some further advantages. First, Bayesian analysis produces reliable results even with small samples (e.g. Lee & Song, 2004). Second, indirect effects are never normally distributed, and Bayesian estimation takes into account the non-normal distribution of the estimates (van de Schoot et al., 2014; Wang & Preacher, 2015).

The analysis followed the recommendations by Depaoli and van de Schoot (2016). Four Markov chains were implemented for each parameter and the Gelman and Rubin (1992) convergence diagnostic was applied with a convergence criterion of 0.01. The analysis used a seed value of 200 and starting values based on the ML-estimates. A total of 100,000 iterations were used to ensure convergence. Default, non-informative priors provided by Mplus were applied. A posterior predictive *p*-value higher than 0.05 and a posterior predictive confidence interval encompassing 0

demonstrates an acceptable fit, i.e. a model in which there is no discrepancy between the observed data and the data generated.

4 | RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and Bayesian correlation coefficients for study variables are summarized in Table 1. Participants reported a medium level endorsement of both cognitive and affective motives, a relatively high level of interlocutor language constraint, and relatively low levels of Swedish use, i.e. relatively little divergence, in online communication. Language use in online communication was positively related to both cognitive and affective motives, and negatively related to interlocutor language constraint. In other words, higher degrees of affective and cognitive motivation increased the use of Swedish, while perception of a greater constraint (i.e. the lack of Swedish skills of the Finnish-speaking interlocutors) decreased the use of Swedish in online communication. In addition, affective and cognitive motives were related to each other, but not to interlocutor language constraint. That is, higher degrees of affective motivation were associated with higher degrees of cognitive motivation, but these personal motives were independent from how individuals evaluated their Finnish-speaking interlocutors' Swedish skills.

The results of the moderated mediational analysis are summarized in Figure 2. The model fit the data well: posterior predictive *p*-value =0.25, posterior predictive 95% CI [−14.65, 29.19]. That is, the data generated by the model did not differ from the actual data. Overall, the model accounted for 36% of the variance in language use in online communication.

Consistent with our first hypothesis, the results showed that participants coming from monolingual, Swedish-speaking families reported higher levels of affective and cognitive motives to use Swedish in online communication with Finnish speakers than did participants from bilingual, Swedish-Finnish families. Also, consistent with our second hypothesis, affective and cognitive motives were positively associated with the use of Swedish in online communication.

However, there was a mixed support for our third hypothesis. While cognitive motives mediated the effect of linguistic background on language use, *B* = 0.46, 95% CI [0.23, 0.77], this relationship did not differ across different levels of interlocutor language constraint. In other words, how individuals' cognitive (i.e. comprehension related) motivation guided language use did not depend on how they evaluated their interlocutors' Swedish skills: cognitive motive was a consistent predictor regardless of interlocutors' language competence. This was contrary to our expectations.

At the same time, and in line with our expectations, interlocutor language constraint did moderate the effect of affective motives on language use in online communication. Specifically, affective (i.e. identity related) motivation predicted language use only at low values of interlocutor language constraint. In other words, affective motives predicted language use only when respondents perceived that the Finnish-speaking interlocutors' skills in Swedish did not restrict language choice.

The moderated indirect effect is depicted as a loop plot in Figure 3 (see, Muthén & Asparouhov, 2015). As can be seen, affective motive mediated the effect of linguistic background on language use in online communication at low

TABLE 1 Means, Standard Deviations and Bayesian Correlation Coefficients among the Study Variables

	M (SD)	Affective motive	Interlocutor language constraint	Language use in online communication
Cognitive motive	3.06 (1.16)	0.48 [0.32, 0.61]	−0.10 [−0.28, 0.08]	0.49 [0.32, 0.62]
Affective motive	2.92 (1.24)		−.00 [−0.18, 0.18]	0.32 [0.13, 0.49]
Interlocutor language constraint	3.81 (0.93)			−0.36 [−0.53, −0.19]
Language use in online communication	2.20 (1.13)			

All variables were measured on a scale 1–5. Higher scores indicate higher endorsement of the given motive, and the more use of Swedish in online communication.
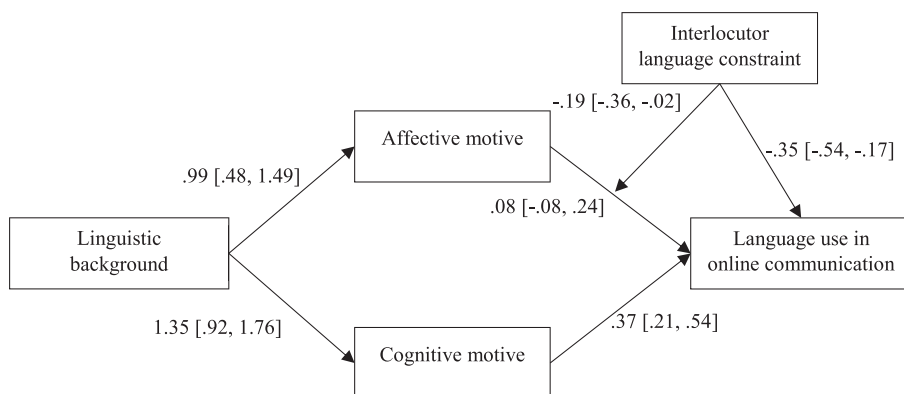
FIGURE 2 Results of the final Bayesian moderated mediation. The figure shows unstandardized coefficients and 95% credible intervals. The model explained 43% in the variance of language use in online communication. The interaction between interlocutor language constraint and affective motive is depicted as an arrow from interlocutor language constraint to the path from affective motive to language use. The interaction between interlocutor language constraint and cognitive motive is not depicted in the model because interlocutor language constraint did not moderate the effect of cognitive motive on language use (B = 0.002, 95% CI −0.17, 0.18). Additionally, the residuals of cognitive motive and affective motive were allow to covary, but are not depicted in the figure for the purpose of clarity
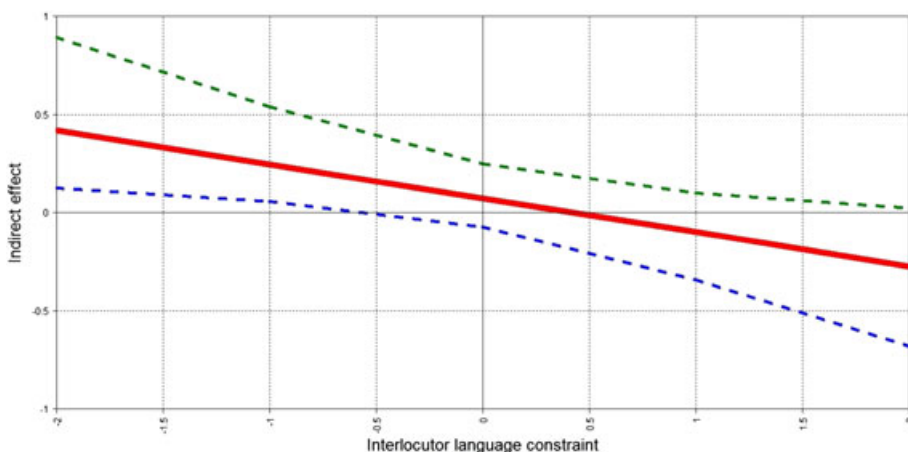

FIGURE 3 Moderated indirect effect of affective motive on language use in online communication. The figure shows the moderated indirect effect depicted as a loop plot. The solid line shows the indirect effect (Y axis), while the dashed lines show the 95% Bayesian credible interval. Values for the moderator range from −2 to +2 standard deviations from the mean (X axis). As can be seen, affective motive mediate the effect of linguistic background on language use only at lower values of interlocutor language constraint (i.e. in the region where the Bayesian credible intervals do not include zero) but not at higher of interlocutor language constraint [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

values of interlocutor language constraint. At −2 SD from the mean, the indirect effect is B = 0.42, 95% CI [0.12, 0.89] At −1 SD from the mean, the indirect effect is B = 0.25, 95% CI [0.06, 0.54]. However, at higher values of interlocutor language constraint affective motive did not mediate the effect of linguistic background on language use in online communication. For instance, at 1 SD from the mean it is B = −0.10, 95% CI [−0.34, 0.10], while at 2 SD from the mean it is B = −0.27, 95% CI [−0.67, 0.02].

5 | DISCUSSION

The aim of the present paper was to explore how affective and cognitive motives for accommodation predicted young Swedish-speaking Finns' use of Swedish with Finnish speakers in online interactions.

In line with our first hypothesis and also with earlier work (Vincze & Gasiorek, 2016), participants coming from monolingual, Swedish-speaking homes reported greater endorsement of both affective and cognitive motives for using Swedish in online interactions with Finnish speakers than did participants coming from bilingual families. Individuals raised in bilingual homes often acquire excellent skills in and strong affiliation with both languages, which usually make them flexible in their language practices (e.g. Duff, 2012; Lojander-Visapää, 2008).

Next, the results provided good support for our second hypothesis. Consistent with CAT's principles, the use of Swedish in online communication was driven by both affective and cognitive motives. This finding affirms that both linguistic identity and linguistic competence are essential socio-psychological factors underlying language choice in bilingual communication contexts. This result also supports our contention that the same fundamental considerations drive language choice in both online and offline (i.e. traditional face-to-face) settings.

Finally, our results provided mixed support for our third hypothesis, which predicted a moderated indirect effect. Specifically, we observed the expected effect – that motives would predict behaviour only when speakers were not constrained by their interlocutors' language skills – only for affective (i.e. identity-related) motives. Cognitive motives did predict language choice in young adults' online communication (as we anticipated), but this association was not moderated by interlocutor language constraint.

These findings highlight two important points. First, these results show that affective (i.e. identity-related) motives only predict divergence if the interlocutors' skills in Swedish do not constrain interactants' language options. This suggests that – when interactants do want to understand each other – the instances in which they will express ethnolinguistic identities and manage social distance from the ethnolinguistic outgroup through language choice, is subject to their interlocutors' language competence (Vincze & Gasiorek, 2016). Second, our results show that participants' comprehension-related (i.e. cognitive) motives play an important and fundamental role in accommodation, regardless of their interlocutors' language skills. Given how cognitive motives were operationalized and measured, this makes sense: when speakers do not possess the necessary skills in Finnish to be able to converge to Finnish speakers, the use of Swedish is their only option. As our participants reside in high Swedish vitality environments, i.e. in Swedish-dominated localities, several of them might have infrequent contact with Finnish speakers, and thus little experience with using Finnish. While most research in communication accommodation focuses on language choice and use as a function of identity-related drives, this study's findings underscore the importance of interlocutors' language skills – and by extension, cognitive motives – in bilingual settings.

With that said, there are contextual factors that should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, although Swedish is a national language in Finland, Swedish-speaking Finns are a linguistic minority constituting a little over 5% of the population of the country. In general, the communication between linguistic minorities and majorities occurs in the majority language (e.g. Hamers & Blanc, 2000; see also Abel, Vettori, & Forer, 2012; Landry et al., 2009), for at least two reasons. Linguistic minorities usually have more contact with majority group members than vice versa; this gives them more opportunities to use and practice the majority language than majority language speakers have to practice the minority language (e.g. Clément, Noels, & Macintyre, 2007). In addition, minority languages possess lower ethnolinguistic vitality than majority languages, and this difference in vitalities typically "pushes" speakers of low-vitality languages to use the high-vitality languages for the sake of effective communication (i.e. to be understood; see Sachdev et al., 2013). Swedish-speaking Finns generally have better skills in Swedish than do Finnish speakers in Swedish (e.g. Strömman, 1995), and the relative vitality of Swedish is lower than that of Finnish. Thus, Finnish appears to be the "default" language of intergroup communication between members of the two ethnolinguistic groups, even in locations where the local vitality of Swedish is relatively high. In bilingual contexts where members of both ethnolinguistic groups have similar skills in each other's language (see e.g. Bourhis, Montaruli, & Amiot, 2007), and/or where the vitality of languages is more balanced, we would expect that affective factors – that is, desire to

manage social distance and identities – would promote divergence to a greater degree. Additionally, it is necessary to take into account, that relations between the language groups in Finland are amicable; it is probable that divergence is more common in situations where intergroup relations are less harmonious and competition between the groups is greater, and therefore individuals feel they need to distance themselves from others.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

Taken together, our findings indicate that monolingual and bilingual individuals differed in their motivations underlying language choice, and while language use was guided by both affective and cognitive motives, the effect of affective motives depended on how individuals evaluated their interlocutors' language skills. In this way, the results presented here contribute meaningfully to our understanding of factors that determine language choice in bilingual environments. Specifically, our findings highlight the primacy of speakers' language competence in their language choice, and demonstrate the potential for interactive effects of personal motives and consideration of interlocutors' language skills on bilingual accommodation.

   This study has several limitations that should be noted. The most important of these is the use of a small, age-specific convenience sample and cross-sectional data; future studies should examine whether similar effects are obtained using larger and more diverse samples. Also, it should be acknowledged that online communication implies predominantly *writing*, which is arguably the most demanding form of language use. It is conceivable that the patterns detected here do not hold in the same way for spoken encounters between Swedish speakers and Finnish speakers. Finally, it is necessary to bear in mind that the study was carried out in a context where relations between the two ethnolinguistic groups are relatively amicable, and the form of communication we explored (i.e. online communication) is largely voluntary. In settings marked by intergroup conflicts and struggles, and in communication situations where the interaction between members of the different ethnolinguistic groups is not optional, we might well see both different motivational profiles and different patterns of effects.

   Future research should seek to replicate these findings and also extend the scope of the present study. One vital direction for future work would be to examine the relevance of other constraints related to the interlocutor. Specifically, while our conceptualization of interlocutor language constraint involved a cognitive constraint, it is highly likely that there are cases when affective constraints are operative and restrict communicative options: this would be the case when interlocutors possess the necessary language skills but they still do not want to accommodate to keep social distance from their own ethnolinguistic outgroup or express their own identity-related communication needs. Future studies should also develop more precise theoretical models, where motives for both divergence and convergence could be incorporated to explain, in parallel, these two communication strategies. Here, a possible methodological contribution would be developing unipolar measures – similar to those used in other contexts within the CAT framework (e.g. McCann, Ota, Giles, & Caraker, 2003; Williams et al., 1997) – to assess linguistic convergence and divergence separately across a variety of language domains.

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APPENDIX A

A.1 | Items contained in the questionnaire

Language use in online communication

The response format was 1 = always in Finnish – 5 = always in Swedish.

When I write an email to a Finnish-speaking person, I do it ....
When I speak to a Finnish-speaking person via Skype, I do it ....
When I chat with a Finnish-speaking person via social media (e.g. Facebook), I do it ...
In general, when I communicate with Finnish speakers online, I do it ...

Affective and cognitive motives

The response format was 1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree.

When you use Swedish in online communication with Finnish speakers, generally why do you it?

... because I belong to the Swedish language group.
... because I identify myself as a Swedish-speaking Finn.
... because Swedish is an important part of my identity

... because it is easier to express myself in Swedish.

... because I have difficulties understanding Finnish.

... because I do not have that good skills in Finnish

Interlocutor language constraint

The response format was 1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree.

When you use Swedish in online communication with Finnish speakers, generally why do you it?

... because Finnish speakers do not have command of Swedish.

... because Finnish speakers have poor skills in Swedish.

... because Finnish speakers would not understand me if I communicated in Swedish