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Does language homophily affect migrant consumers' service usage intentions?

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper investigates how language homophily between service providers and migrant consumers affects migrant consumers' intentions to engage with financial and medical service providers.

Design/methodology/approach – Three empirical studies were conducted with migrant consumers living in Chile, England and the USA. Participants were presented information on service providers, and language homophily was manipulated between subjects. In the high (low) language homophily condition, service providers were described as having (not having) the ability to speak the native language of the migrant consumer.

Findings – Language homophily was found to increase migrant consumers' expectation of control over a service encounter and, in turn, increase their intention to use a provider's services. Collectivism was identified as a boundary condition. Among high collectivist consumers, language homophily did not affect service usage intentions; however, language homophily did positively affect service usage intentions among low collectivist consumers.

Originality/value – This work extends prior research on service provider language by finding a positive effect of language homophily on service usage intentions and by identifying mediating (i.e. expected control over the outcome of the service encounter) and moderating (i.e. collectivism) mechanisms for this effect.

Keywords Control, Services marketing, Collectivism, Language homophily, Migrant consumers, Service provider

Paper type Research paper

Globalization continues to enhance the extent that people of different languages interact in the marketplace. In turn, the study of language in marketing research has become increasingly important. This is especially true for the highly communicative field of services marketing, leading scholars to call for more research on how language affects service encounters, particularly how language affects intentions to use a service (Holmqvist and Grönroos, 2012, *P1*; Holmqvist *et al.*, 2017). Recent work has examined how language affects consumer outcomes in the services marketing domain, such as preference for service providers and word-of-mouth. (Holmqvist, 2011; Holmqvist *et al.*, 2014; Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist, 2013, 2014). However, research has yet to address the extent that the language spoken by service providers affects the willingness of consumers living in a country other than their native country or region (i.e. migrant consumers) to engage with service providers.

Migrant consumers are a substantial and growing segment of consumers. The number of migrant consumers has increased by 41 per cent over the past 15 years, resulting in approximately 244 million migrant consumers worldwide (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2016). Previous research has addressed migrant consumer behavior in the marketplace (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This research has largely focused on the cultural values of migrant consumers in relation to those of their host country (Chung, 2000), their acculturation process (Peñaloza, 1994; Üstüner and Holt, 2007), ethnocentrism (Poon *et al.*, 2010; Zolfagharian *et al.*, 2014) and factors affecting their adoption of novel consumer habits (Chu *et al.*, 2015). More recently, researchers have begun to examine how language affects migrant consumers during service encounters (Azab and Clark, 2017).

There remains the need, however, to understand how the language(s) used by service providers (e.g. physicians and financial consultants) affects migrant consumers' intentions to engage with service offerings. To address this need, the present research investigates migrant consumers living in the USA, England and Chile. Three experiments manipulate language homophily (i.e. similarity) between service providers and migrant consumers to assess its effect on migrant consumers'

response to service offerings. Language homophily is manipulated between subjects by describing service providers as either speaking (high homophily) or not speaking (low homophily) the migrant consumer's native language.

The results of the three studies suggest a positive effect of language homophily on migrant consumers' service usage intentions, as does our single-paper meta-analysis. This relationship is found to be mediated by migrant consumers having higher expected control over the outcome of the service encounter when language homophily is high versus low (Study 2). In addition, cultural collectivism is identified as a boundary condition (Study 3); the otherwise positive effect of language homophily on service usage intentions is attenuated among migrant consumers who are high (vs low) in cultural collectivism.

Conceptual framework and hypotheses

Language homophily

Consumer researchers have long known the importance that language has on consumer behavior across the marketing discipline (Kronrod and Danziger, 2013; McQuarrie and Mick, 1996; Schmitt *et al.*, 1994). Recently, researchers have begun to understand how language homophily between consumers and service providers affects relevant consumer outcomes in services marketing (Holmqvist and Grönroos, 2012). In general, homophily refers to the extent that people are similar, for instance, on dimensions such as gender, age, lifestyle and language (Rogers, 1983). In regard to language, homophily increases as people communicate with each other by using similar sounds, words, gestures and expressions (Rogers, 1983).

Service providers can increase language homophily between themselves and their consumers by using the sounds, words, gestures and expressions commonly used by their consumers. With regard to migrant consumers, service providers can increase language homophily by speaking the migrant consumer's native language. A physician in the USA, for example, can increase language homophily by speaking Spanish to her patients who have migrated from a region, such as Mexico, where Spanish is the common language.

Research finds that language homophily tends to have a positive effect on services marketing outcomes. Much of this research has addressed consumers living in bilingual countries such as Finland and Canada. In bilingual countries, it is common for consumers to encounter high or low language homophily between themselves and a service provider depending on whether the service provider speaks the consumer's native (i.e. first) language. For instance, Holmqvist (2011) found that higher language homophily resulted in higher consumer comfort during the service encounter. Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist (2013) found that higher language homophily between servers and patrons of a restaurant increased gratuities. Similarly, Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist (2014) found that language homophily increased the perceived responsiveness of restaurant personnel and positive word-of-mouth. Positive effects of language homophily on services marketing outcomes have also been reported in research focused on Spanish-speaking Hispanic consumers living in the USA. For example, language homophily was found

to increase rapport between service providers and customers (Azab and Clark, 2017) and increased perceptions of a service provider's cultural sensitivity (Touchstone *et al.*, 2017).

Such research suggests that the willingness of migrant consumers to engage with service providers will increase as language homophily between themselves and a service provider increases. This could occur when service providers have the ability to speak a migrant consumer's native language. The literature on ethnocentrism also lends support for this proposed relationship between language homophily and service usage intentions. Research in this area, for instance, demonstrates that consumers often prefer products and services from their own country (Balabanis and Siagmagka, 2017; De Ruyter *et al.*, 1998; Sharma *et al.*, 1995). Regarding service provider language, such research indicates that migrant consumers will respond more positively to service providers when they speak their native language. The present research will empirically test how language homophily affects intentions to use a service. Specifically, three studies test the following hypothesis:

H1. High (vs low) language homophily between service providers and migrant consumers will increase migrant consumers' service usage intentions.

Language homophily and control

How might language homophily affect migrant consumers' service usage intentions? Research finds that perceived control over service encounters can affect the extent that consumers prefer to communicate in their native language (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2014). For migrant consumers, a sense of control may be especially important when forming their service usage intentions. Relative to native consumers, migrant consumers can feel a lack of control over their service encounters (Noels *et al.*, 1996; Jang *et al.*, 2006; Woloshin *et al.*, 1995). In the USA, for example, Spanish-speaking migrant consumers can feel a lack of control over their encounters with health service providers when providers lack the ability to speak Spanish (Woloshin *et al.*, 1995). This feeling of a lack of control, however, has been found to decrease as migrant consumers gain fluency in the language of their host country (Noels *et al.*, 1996). Such research suggests that language homophily may affect the extent that migrant consumers feel that they have control over a service encounter.

When service providers speak the native language of their migrant consumers, research (Noels *et al.*, 1996) suggests that migrant consumers may feel a greater sense of control over the service encounter. Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between a consumer's sense of control over a service encounter and their service usage intentions (Oyedele and Simpson, 2007). Thus, it may be the case that language homophily increases the service usage intentions of migrant consumers by increasing their sense of control over the service encounter. The present research will empirically test this hypothesis (Study 2):

H2. High (vs low) language homophily with service providers will increase migrant consumers' expected control over the service encounter, which, in turn, will increase their service usage intentions.

Collectivism as a boundary condition

Will language homophily always result in higher service usage intentions? Empirical testing of the aforementioned hypotheses will provide initial evidence on whether and how language homophily affects service usage intentions. However, empirical testing is also needed to establish a possible boundary condition for the proposed effect of language homophily on service usage intentions.

Research on consumers in bilingual countries finds that consumer involvement and consumers' political beliefs can moderate the effect of language homophily on service outcomes (Holmqvist, 2011; Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist, 2013). Holmqvist (2011) found that low language homophily was especially detrimental to service outcomes when consumers were highly involved with the service. For migrant consumers, it may be the case that cultural values affect the extent that language homophily influences their service usage intentions.

The cultural dimension of collectivism reflects a consumer's orientation toward others, including service providers. Collectivism refers to the extent that consumers see themselves embedded in their social groups (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Triandis *et al.*, 1988; Triandis and Gelfland, 1998). Because consumers who are higher in collectivism tend to see themselves as highly embedded in their social groups, they value relational harmony, interdependence and group loyalty (Triandis *et al.*, 1988; Triandis and Gelfland, 1998). To achieve relational harmony, collectivistic consumers tend to be more perceptive of the needs of their groups and are generally more conforming (Bond and Smith, 1996). Less collectivistic consumers, on the other hand, are less dependent on their social groups. As a result, they value autonomy, placing more importance on their own needs rather than the needs of the groups to which they belong (Triandis *et al.*, 1988; Triandis and Gelfland, 1998).

To achieve relational harmony, collectivistic consumers adjust their expectations and behaviors when interacting with others (Morling, 2000; Morling *et al.*, 2002). Alternatively, less collectivistic consumers are less likely to adjust their expectations and behaviors when interacting with others. Morling (2000), for example, found that consumers high in collectivism were more likely to adjust themselves to fit the demands of a class, whereas consumers low in collectivism tried to change the class to address their specific needs.

The influence of collectivism on the willingness to adjust oneself to fit the social environment may have important implications on the service intentions of migrant consumers. Because collectivistic consumers are more likely to adjust themselves to fit their social environment, they may be more willing to adjust their expectations and attitude toward service offerings and providers. As a result, when compared to consumers who are less collectivistic, those who are high in collectivism may be less affected by language homophily between themselves and service providers. Whether collectivism attenuates the effect of language homophily on migrant consumers' service usage intentions will be assessed by empirically testing (Study 3) the following hypothesis:

H3. High (vs low) collectivism will attenuate the positive effect of language homophily on migrant consumers' service usage intentions.

Study 1

Study 1 provides an initial test of whether language homophily between service providers and migrant consumers affects migrant consumers' service usage intentions. The study uses the context of a medical service provider, as choosing and interacting with medical service providers can be challenging for migrant consumers (Sanmartin and Ross, 2006). In this context, this study tests *H1*, that is, high (vs low) language homophily will increase migrant consumers' intentions to use the services of a general medical practitioner.

Method

Participants

The study required recruiting participants currently living in a foreign country (i.e. migrant consumers). This was accomplished by posting advertisements for the study on Facebook. In particular, announcements were made on the Facebook group page "Find-in-Chile," which is used by English-speaking migrant consumers living in Chile. The advertisement for the study explained that participants would be entered in a lottery for the chance to win a cash prize in exchange for participating in the survey. A link to the online survey, administered by Qualtrics, was included in the advertisement. This resulted in 57 native-English-speaking migrant consumers, living in Chile, completing the survey. Of the total participants, 37 were female, their age ranged from 21 to 72 ($M = 36.7$, $SD = 12.1$) and their duration in Chile ranged from 0.16 to 44.5 years ($M = 6.2$ years, $SD = 7.8$).

Experimental design and procedure

Participants were presented with information about a general medical practitioner working in Chile. Participants randomly assigned to the low language homophily condition read that the general practitioner "[...] is not bilingual and only speaks with his patients in Spanish", whereas participants assigned to the high language homophily condition read that the general practitioner "[...] is bilingual and speaks with his patients in Spanish or English". The general practitioner was described as having the ability to speak Spanish (which is the official language of Chile) in both conditions so that only the presence vs absence of the general practitioner's ability to speak the participants' native language (English) varied between conditions. All other aspects of the description of the general practitioner were held constant across the two conditions (Appendix).

Measures

After reading the condition-specific information about the general practitioner, participants indicated their intentions to use the services of the general practitioner by responding (1 = "extremely unlikely"; 7 = "extremely likely") to the following item adapted from Forehand *et al.* (2011): "Imagine that you need to find a general practitioner. What is the likelihood that you would visit this general practitioner?" Participants also reported their native language, time spent living in the Chile and demographics such as age and gender. Ability to speak Spanish was measured, as in previous research (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2014; Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist, 2013), by having participants indicate their agreement (1 = "strongly disagree"; 7 = "strongly agree") with three statements ("I am fluent in

Spanish", "I understand both English and Spanish" and "I can easily switch from English to Spanish").

Results and discussion

An ANCOVA model was estimated to assess *H1*, that is, high (vs low) language homophily between a migrant consumer and a service provider will result in higher service usage intentions. The model included language homophily as a binary independent variable, service usage intention as a continuous (1-7) dependent variable and migrant consumer's duration in Chile, Spanish-speaking ability, gender and age as control variables. Following previous research (Azab and Clark, 2017; Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist, 2013), duration in the host country, ability to speak the native language of the host country, gender and age were used as control variables in the statistical models reported in each of the three studies. Consistency in the use of control variables is generally recommended (Lipsey and Wilson, 2001), as doing so facilitates the comparability of the effect of language homophily on migrant consumers' service usage intentions across the three studies.

The results offer robust support for *H1*. As predicted, high (vs low) language homophily between migrant consumer and service provider resulted in higher service usage intentions, $F(1, 51) = 22.69$, $p < 0.001$. Migrant consumers in the high language homophily condition reported higher service usage intentions ($M = 6.26$, $SD = 0.86$) than migrant consumers in the low language homophily condition ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 2.02$).

The results of this study provide initial insight on the relationship between language homophily and the service usage intentions of migrant consumers. Building on previous work on language and service encounters (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2014), the present study finds that an increase in language homophily between migrant consumers and a service provider results in higher intentions to engage with the service provider. The study's participants varied with regard to their time spent living in Chile. However, even after controlling for their time spent in Chile and their Spanish-speaking ability, age and gender, language homophily was found to have a significant effect on their service usage intentions.

Study 2

The objective of this study is to identify a process mechanism by which language homophily affects the service usage intentions of migrant consumers. Specifically, the study tests whether high (vs low) language homophily exerts a positive effect on migrant consumers' expectation of control over a service encounter and whether expected control increases service usage intentions (*H2*). This study also tests the generalizability of the observed effect of language homophily on service usage intentions by using a financial, rather than medical, service context and by sampling migrant consumers living in the USA and England, rather than only in Chile. English is the dominant language in the USA and England, whereas Spanish is the dominant language in Chile. By sampling migrant consumers from the USA and England, the present study helps to ensure that the effect of language homophily on service usage intentions is not specific to host countries whose dominant language is Spanish. Similarly, the

present study's use of a financial services context helps ensure that the observed effects are not limited to medical services. As with medical services, migrant consumers are known to face challenges in accessing and using financial services (Leonhardt and Chu, 2017; Osili and Paulson, 2009), and such challenges affect their well-being (Wright, 2010).

Method

Participants

Participants living in the USA or England with a native language other than English were recruited with the help of the online crowdsourcing platform ProlificAcademic.com (Peer *et al.*, 2017). ProlificAcademic.com advertised the study and provided a link to the survey for users who reported living in the USA or England with a first language other than English. Because the study was administered in English, comprehension of the survey was tested with an instructional manipulation check (IMC) to verify that participants read and understood the survey's content (Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2009). Two participants failed the IMC and were excluded from subsequent analyses. Excluding these two participants did not appreciably change the results. The final sample consisted of 65 migrant consumers. In total, 45 participants were female, and their age ranged from 18 to 65 years ($M = 31.8$, $SD = 9.5$). Also, 20 of the participants were living in the USA and 45 were living in England. There were 20 different native languages reported among the participants. Time living as a migrant consumer in either the USA or England ranged from 0.8 to 35.2 years ($M = 11.2$ years, $SD = 8.5$).

Experimental design and procedure

Participants were asked to imagine the following scenario:

> Imagine that you need to borrow money to buy a new home. To finance the home, you would need to find a loan officer that would give you a loan and walk you through the process of financing a home. Some of the things a loan officer does include determining whether a client is eligible for a loan, determining the interest rate to apply to the loan, explaining the terms of repaying the loan, and describing the fees clients pay to obtain the financing. The loan officer also helps clients with the paperwork that is needed, as well as other things. Read the description of the loan officer on the following page and then respond to the questions asking what you think it would be like to work with this person.

Participants were then provided with condition-specific information about a loan officer. Language homophily was manipulated between-participants by randomly assigning participants to either the low or high language homophily condition. In the low language homophily condition, the loan officer was described as only having the ability to speak English, whereas in the high language homophily condition, the loan officer was described as having the ability to speak both English and the native language of the participant.

In both conditions, the loan officer was described as having the ability to speak English (which is the official language of England and the *de facto* national language of the USA) so that only the presence versus absence of the loan officer's ability to speak the participants' native language varied between conditions. Rule-based programing of the online survey allowed for the insertion of each participant's reported native language in the description of the loan officer's language ability in the high language homophily condition. All factors other than the reported language ability of the loan officer were held constant across the two conditions (Appendix).

Measures

After reading their condition-specific information about the loan officer, participants indicated their intent to use the services of the loan officer by responding (1 "extremely unlikely" to 7 "extremely likely") to the following item adapted from Forehand *et al.* (2011): "What is the likelihood that you would visit the loan officer?" Expected control over the service encounter was subsequently measured using a scale adapted from Holmqvist *et al.* (2014). Specifically, participants responded (from 1, "extremely unlikely", to 7, "extremely likely") to the following four items:

1 When interacting with the loan officer, I would feel that I am in control.
2 I would get precisely what I want from this loan officer.
3 If I communicated in English in this situation, I would achieve the same results as if I communicated in my native language.
4 In this situation, I would have complete control over the outcome of the loan process (*alpha* = 0.72).

English-speaking ability, time spent living in the USA or England as a migrant consumer and general demographics were collected as control variables. English-speaking ability was measured following previous research (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2014; Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist, 2013). Participants indicated their agreement (from 1, "strongly disagree", to 7, "strongly agree") with three statements that assessed their fluency in English, their ability to understand both English and their native language and their ability to switch from English to their native language.

Results and discussion

An ANCOVA model was estimated to assess the effect of language homophily on service usage intentions (*H1*). The model included language homophily as a binary independent variable, service usage intentions as a continuous dependent variable and English-speaking ability, residence (USA or England), time spent living in the USA or England as a migrant consumer, gender and age as control variables. The results of this analysis were similar to those reported in a previous study, providing additional support for *H1*. Service usage intentions were higher for participants in the high language homophily condition ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.51$) than for participants in the low language homophily condition ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.14$; $F(1, 60) = 4.38$, $p < 0.05$).

Next, following Hayes (2013), an ordinary least squares path analysis was conducted, and bias-corrected confidence intervals were estimated for the indirect effect of language homophily on service usage intentions through its predicted effect on expected control over the service encounter. Language homophily was coded 0 for low language homophily and 1 for high language homophily. The results provide support for *H2* and suggest that expected control over the service encounter fully mediates the effect of language homophily on service usage intentions. Language homophily exerted a positive effect on expected control during the service encounter ($a = 1.34$, $t = 3.91$, $p < 0.001$), and expected control exerted a positive effect on service usage intentions ($b = 0.43$, $t = 3.80$, $p < 0.001$). A bias-corrected confidence interval for the indirect effect ($ab = 0.58$) based on 10,000 bootstrap

samples was above zero (0.23 to 1.06). Moreover, there was no evidence that language homophily influenced service usage intentions independent of its effect on expected control ($c' = 0.12$, $t = 0.36$, $p = 0.72$). These results are illustrated in Figure 1. Such results support *H2* that language homophily influences the service usage intentions of migrant consumers, and that this effect is mediated by migrant consumers' expected control during the service encounter.

The results provide additional support for the initial finding that language homophily positively affects the service usage intentions of migrant consumers. The results also provide evidence for an underlying process mechanism. Migrant consumers' expected control over the service encounter was found to mediate the relationship between language homophily and service intentions. In addition to identifying a process by which language homophily affects service usage intentions, the present study also helps to generalize the results of Study 1 by incorporating a different service context and by recruiting migrant consumers from the USA and England.

However, in addition to testing the generalizability of the effect of language homophily on service usage intentions, it is also important to determine under what conditions this effect is attenuated. Drawing on the previous research finding that more collectivistic consumers are more willing to adjust their expectations and behaviors to fit the environment (Morling, 2000; Morling *et al.*, 2002), the final study tests whether migrant consumers who are high in collectivism are less likely to have their service usage intentions affected by the language homophily between themselves and service providers (*H3*).

Study 3

The objective of this study is to identify a boundary condition for the otherwise robust effect (Studies 1 and 2) of language homophily on migrant consumers' service usage intentions. Similar to the initial study, this study recruited migrant consumers living in Chile and asked them to evaluate a service provider while manipulating language homophily between subjects. This study also measured each participant's level of collectivism to determine whether it affects the extent to which language homophily affects service usage intentions.

Method
Participants

As in Study 1, migrant consumers were recruited by posting advertisements for the study on Facebook. Announcements

Figure 1 Effect of language homophily on service usage intentions was mediated by expected control during the service encounter
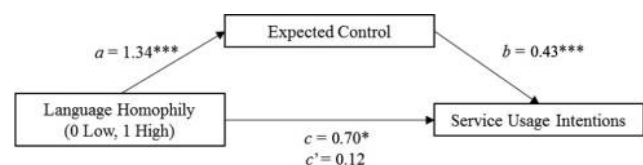
Notes: The bias-corrected confidence interval for the indirect effect of language homophily on service usage intentions (through expected control) is significant: $ab = 0.58$, 95 per cent confidence interval = 0.23 -1.06; *p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001

were made on the following Facebook group pages frequented by migrant consumers living in Chile: "ExpatsChile", "Find-in-Chile", "Find-in-Santiago" and "DiscoverChile". As an incentive, participants were entered in a drawing for the chance to win a cash prize. A total of 94 migrant consumers completed the study, of which 73 were female, their age ranged from 20 to 67 years ($M = 34.7$, $SD = 10.2$), their time living in Chile as a migrant consumer ranged from 0.16 to 24.8 years ($M = 4.3$ years, $SD = 4.9$) and their reported native languages were English (69), German (6), French (3), Russian (4), Swedish (2), Italian (2) and other non-Spanish (8).

Experimental design and procedure

Participants were asked to imagine the following scenario:

> Imagine that you have been physically ill for several weeks and that you do not know what is causing the sickness. As a result, you need to visit a doctor to diagnose the problem and get treatment. Consider the description of the doctor below and after reading the description, respond to the questions asking what you think it would be like to visit this doctor so that you could get the diagnosis and treatment you need.

Participants were then presented with information about a general practitioner located in Chile. Between-participants, language homophily was manipulated by randomly assigning participants to the low or high language homophily condition (Appendix). The general practitioner was described as only having the ability to speak Spanish in the low language homophily condition and as having the ability to speak both Spanish and the native language of the participant in the high language homophily condition. As in Study 2, the online survey was designed with rule-based programing, so the participant's reported native language was used to describe the general practitioner's language ability in the high language homophily condition. All other aspects of the description were held constant across the two conditions.

Measures

After reading the description of the general practitioner, participants indicated their intentions to use the practitioner's services by responding to the question "What is the likelihood that you would visit this general practitioner?" by using a scale that ranged from 1 "extremely unlikely" to 7 "extremely likely" (Forehand *et al.*, 2011). Each participant's level of collectivism was then measured using a six-item (e.g. "individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group") collectivism scale (*alpha* = 0.88; Yoo *et al.*, 2011). Participants responded to the collectivism items on a seven-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree"; 7 = "strongly agree"). Participants then reported their time spent living in the Chile as a migrant consumer, their ability to speak Spanish and other demographics. Spanish-speaking ability was measured as in Study 1.

Results and discussion

A linear regression model was estimated that regressed service usage intentions on language homophily, individual collectivism, the language by collectivism interaction term and control variables, including time spent in Chile as a migrant consumer, Spanish language ability, age and gender. Language homophily was coded -0.5 for low language homophily and 0.5 for high language homophily, and the collectivism measure was mean-centered (Yoo *et al.*, 2011).

The results of this regression model revealed that language homophily had a positive effect on service usage intentions ($B = 1.17$, $t = 3.55$, $p < 0.001$). The relationship between individual collectivism and service usage intentions did not reach significance ($B = 0.14$, $t = 1.06$, $p = 0.29$). In addition, although the main effect of language homophily on service usage intentions was significant, the results show that this effect depended on the participants' level of collectivism (interaction term: $B = -0.65$, $t = -2.44$, $p < 0.05$).

Following Spiller *et al.* (2013), the nature of the interaction between language homophily and collectivism was examined by testing how language homophily affected the service usage intentions of participants who are low (1 *SD* below the mean), moderate (at the mean) and high (1 *SD* above the mean) on collectivism. The results of this spotlight analysis revealed that language homophily exerted a positive effect on the service usage intentions of participants who are low ($B = 2.01$, $t = 4.20$, $p < 0.001$) and moderate on individual collectivism ($B = 1.17$, $t = 3.55$, $p < 0.001$), but not for participants who are high on collectivism ($B = 0.34$, $t = 0.71$, $p = 0.48$). The contrasting results of the participants low and high on collectivism are illustrated in Figure 2.

The results of this study provide additional insight on the relationship between language homophily and service usage intentions. As in the previous studies, language homophily was found to positively affect service usage intentions. In addition, collectivism was identified as a boundary condition for this effect. In particular, the results suggest that language homophily does not affect the service usage of intentions of consumers who are higher in collectivism; however, it does significantly affect the service usage intentions of consumers who are lower in collectivism. This result aligns with the existing theory on collectivism, which suggests that collectivism is positively associated with consumers' willingness to adjust their expectations and behaviors to fit the environment (Morling, 2000; Morling *et al.*, 2002).

Single-paper meta-analysis

The previous studies used different service contexts (medical and financial) and included migrant consumers living in Chile, England and the USA. In each study, language homophily was

Figure 2 Effect of language homophily on service usage intentions was moderated by collectivism (interaction term: B = -0.65, $t = -2.44$, $p < 0.05$)
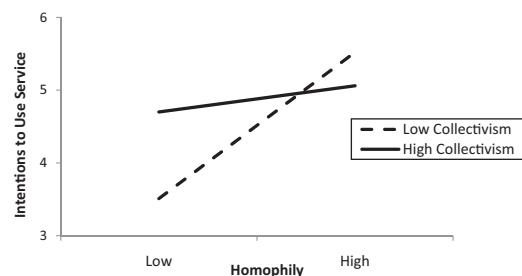
Notes: The positive effect of language homophily on service usage intentions was attenuated among migrant consumers who are high in collectivism

found to have a significant positive effect on service usage intentions. Analysis of effect sizes, as measured with Cohen's *d*, shows that the magnitude of the effect of language homophily on service usage intentions ranged from medium (Study 2 = 0.54, Study 3 = 0.65) to large (Study 1 = 1.39; Cohen, 1988). This suggests that the effect of language homophily on service usage intentions holds across medical and financial service contexts and among migrant consumers living in host countries where English or Spanish is the dominant language.

A single-paper meta-analysis provides additional support for the positive effect of language homophily on service usage intentions across different service contexts and migrant consumer samples. Using a procedure developed by McShane and Böckenholt (2017), the effect of language homophily on service usage intentions, across the three studies, was estimated at 1.35 units (*SE* = 0.39). Such evidence is important for demonstrating the generalizability of this effect. The single-paper meta-analysis also revealed that language homophily accounted for 22 per cent (95 per cent CI: 9-53 per cent) of the variation in service usage intentions across the studies.

Variation across the studies, not accounted for by language homophily, may be due to differences between the service contexts. Although medical and financial service contexts are associated with high consumer involvement (Holmqvist, 2011), other differences between these services may have contributed to variation in how language homophily affected service usage intentions. Variation across the studies may also be due to differences between the migrant consumers sampled across the three studies. Migrant consumers living in the USA, England and Chile are likely to vary on cultural dimensions such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, interdependence and ethnocentrism (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Sharma, 2010). These factors may also influence how language homophily affects intentions to use medical and financial services. Though beyond the scope of the present research, there is a need for future research to identify how such factors may differentially affect migrant consumers' reaction to different service offerings in their non-native language.

General discussion

Summary
The results of three studies and a single-paper meta-analysis suggest that language homophily has a positive effect on migrant consumers' intentions to engage with service providers. This effect was observed across service contexts (i.e. medical and financial) and, importantly, across migrant consumers living in Chile, England and the USA. A process underlying this relationship was also identified. Language homophily was found to increase migrant consumers' expectation of control over the service encounter, which, in turn, was found to increase service usage intentions. Furthermore, the final study suggests that cultural orientation, namely, collectivism, serves as a boundary condition for the effect. Migrant consumers higher (lower) in collectivism are less (more) affected by language homophily between themselves and service providers when forming service usage intentions.

Theoretical implications
The findings add to the literature on language and services marketing in several ways. Previous research on the languages spoken by service providers has largely focused on consumers living in bilingual countries (e.g. Canada and Finland; Holmqvist, 2011; Holmqvist *et al.*, 2014; Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist, 2013). Such research documents a number of factors affecting consumers' reactions to the language of service providers, such as consumer involvement (Holmqvist, 2011), political attitudes (Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist, 2013) and perceived service provider responsiveness (Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist, 2014). Less research has focused specifically on migrant consumers. Among Hispanic migrant consumers living in the USA, service provider language is known to affect rapport with service providers (Azab and Clark, 2017) and the extent that consumers perceive discrimination during service encounters (Touchstone *et al.*, 2017).

The present research builds on this research by directly testing whether service provider language influences intentions to engage with service providers across different contexts and among migrant consumers in different countries. A process by which language homophily affects service intentions is also identified. Research has shown that consumers are more willing to communicate in a second language when they feel high levels of control (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2014). Extending this research to migrant consumers, the present research finds that an increase in language homophily between service providers and consumers can cause an increase in the extent that they feel control over the service encounter, which, in turn, is associated with higher service usage intentions.

Also of theoretical importance is that the present research suggests a previously unidentified link between service provider language and cultural dimensions theory by showing that a consumer's cultural orientation can moderate the effect of language homophily on service usage intentions. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating that collectivistic consumers are more likely to adjust their expectations and behaviors to fit the environment (Morling *et al.*, 2002).

Managerial implications
The positive effect of language homophily documented in this research indicates that services may attract more migrant consumers by offering a service in the migrant's native language. This insight is important for managers, especially when considering the increasing number of migrant and non-native language speaking consumers seeking services worldwide. In the USA, for example, there are approximately 60 million consumers whose native language is not English, and they have approximately US$1.3tn in buying power (Humphreys, 2016). Understanding factors affecting the service intentions of such consumers remains a challenge for managers and can have significant implications for consumer welfare (Flores *et al.*, 2006).

Striving to increase language homophily is one way for services to attract migrant consumers. Depending on the characteristics of the migrant consumer segment, services may benefit from training employees in the native language of their migrant consumers. Previous research has addressed ways to enhance intercultural communication among employees in an organization (Forster, 2000); however, additional research is

needed on ways to enhance service providers' ability to communicate with their non-native speaking customers. In addition to training programs, services may benefit from expanding their workforce to include migrant employees whose native language matches that of their migrant customers. Moreover, service providers can emphasize language homophily when advertising their services to migrant consumers.

In addition, as the present research finds that language homophily increases expectations of control, which, in turn, increase service usage intentions, an alternative strategy to increase the service usage intentions of migrant consumers is to increase their expectation of control over the service encounter. Enhancing migrant consumers' understanding of the service, for example, could indirectly affect their service usage intentions by increasing their expectation of control over the service encounter. This may be especially important considering that service encounters often involve dynamic communication and the possibility of consumer misunderstanding (Sharma and Patterson, 1999).

The present research also finds that the positive effect of language homophily on intentions to use a service do not apply to all migrant consumers. The positive effect of language homophily seems to exist for consumers low, but not high, in collectivism. This finding is relevant for managers seeking to target specific segments of migrant consumers. The positive effect of offering a service in the native language of migrants may be much more effective for managers targeting less collectivistic consumers, such as those originally from North America and western Europe, than for managers targeting more collectivist consumers, such as those from Asia and South America.

Limitations and opportunities for future research

The present research examined service contexts (medical and financial) in which consumer involvement is typically high (Holmqvist, 2011). In these high involvement contexts, the present research suggests that service providers should make efforts to increase language homophily between themselves and their customers. However, it remains to be tested whether service providers in lower involvement service contexts (e.g. public services and restaurant) will see a similar benefit from an increase in language homophily. In lower involvement contexts, it also remains unclear whether consumer expectations of control will continue to mediate the relationship between language homophily and service usage intentions. Other factors, such as perceived service provider responsiveness (Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist, 2014), may help to explain the effect of language homophily on relevant service outcomes in these contexts.

There is also an opportunity for future research to consider additional cultural orientations and beliefs. Although the present research focused on collectivism, consumers can vary on dimensions such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, femininity-masculinity, long-term orientation, indulgence, interdependence and ethnocentrism (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Sharma, 2010; Sharma and Zhan, 2015; Sharma *et al.*, 2016; Tam *et al.*, 2016). Migrant consumers high in ethnocentrism, for instance, may be more averse to service offerings in their non-native language (Grönroos, 1999). Consumer

ethnocentrism is negatively associated with travel exposure, education and mobility (De *et al.*, 2015; Cleveland *et al.*, 2009). Future research is needed to identify how such factors might moderate the otherwise positive effect of language homophily on migrant consumers' service usage intentions.

Recent research also finds that in addition to affiliations that exist between consumers and their home country, migrant consumers can develop strong affiliations with their host country (Banna *et al.*, 2018). As a result, future research is needed to determine whether the nationalistic feelings that may lead migrant consumers higher in ethnocentrism to prefer service offerings in their native language decreases as their affiliation with their host country increases. In addition, as the present research focused on service usage intentions, future research that studies the effects of language homophily between migrant consumers and service providers on customer satisfaction and interactivity with service providers over time is needed. In general, because research has only recently begun to examine how language homophily influences relevant service outcomes, there is ample opportunity for researchers to contribute to the theory and practice of marketing by further studying language in services marketing.

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Further reading

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Appendix

Study 1

Low language homophily condition
Patricio Valenzuela is a Medical Doctor in Chile. He is not bilingual and only speaks with his patients in Spanish. He is a general practitioner and has been in practice for 10 years. As a general practitioner, he diagnoses and treats a wide variety of medical issues such as allergies, upper respiratory infections, skin disorders and joint pain. His office is open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. He accepts most forms of health insurance.

High language homophily condition
Patricio Valenzuela is a Medical Doctor in Chile. He is bilingual and speaks with his patients in Spanish or English. He is a general practitioner and has been in practice for 10 years. As a general practitioner, he diagnoses and treats a wide variety of medical issues such as allergies, upper respiratory infections, skin disorders and joint pain. His office is open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. He accepts most forms of health insurance.

Study 2

Low language homophily condition
Brian works at a bank in your area. He specializes in helping clients get loans so that they can purchase a new home. He is not bilingual and only speaks with his clients in English. He has been working at the bank for 10 years. He is in his office from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. from Mondays through Fridays.

High language homophily condition
Brian works at a bank in your area. He specializes in helping clients get loans so that they can purchase a new home. He is bilingual and speaks with his clients in English or [native language of participant was inserted here (e.g. Spanish)]. He has been working at the bank for 10 years. He is in his office from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. from Mondays through Fridays.

Study 3

Low language homophily condition

Juan Contreras is a Medical Doctor in Chile. He is not bilingual and only speaks with his patients in Spanish. He is a general practitioner, specializing in family medicine, and has been in practice for 10 years. As a general practitioner, he can prescribe medicines and diagnose a range of disorders. He is covered by most insurance plans and is located near your home.

High language homophily condition

Juan Contreras is a Medical Doctor in Chile. He is bilingual and speaks with his patients in Spanish or [native language of participant was inserted here (e.g. English)]. He is a general practitioner, specializing in family medicine, and has been in practice for 10 years. As a general practitioner, he can prescribe medicines and diagnose a range of disorders. He is covered by most insurance plans and is located near your home.

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