



# The Language-Identity Link in International Students to Canada



Gabriela Diniz, Kimberly Noels & Aleyette Jackson, University of Alberta

## Introduction

Each year, many sojourners relocate to Canada for post-secondary education. As a result of intercultural contact, these individuals may experience a variety of changes to their everyday life, which can lead to alterations in language, identity and behaviour. Within the context of a multicultural society, ethnicity is often a marker of identity, and because language is intimately linked with ethnicity, it is usually a salient identifier.

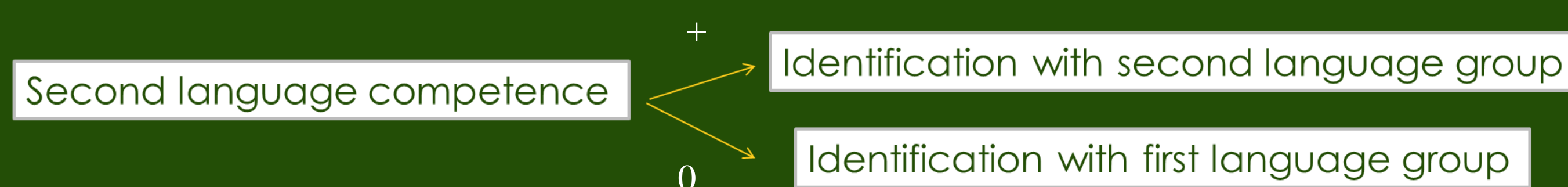
### Number of international students worldwide

1990	1.3
2000	2.1
2011	4.3
2025	7.2*

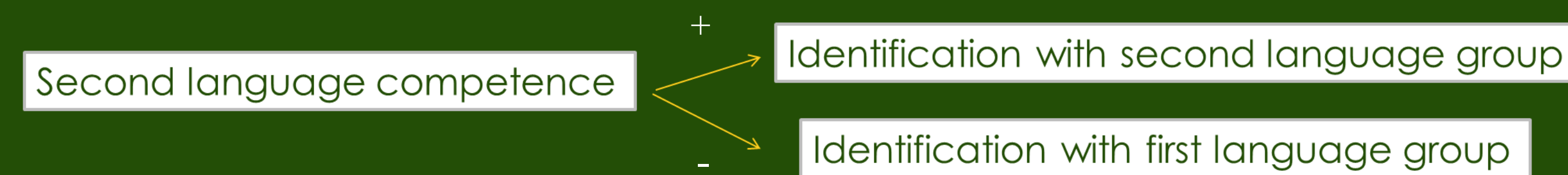
In millions of students, CBIE (2012), OECD (2013)  
\*projected (CBIE, 2012)

Many different patterns of bilingualism can be identified among language learners, as proposed by Lambert (1954) in his theory of Additive and Subtractive Bilingualism:

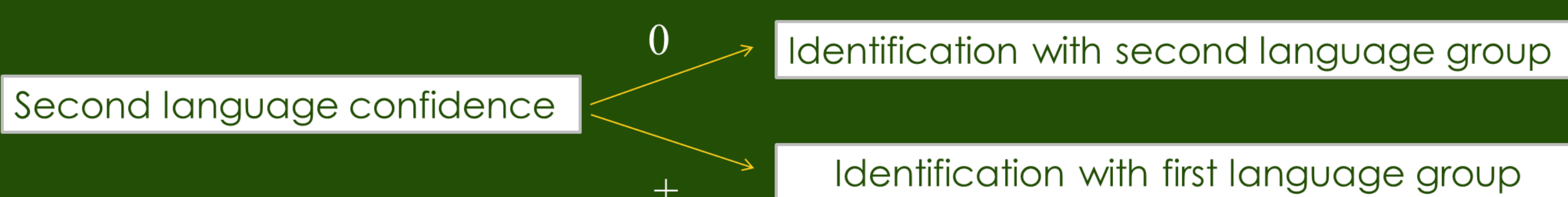
Majority Ethnolinguistic Group



Minority Ethnolinguistic Group



Noels and Yashima (2000) found a different pattern among international students. Participants who had learned English before the age of 11 showed no correlation between language confidence and ethnic identity, and those who learned English after that age presented a significant correlation between these two variables:



Correspondence to: diniz@ualberta.ca

## Research question and hypotheses

What relations exist between English self-confidence, English language vitality, Canadian identity, ethnic identity, discrimination, fear of assimilation, and ethnic importance? Based on previous findings, we hypothesize that English self-confidence will be positively correlated with heritage identity, but uncorrelated with Canadian identity. This pattern will be most evident in those people who learned English after the age of 11. Other variables might be accounted for this relationship.

## Method

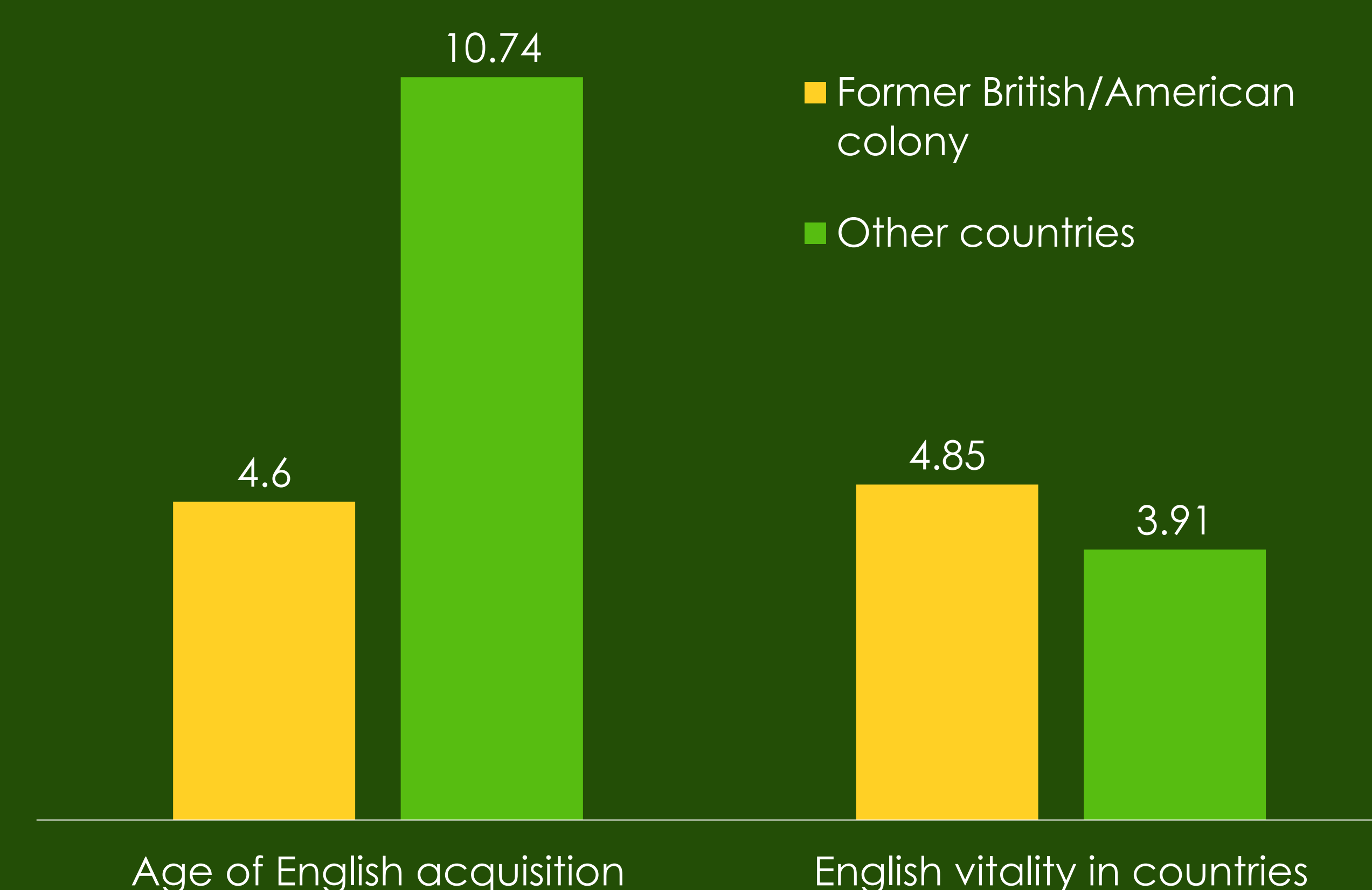
### Participants and procedure

N=109 International ESL students enrolled at the University of Alberta responded to a web based survey  
Age: 17-35 years (Mean = 23.39 years) Sex: 59% female  
Country of Origin: former British/American colonies (e.g., Hong Kong, Philippines): 19.3%  
Age of English Acquisition: before age 11: 52.3%; after age 11: 45.0%

### Materials

Ethnic and Canadian identity – Situated Ethnic Identity (Noels et al., 2005)  
Perceived Ethnolinguistic Vitality (Bourhis, Giles, Rosenthal, 1981)  
Fear of assimilation Scale (Clément & Baker, 2001)  
Importance (Commitment subscale -- MEIM; Phinney, 1992)  
English Anxiety and Confidence (Clément & Baker, 2001)

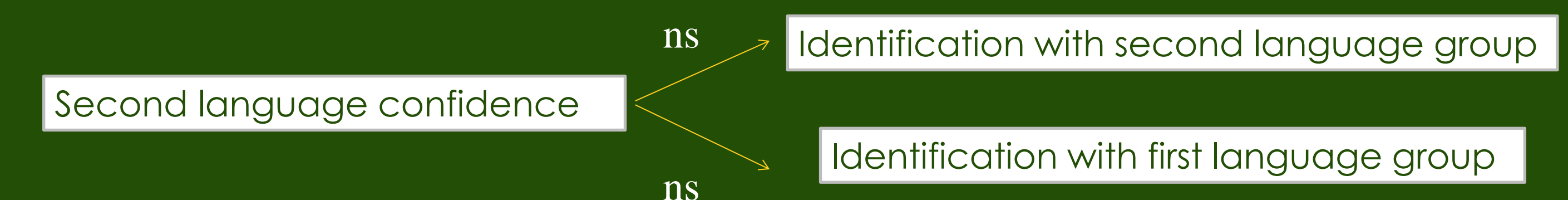
## Results



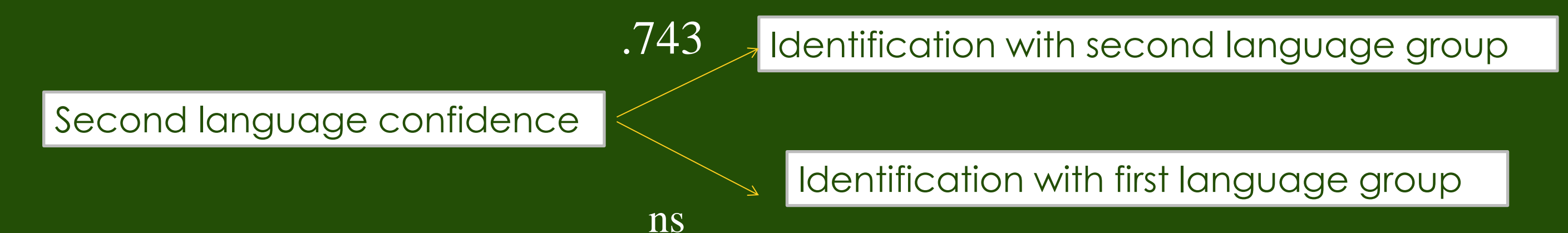
## Results

When analysing the participants in terms of country of origin (former British/American colony vs. not), there was a significant correlation between confidence in English and Canadian identity. This finding was contrary to the results in Noels and Yashima (2000), given that in the former British/American colonies students learn English at an earlier age.

Students from non-former British/American colonies



Students from former British/American colonies



## Conclusion

We were unable to replicate Noels and Yashima's (2000) results. This may be due in part to the differences between the two samples (e.g. age range, sex ratio, and countries of origin). As for the finding that students coming from former British/American colonies presented a correlation between confidence in English and Canadian identity, it can be partially explained by the fact that 28% of them had previously lived in countries where they spoke English, whereas that was not true for the other participants. A limitation for this analysis is sample size (only 20 students in the former group).

These results are consonant with the premise that language is an element of culture, and therefore the acquisition of both overlaps. That no other significant links were identified can be attributed to the fact that international students are voluntarily and temporarily abroad, which affects their identity differently from other migrants. This raises an interesting question that merits further research.

