

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Key strategic decisions in international corporations or governments are often made by people who speak different languages. Such decisions are often made in English, a language that is the first language for some decision makers, but foreign to some others. Psychological research suggests that people who think and speak in their foreign language decide and behave differently, compared to how they would in their mother tongue. For example, such people tend to see less risk in their actions and to rely less on universal moral rules. This finding has been known as the foreign language effect.

Sadly, researchers provided no compelling explanation how and why the effect occurs. Moreover, some experimental findings provide contradictory findings – for example, sometimes people tend to be more risk seeking, and some other times to be more risk-averse in their foreign language.

The goal of this project is to explain, what psychological processes are responsible for the foreign language effect, and how one can use it to increase the accuracy of top-level decisions. Key, but yet neglected factors that can help achieve the goal are the individual differences in cognitive style and intelligence. I plan to extend the research on foreign language by two new domains, namely reasoning and delay discounting, and additionally, account for individual differences in participants. I am confident that it will result in a comprehensive model describing how and why the foreign language works.