

Processing information and making decisions in a foreign language can sometimes lead people to make different choices than they would in their native language. This phenomenon is known as the foreign language effect. How can people decide differently, even though they fully comprehend a problem and have the same preferences, values, expertise, and cognitive abilities? Understanding this is crucial for understanding how people make decisions in general, not just in the narrow context of bilinguals and their decision processes.

Early research on the foreign language effect, assumed that using a foreign language reduces the emotional reactions elicited by the decision problem, leading to a decision change. This assumption was based on observations that emotionally resonant problems are particularly susceptible to biases and heuristics - the higher the level of emotional associations and emotional reactions, the greater the likelihood that the decision will be biased. Lowering emotional reactions by using a foreign language should allow for a different decision than if made in the native language (i.e., less susceptibility to decision biases).

Despite increasing evidence that using a foreign language shapes our choices, its exact mechanism remains an open question. Previous research only suggests a general conclusion about its mitigating effect on emotional reactions. An alternative explanation for the foreign language effect is that using a foreign language affects the greater engagement of cognitive processes when making decisions, resulting in different choices than in the native language. However, the exact mechanism of the foreign language effect has not yet been discovered, and much of the latest research indicates that decision-making in a foreign language does not always bring benefits.

This project aims to enhance our understanding of the foreign language effect by examining the cognitive and emotional mechanisms that give rise to it. It will be done by manipulating participants' cognitive processing modes and observing the effects. By testing different processing modes, we can thoroughly verify the initially proposed mechanisms that account for the foreign language effect: reduced intuitive-emotional processing and increased cognitive engagement. Ultimately, this will create of a more precise model explaining how the foreign language effect impacts decision-making.