



Thinking in a Foreign Language Makes Decisions More Rational

Experiments on more than 300 people from the U.S. and Korea found that thinking in a second language reduces biases that influence how risks and benefits are perceived

bias: preconceptions; partiality.
to assume: to conclude something without thinking much.
regardless: without taking into account.
to be plausible: to be considered possible.
demand: what is needed.
hasty: in a hurry; too fast.
to be framed: to be presented (in a certain context).
scenario: situation.
gut-level: instinctive.
given that: as / since.
far-reaching: affecting many people or things.

Equally plausible, however, is that communicating in a second language forces people to be deliberate, reducing the role of "instinct". Research also shows that immediate emotional reactions to emotively charged words are switched off in non-native languages, allowing the thinker to be rational.

To investigate these possibilities, Keysar's team developed several tests based on **scenarios** originally proposed by psychologist Daniel Kahneman, who in 2002 won a Nobel Prize in economics for his work on prospect theory, which describes how people intuitively perceive risk.

In one famous example, Kahneman showed that, given the hypothetical option of saving 200 out of 600 lives, or taking a chance that would either save all 600 lives or none at all, people prefer to save the 200 – yet when the problem is framed in terms of losing lives, many more people prefer the all-or-nothing chance rather than accept a guaranteed loss of 400 lives.

People instinctively avoid risks when considering gain, and take risks when considering loss, even when the essential decision is the same. It's a **gut-level** human predisposition.

The researchers believe a second language provides a useful cognitive distance from automatic processes, promoting analytical thought and reducing unthinking, emotional reaction.

"**Given that** more and more people use a foreign language on a daily basis, our discovery could have **far-reaching** implications," they wrote, suggesting that people who speak a second language might use it when considering financial decisions.

Adapted from: www.wired.com

Some decisions can be difficult to make, but what happens when we make them by thinking in a different language?

Weekly English Practice

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"Would you make the same decisions in a foreign language as you would in your native tongue?" asked psychologists led by Boaz Keysar of the University of Chicago in a Psychological Science study

"You may **assume** that people would make the same choices **regardless** of the language they are using, or that the difficulty of using a foreign language would make decisions less systematic. We discovered, however, that the opposite is true: Using a foreign language reduces decision-making biases," wrote Keysar's team.

Psychologists say human reasoning is shaped by two distinct modes of thought: one that's systematic, analytical and cognition-intensive, and another that's fast, unconscious and emotionally charged. In light of this, **it's plausible** that the cognitive **demands** of thinking in a non-native, non-automatic language would use up a lot of mental energy, ultimately leading them to make **hasty** decisions.

"Let's chat about that!"

Write your answers in an email and send them to your ECP coach!

Give reasons for your answers

- Can you think of some examples of important decisions?*
- What decisions do you usually make in English?*
- What emotionally charged words do you think affect how you make decisions?*
- Will you consider making decisions in English after reading this article?*



“iLook, iThink, iSpeak” Express yourself better!



What would you rather do?

What would you prefer to do in these difficult situations?

Try making these silly decisions in English, and then explain why you've made each choice. Would your partner/brother/sister/parents do the same?

Then say what you think Homer Simpson would do!

be chased by 100 angry birds

lose your two front teeth

do your neighbour's laundry every day

be lost in a boat at sea

have 50% of your body burned

...OR...



be chased by a lion?

lose the ability to smile?

give your neighbour €20 every week

be lost on a camel in a desert?

have 100% of your body tattooed?

WOMEN SPEND MORE TIME THINKING ABOUT WHAT MEN THINK THAN MEN DO ACTUALLY THINKING.

1

Discuss these 3 statements with your colleagues, friends and ECP coach. Do you agree?

2



"If you spend too much time thinking about your next step, you will be standing on one leg for the rest of your life" - **Bruce Lee**

"Don't make a permanent decision for your temporary emotion."

3