

A Foreign Language Effect or a Language Proficiency Effect?

Paul Thibodeau

Oberlin College

Evelyn Kalafus-Mastenbrook

Oberlin College

Matias Berretta

Oberlin College

Aliya Tuzhilin

Oberlin College

Nupur Agrawal

Trinity University

Abstract: Recent work suggests that people think more systematically when using a second language because second languages are less automatic or emotionally valenced. Here, we use a different population (from India) to further investigate this possibility. We also test whether nuanced factors like language proficiency, usage context, and age of acquisition affect the degree to which people show a foreign language effect. We do not find a strong difference between native and second language speakers. However, we do find a more nuanced effect of language proficiency: people who are more proficient in the target language show more loss aversion. We also find that proficient English speakers are more willing to take on risk in both experiments, suggesting that English, itself, may lead people to think differently – possibly because it is a highly agentive language or because it is associated with individualistic cultural values.