

Experiencing Positive and Negative Emotions in L1 vs. L2

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Abstract

Bilinguals perceive events differently in their native (L1) and second languages (L2; e.g., Dylman & Bjärtå, 2019). A possible explanation for this “foreign language effect” is that L2 makes the described event feel less personal or emotional, leading to more analytical thinking. Prior research has (1) focused predominantly on negative emotions, and (2) not considered individual differences in how relatable an event feels, potentially modulating emotional intensities. This study tests both positive and negative events and how relatable each event feels. Participants, randomly assigned to the L1 or L2 condition, read 8 happy and 8 sad stories, and rated the emotion they felt for each story and its similarity to their personal experience. Preliminary descriptive results (N=17) suggest that emotion is felt more intensely in L1, regardless of valence. With the final dataset, we will examine whether Language, Valence, and Relatability independently and interactively predict the felt emotion.