NEWS LESSON

Are You the Same Person in Your Second Language?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Do you act or sound differently when you speak English, and in what way?
2. Do you think it is easier to talk about difficult things in a language that is not your first? Why or why not?
3. How much do you think the language you speak shapes who you are?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**sacrificing**	☐	A	results that researchers discover
2	**questionnaire**	☐	B	showing different results, not one clear answer
3	**commitment**	☐	C	when you look at everything together
4	**overall**	☐	D	soft and not extreme
5	**self-report**	☐	E	giving up something important so others can gain
6	**findings**	☐	F	information that people give about themselves
7	**mixed**	☐	G	a list of written questions for people to answer
8	**gentle**	☐	H	a strong promise to something

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A study of 106 Greek-English bilinguals found that the language they used did not change their moral decisions, although it did shift how some of them described themselves.

1 Anyone who has lived in a second language knows the odd feeling of not being quite the same person. You might be more direct, more polite, more playful or more reserved. Some people say a part of themselves gets lost in translation. Researchers have wondered how deep this goes, and whether it reaches as far as our sense of right and wrong.

2 There is a reason to ask. Earlier research suggested a foreign-language effect: when people judge classic dilemmas in a second language, they are more willing to accept harming one person to save several. One explanation is that a second language feels less emotional than the language we grew up with. But the evidence has been mixed, and some studies have found little or no effect.

3 Irini Mavrou and Andreas Kyriakou set out to look at it differently. Their preregistered study, published online in Bilingualism: Language and Cognition in August 2026, involved 106 native Greek speakers with upper-intermediate or advanced English. Half completed the study entirely in Greek and half entirely in English. Each person judged four dilemmas: two about sacrificing one life to save others, and two about honesty, namely lying on a CV and revealing a partner's infidelity. They also completed a questionnaire about moral identity, which includes moral self and moral integrity.

4 The headline result is that language did not have a reliable overall effect on moral decisions. Switching from Greek to English did not make people more or less willing to sacrifice one person to save several. There was one difference in self-image: people who used Greek rated being a moral person as more important than people who used English. Moral integrity, which is about commitment to acting on your principles, was the same in both groups. Emotions varied. People often reported stronger feelings in English, but those feelings did not reliably explain their choices.

5 What did predict behaviour was moral identity. People with a stronger sense of themselves as moral reported stronger emotional reactions and were more likely to reject dishonest or harmful acts. The effect was clearest in the everyday honesty scenarios rather than in the extreme life-or-death ones.

6 It is important to take the findings with a pinch of salt. They come from one study with 106 people who all spoke the same two languages, so they may not apply to other bilinguals. The dilemmas were hypothetical, and different people took part in each language, so the study cannot show how any one person would change if they switched. Moral identity was also measured by self-report. The researchers also describe their work in an article for The Conversation, so it is worth reading that account alongside the paper itself.

7 Still, the take-home message is gentle. A second language may nudge some feelings or self-descriptions, but it does not seem to override a person's basic values. At the end of the day, who you are mattered more than which language you were using.

Sources: Phys.org (from The Conversation), Speaking in a second language may shift your moral compass but it can't overpower it; Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, Moral identity and language jointly influence how bilinguals feel and decide. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The article suggests that the link with moral identity was clearest in the honesty scenarios. T F NG
2. Language had a reliable overall effect on moral decisions. T F NG
3. Moral integrity was the same in both groups. T F NG
4. The text says how many men and women took part. T F NG
5. The same people did the study in both languages. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

exaggerate	integrity	outgoing	override	predict	reject	reserved	scenarios

1. A strong sense of duty may _____ a person's wish to avoid trouble.
2. She is usually quite _____ at work, but she becomes chatty and open with her friends.
3. Nobody can _____ exactly how a person will behave in a situation they have never faced.
4. Honest people are likely to _____ any offer that involves cheating.
5. The council was praised for its honesty and _____ .
6. Teachers use role-play _____ to practise difficult conversations.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Researchers have _____ how deep this goes. (WONDER)
2. Before the study began, the team had _____ the dilemmas carefully. (CHOOSE)
3. Moral identity was _____ by a questionnaire. (MEASURE)
4. The findings may not _____ to other bilinguals. (APPLY)
5. Different people _____ part in each language. (TAKE)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many verbs, nouns and adjectives take one fixed preposition. Learn the pair as one chunk, for example commitment to.

at	between	for	in	on	to	with

1. Some people say a part of themselves gets lost _____ translation.
2. The results depend _____ the person who is making the choice.
3. The researchers looked at the difference _____ the two groups.
4. Moral integrity is about commitment _____ acting on your principles.
5. Language is not responsible _____ changes in people's decisions.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Does it surprise you that language did not change people's decisions? Why or why not?
2. Which shapes your choices more, your values or your emotions?
3. How would you feel about taking a moral decision in English rather than in your own language?

9 Role-play: which language for a difficult talk?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the team leader

Your company works in English. A colleague made a mistake with some figures and you need to talk about it. You want to speak English so the whole team can follow. Ask why your colleague disagrees, then look for a deal.

Student B · the colleague

You made the mistake and you want to be honest about it. You'd rather explain it in your first language, because you feel more like yourself. Say why, and suggest another way to do it.

Useful phrases

I'd feel more comfortable in my own language.

I don't feel like myself when I speak English.

That's fair, but the others won't understand.

What if we asked someone to translate?

Could we start in English and switch if you need to?

We're both trying to be honest, so let's find a way.

Afterwards, tell the class: which language did you choose, and did you reach a deal?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 E · 2 G · 3 H · 4 C · 5 F · 6 A · 7 B · 8 D

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 override · 2 reserved · 3 predict · 4 reject · 5 integrity · 6 scenarios

6 Verb forms

1 wondered · 2 chosen · 3 measured · 4 apply · 5 took

7 Language focus

1 in · 2 on · 3 between · 4 to · 5 for

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