

Uncovering the Role of Foreign Language on Acquiescence

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This study investigates the impact of a foreign language on acquiescence, the act of passively accepting something (Paulhus, 1991). The research is based on the "foreign language effect" which proposes that using a foreign language leads to more analytical thinking (Keysar et al., 2012), reduced emotional involvement (Duñabeitia & Costa, 2015), and higher cognitive effort (Dhaene et al., 2022). This, in turn, can impact social desirability bias and increase compliance with requests or social norms. Four experiments were conducted to test the foreign language effect on acquiescence. In Experiments 1a and 1b, 377 participants made dichotomous decisions to whether 100 personality traits describe them or not according to Knowles and Condon's (1999) paradigm on acquiescence. The results showed that participants took longer to generate negative responses in a foreign language (vs. native language), while showing no difference in positive responses. In Experiment 2a and 2b, 192 participants made dichotomous decisions to tell lies in social interactions (Cantarero et al., 2018). The results showed that participants were more likely to acquiesce to lie-telling for lies with low social desirability in a foreign language (vs. native language). These findings highlight the relationship between language and decision making, by showing that a foreign language can make people more acquiescent in certain cognitive and social domains. Our study has important implications for decision-making, particularly in international settings where people may communicate in a foreign language. In addition, the study adds to the field of social and cognitive psychology and provides valuable insights for future research.

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