

Different Language, Different Personality?

Many studies have found advantages in speaking more than one language, including better skills in planning and communication, and possibly less memory loss in old age. It seems normal enough, but do you feel a slight change of personality when you speak a different language, as if you were a different person? In fact, many people who can speak multiple languages have reported having varied personalities when different languages are used. For example, one may become louder when speaking one language, and quieter in another. Though this idea is still under debate, there are a number of theories as to why people feel slightly different when they switch languages.

First, since most people do not possess an equal ability in the languages they speak, they may feel tense and hesitant when using one language, while being confident or funny in another. Another reason may be the psychological effect called priming. This happens when people's old, hidden memories are aroused, which may change the way they behave. However, the person may not be aware of the resurfacing of the old memory. For example, when asked to tell a happy story, most people would automatically be in a better mood. After all, our past memories tell us that happy stories are related to good feelings. The same is true of language. If speaking English is linked with memories of school and work, one may turn more serious and polite when using it. Meanwhile, the Taiwanese language you speak with your grandparents may give you a sense of security, leading you to act differently.

Whether or not people's personalities undergo some degree of change when they use different languages is still up for debate. Presently, linguists and scientists are still working on the topic, hoping to find out more.