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Bilingualism and Personality Shifts: A Study of Vietnamese-English Bilinguals

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Introduction

In this study, the relationship between bilingualism and personality shifts was explored as previous researchers have reported that switching languages can result in the shifting in one's personality. It is estimated that more than half of the world's population is bilingual, making study of this occurrence important.

Several studies exploring this phenomenon have been conducted on different bilingual populations (Hong et al., 2001; Luna et al., 2008; Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2006), but less commonly on Vietnamese-English bilinguals. Given the scarcity of studies in this specific population, there is a need to explore personality shifts on Vietnamese-English bilinguals.

This phenomenon can be evaluated from different perspectives, including the psychoanalytic point of view, Eastern personality theories, and Cultural Frame Switching.

It was hypothesized that Vietnamese-English bilinguals would experience personality shifts as the culture-related linguistic cues change.

Method

Participants in this study were derived from a snowball sample of Vietnamese-English bilinguals active on the social media portal Facebook. Snowball sampling is a non-random sampling technique where selection is based on direct or indirect connections to a few elements (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Taking the advantages of this method and online social networking sites, I located a group of interested individuals, added them into a public Facebook group, and they could make further referrals by adding their friends that may be interested into the group.

Potential participants were provided with a survey link online, as I utilized SurveyMonkey.com for assignment.

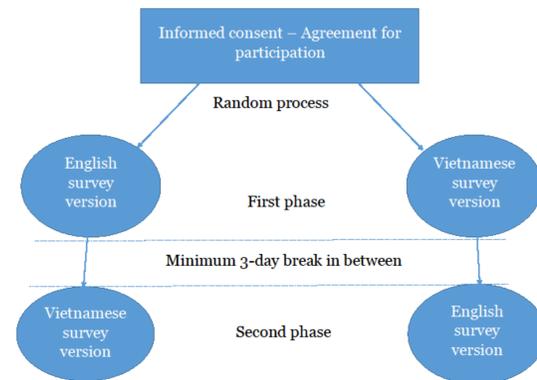


Figure 1. Data collection procedure.

Once directed to the survey, participants provided demographic information, such as age, gender, current or highest education completion, and occupation. After that, they continued with selected items of the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q), and the NEO-IPIP-120. The items in both the English and Vietnamese surveys were identical, only written in designated languages.

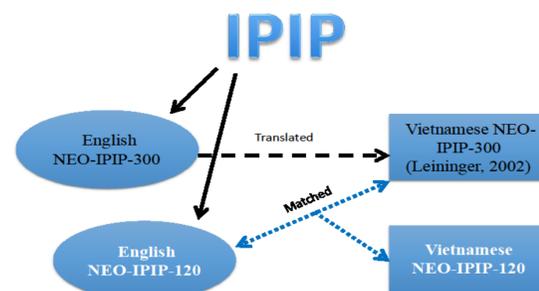


Figure 2. How the Vietnamese NEO-IPIP-120 was created for this study.

The theoretical base for personality in this study was based on Costa and McCrae (2008)'s Five-Factor Model. These factors are Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.

Results

A total of 70 people agreed to participate in the study. 47 participants completed both the English and Vietnamese surveys within the 3-week duration of this study. Two participants were ineligible, resulting in 45 participants for final analysis

Gender	N and %	Age (all participants)
Male	11 (24%)	M = 21.38, SD = 1.96
Female	34 (76%)	

Table 1. Demographic data of participants.

A series of paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to find the differences between the domain scores of the NEO-IPIP-120 in English and Vietnamese. Means of five domains: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, were compared across the two translations.

No statistically significance was found in Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, and Conscientiousness. However, on the Agreeableness factor, a significant difference [$t(45) = 2.48, p = .017, d = -.22$] was found between the English ($M = 86.36, SD = 9.98$) and the Vietnamese scores ($M = 88.78, SD = 11.22$)

Before making any conclusion, it was important to address measure equivalence. A Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis was conducted to see if the items in the Agreeableness factor function similar across two translations. The DIF analysis indicated that four out of 24 items function differently cross two versions. They were removed, and a second *t*-test was conducted. No statistical significance was found within the Agreeableness factor after removing these items, $t(45) = .105, p = .917$.

Conclusions

The initial finding supported the hypothesis in this study. The result from the first *t*-test indicated that Vietnamese-English bilinguals expressed more traits associated with the Agreeableness factor when they answered in Vietnamese, than when they did in English. However, the DIF analysis and the second *t*-test results suggested that the significance observed in the initial finding may be due to translation inequivalence across two versions. This inconclusive result suggested that there is a further need in future research to validate the measure on a larger sample size, and explore the phenomenon of bilingual personalities in general.

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