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Aversive language processing in bilingualism: The role of System 1 and 2

Growing work on the decision-making strategies of bilinguals indicates that the mechanisms underlying judgments in each language differ. Bilinguals tend to make riskier bets in the L2, perceive crime and punishment with less disdain, and display a host of other cognitive/heuristic biases. Within a dual-systems approach, the consensus is that bilinguals, for a number of reasons, are neither as emotionally attached to the L2, nor do they process information in it with the same fluency as their L1. However, less is known about the timing of these effects during active processing. This study aims to complement existing Foreign Language effect research by examining the role of the fast, automatic nature of System 1 and the slower, more deliberate System 2. We do this by using two tasks: 1) a taboo Stroop task in which the speed associated with the processing of neutral words and taboo words is compared in each language; and 2) a self-paced reading task in which politically uncongenial information is read in each language. Our results indicate that, unlike previous work, our bilinguals do not show a reduction in emotional responses to evocative stimuli. Results are discussed in the context of task disparities across studies.