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## The Impact of Language on Personality Ethic as a Social Paradigm

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### Abstract

This study aimed to explore the role of language type in personality ethic- as a social paradigm. To do so, 30 Iranian advanced bilingual EFL university students were selected based on their performance on the OPT. Then, they were asked to respond to an ethical survey as modelled by Poulshock in two Persian and English versions at the time interval of one month. Their responses to both versions of the survey were compared. The results revealed that there were noticeable inconsistencies between the results of the two Persian and English surveys; yielding support to the role of language type in personality ethic- as a social paradigm of people.

**Keywords:** Bilingual, Ethic, Language, Paradigm, Personality ethic, Social paradigm

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### INTRODUCTION

Personality ethic centers on individual differences searching for traits or comparatively stable characteristics along which people differ (Eysenk, 1985; Howard, 1993). In addition, the word paradigm has the Greek language origin. It was originally a scientific, and more commonly used today as a model, theory, perception, assumption or frame of reference. In the more general sense, it's the way we "see" the world not in terms our visual sense of sight, but in terms of perceiving, understanding and interpreting (Waston, 1989, p. 45).

Robinson and Bennett (1997) reported that there are many things which affect our lives and personality. For instance, family, school work environment, friends, associates and current social paradigms such as personality ethic all have made their silent unconscious impact on us and help share our frame of reference, our paradigms, our maps. Darwin, in Chapter Four of *The Origin of the Species*, declared that the human moral sense exists as the most important difference between humanity and the lower animals. Furthermore, leading evolutionary linguists happens that language stands out boldly as a uniquely human characteristic (Pinker, 1994; Deacon, 1997; Hurford, Studdert-Kennedy, & Knight (1998); Calvin and Bicker-

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ton, 2000; Kirby, 2000; Jackendoff, 2002).

Hence, the uniqueness and therefore significance of both human morality and language mix two vital, intriguing, and interconnected traits that clearly merit intensive study.

### **Language, Morality, Evolution, and Social Groups**

Evolutionary linguistics forms a somewhat new field of research that approaches the subfields of linguistics from a Darwinian perspective. From this perspective, linguists can center on how natural selection, cultural evolution, and other causal pressures, mechanisms, and processes may have affected the origin, evolution, and survival of various linguistic behaviors and features (Hurford et al., 1998; Knight, Studdert-Kennedy, & Hurford, 2000; Wray, 2002). This field of inquiry is diverse needing a multidisciplinary approach to inspect exceptionally challenging questions, like the origin of language, which scholars consider a major transition in evolution that requires complex and meticulous explanation (Maynard-Smith & Szathmari, 1999; Wray, 2002).

With the following essential questions stands the related evolutionary problem of altruism and how human language interrelates with the origin, evolution, and maintenance of altruistic and moral behavior in human groups. Could humans have developed a morality without language? Does morality require language? Could we have developed a language without morality? What is the evolutionary relationship between language, altruism, and morality? These language-related questions bond with the general Darwinian problem of altruism (Hamilton, 1964; Sober & Wilson, 1998) in ways that may transform and stimulate discussion on this topic. The orthodox evolutionary view believes that organisms best adapted to their environments experience the highest levels of reproductive fitness and grow through natural selection. This process is completely selfish as it only considers individual organisms that reproduce the genotypes that in turn produce the most well adapted

phenotypes (Dawkins, 1976; 1982). This makes altruism evolutionarily detrimental if it does not value the altruist's genes.

### **(Social) Paradigms**

Paradigm is a logical lens, a way of seeing the world and a framework from which to understand the human experience (Jensen, 2005). It can be difficult to fully grasp the notion of paradigmatic assumptions since we are very ingrained in our own, personal everyday way of thinking. In the first paradigm we will deliberate, called Positivism, is undoubtedly the framework that comes to mind for many of you when you think of science. Positivism is guided by the standards of objectivity, know ability and the deductive logic. Another predominant paradigm in sociology is social constructivism (Peter Berger, & Thomas Luckman, 2008). A third paradigm is the critical paradigm. At its core, the critical paradigm is inequality and social change. Lastly, postmodernism is a paradigm that challenges almost every way of knowing that many social scientific takes for granted (Best Kellner, 1991).

Theoretical framework that sees society as being in a continuous struggle over a limited amount of sources, e.g., struggle between the capitalist class and the working class that in both classes the conflict is obvious in their educational system. Essentially, conflict can be performed in many institutions, not just social class e.g., age, gender, race, religion that all of them influence learning, especially language learning (Teachman, 1980).

### **The Problem of Altruism Language and Social Groups**

Normally, those who consent that genuine altruism actually occurs in nature will often appeal to group selection or multi-level selection pressures. Many researchers, nonetheless, think of this problematic since until recently group selection was seen completely discredited as an explanatory tool (Dawkins, 1976; Trivers, 1985). However, commonly thanks to the work of Sober and Wilson (1998), group selection, which

while still being debatable, has experienced renewed rigor, broader deliberation, and productive empirical testing (Sober & Wilson, 2000; Bekoff, 2002).

One problem with group selection concerns how a group of genetically selfish individuals can join into a part to the degree that it would endure group selection pressures. In other words, how can a group of individuals who naturally act in their own genetic self-interest begin to behave altruistically to non-kin members hence enduring a cost to their own reproductive fitness? And how would this process allow the group in question to coalesce to the degree that it would begin to undergo a group selection process? (Macky & Gass, 2005)

The social paradigms are the source of our attitudes and behaviors in social activities, which are the most important and significant facts in learning a foreign language. However, it seems left intact so far is the basic flaws of the personality ethic to try to change outward attitude and behaviors. So, it is worthwhile to explore the role of language type in personality ethic-as a social paradigm; addressed as the research question.

○ *To what extent does language affect personality ethic- as a social paradigm- of Iranian bilingual learners?*

## METHODS

The participants were 30 Persian speakers Iranian advanced university EFL students from Islamic Azad university of South Tehran Branch. They first attempted Oxford placement test (OPT) as a measure of their general language proficiency Table 1 summarizes the scoring method and placement of the students in different proficiency levels. The reliability index for OPT was assessed in a pilot study with 20 advanced EFL learners who shared the same features with the main sample of the current study and it turned out to be 0.89 using KR-21 method which is an acceptable value of reliability.

**Table 1.**  
*Level and Scoring of OPT*

Level	Score
0 beginner	0-17
1 elementary	18-29
2 lower intermediate	30-39
3 upper intermediate	40-47
4 advanced	48-54*
5 very advanced	54-60*

Moreover, they were exposed to the ethical survey in order to assess their values and morals based on Poulshock's (2006) moral survey instrument, consisting of 20 two-choice items. The instrument was translated into Persian then piloted and its reliability index based on Cronbach Alpha proved to be %.85.

Of course, the original survey was translated into Persian from English, and after that a separate translator translated the survey back into English from Persian. The back-translation was compared with the English original, and based on discrepancies between the original and the back-translation; the Persian translation was revised to enhance its equivalence to the original English. Hence, the researcher made sure the surveys mirrored each other as faithfully as possible. Then, the participants were asked to respond to ethical survey. In fact the purpose of the survey was to see to what extent bilinguals respond differently to equivalent translations of moral dilemmas mainly because of differences in language?

The preliminary study presented the mirror translations of the surveys in Persian and English to the 20 P/E bilinguals as the pilot study. The survey consisted of 15 moral dilemmas and its reliability value reached .85 and .83 for English and Persian versions respectively. Finally, the participants were asked to complete the Persian survey first, and then respond to the English version about one month later. This time interval was due to the fact that answering the Persian survey did not affect their responses to the English one. Subjects were reminded that the survey questions were moral dilemmas that happened to real people, and though their identity remained anonymous, surveys were numbered so that the

researcher could compare answers for individuals between surveys. Finally, the responses of the two versions of the survey were compared for the man analysis.

## RESULTS

### OPT Results

Given the importance of language proficiency level as a determining variable, the OPT was ad

ministered to 44 participants to select homogeneous advanced participants. The descriptive statistics, as appeared in Table 2, shows that the mean, median and mode of the OPT scores were 50.07, 50.50, and 50, respectively. These central parameters are not very far from each other implying that the scores are dispersed normally around the mean. (See Appendix D for the raw scores obtained on the OPT.)

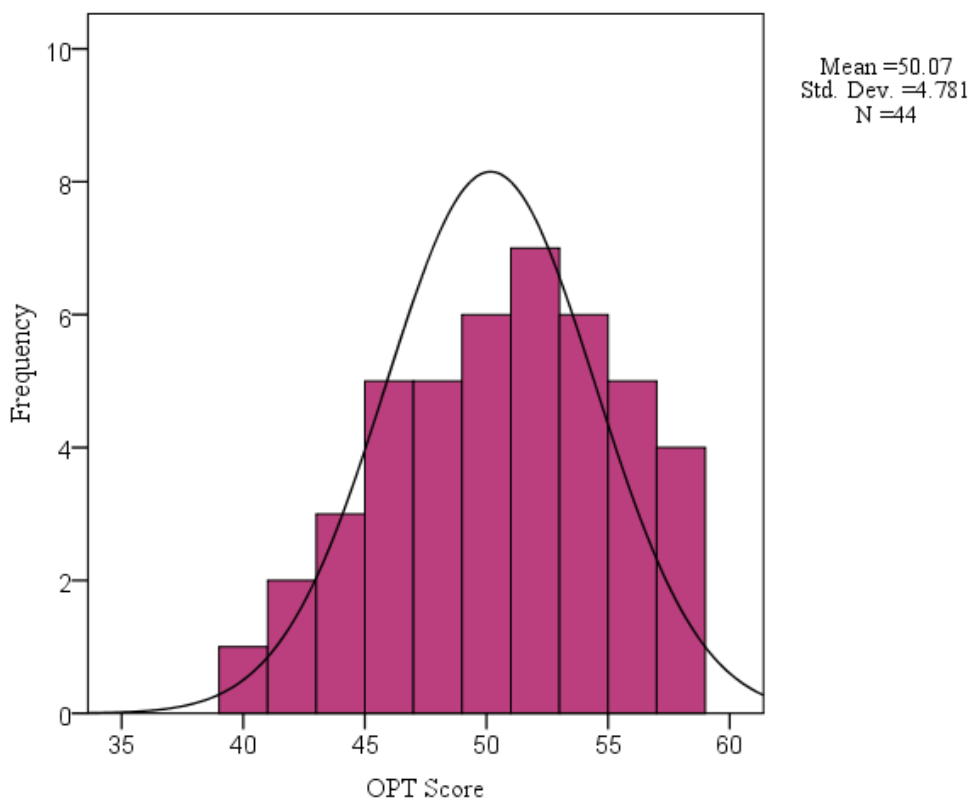
**Table 2.**

*Descriptive Statistics for OPT*

<i>N</i>	Mean	Median	Mode	<i>SD</i>	Skewness Ratio	Kurtosis Ratio
44	50.07	50.50	50	4.78	-.647	-1.174

Based on the results of OPT results (Table 2 above), form among 44 students, those 30 students whose scored 48 or more were selected as homogeneous advanced participants for the present study. Also the table indicates that the normality

of the scores is proved as the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors do not exceed the ranges of  $\pm 1.96$ . Figure 1 below displays the distribution of the OPT scores on a normal curve.



**Figure 1:** Distribution of OPT scores

### Ethical Survey Results

The aim of the research question of the present study was to see to what extent language affects personality ethic- as a social paradigm of Iranian bilingual learners. After the students completed the two English and Persian of the survey for the one month interval, their responses were analyzed and compared. The results indicated that of the 30 participants who completed both the Persian and English sides of the survey, only two

subjects returned the exact same answers on both surveys.

Moreover, though individuals gave the same answers on a majority of the questions on both surveys, more importantly, 28 of the 30 gave at least one different answer for the same question. The average discrepancy for individuals was 3 answers per person, and the total spread set out (see Table 3).

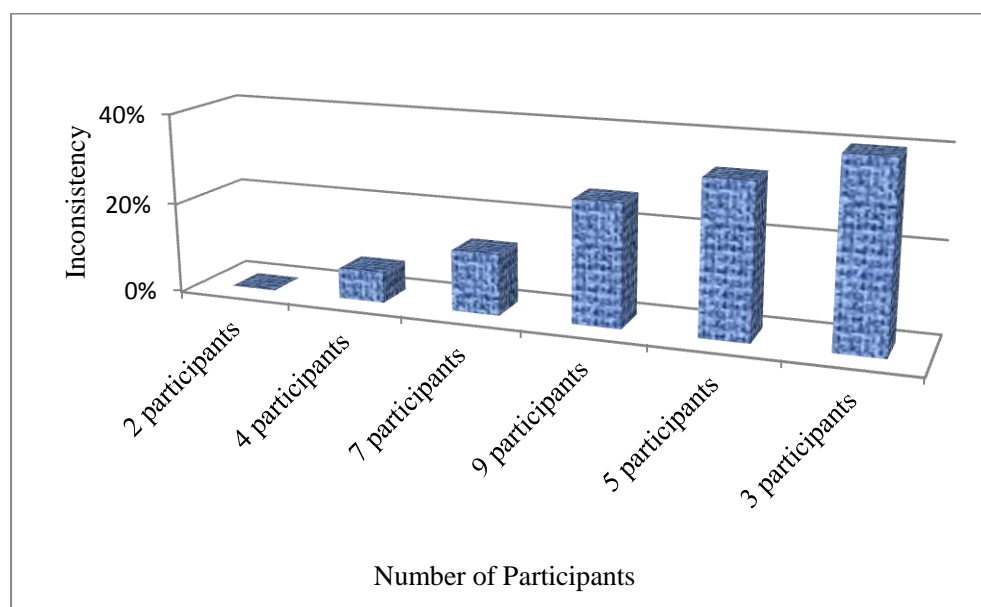
**Table 3.**

**Inconsistency of the Participants' Responses to the Persian and English Ethical Surveys**

Number of participants	Ratio	Inconsistency
2 participants	15/15	0.00%
4 participants	14/15	6.67%
7 participants	13/15	13.33%
9 participants	11/15	26.67%
5 participants	10/15	33.33%
3 participants	9/15	40.00%
Average	3.00/15.00	20.00%

Though patterns of difference were not overwhelming, they were substantial enough. For instance, 30% or 9 of the 30 subjects expressed incongruity in 26.67% or 4 of their answers. A Bar Graph (Figure 2) was drawn to illustrate the

results graphically. As the Bar Graph shows clearly, majority of the participants experienced some considerable inconsistency in their responses to the Persian and English ethical surveys.



**Figure 2: Bar Graph of Inconsistency of the participants' responses to the Persian and English ethical surveys**

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Considering the research question of this study as “To what extent does language affect personality ethic- as a social paradigm- of Iranian bilingual learners?”, the results showed that there were inconsistencies between the students’ performances on the two English and Persian surveys. In other words, the results of this research suggested that language has some considerable effects on personality ethic- as a social paradigm- of Iranian bilingual learners.

The results of this study are in line with Poulshock’s (2006) research in which he conducted in Japan. He recruited 15 Japanese bilingual subjects to respond to two Japanese and English versions of the moral survey. Of the 14 subjects who completed both the Japanese and English sides of the Survey. Only one subject returned the exact same answers on both surveys.

Additionally, though individuals gave the same answers on a majority of the questions on both surveys, more importantly, 13 of the 14 gave at least one different answer for the same question. The average discrepancy for individuals was 2.3 answers per person. Finally, he came to the conclusion that language affects the moral paradigm of the people.

Carrying out the current research it was concluded that language affects personality ethic of people. In fact, as Boehm (2000) believes, language and gossip permit humans to articulate norms and monitor altruists and non-altruists who may be present or absent from the observers. Hence, language not only enables us to articulate norms in a cost efficient manner – with a few words, such as “Thou shalt not...” or “Do as you would be done to,” but when group members articulate and agree upon norms, they can compare actions with the standards set (Sober & Wilson, 2000). Language enables us to communicate and share mental representations (Thierry, 2000). This helps us transmit a moral system to our conspecifics. On the other hand, though non-linguistic species have innate or learned abilities to recognize genetic relatives and behave in terms of inclusive fitness, they cannot linguistically

share mental representations, and even if they have a mentally represented framework for morality, they cannot transmit it to each other for lack of a shared language. The above HOV lane scenario also exemplifies the importance of shared representations. Foreigners, with international driver’s licenses but without knowledge of English would not understand the system, and they could violate it for this reason. Moreover, to take an extreme example, a circus bear that can ride a motorcycle would also fail to adhere to this system, not simply because of poor driving skills, but also because it lacks cognitive and linguistic skills. Hypothetically, trainers could teach a non-linguistic creature to adhere to the

HOV rules, but intervention by trainers who know language invalidates the counter example.

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**Biodata**

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