



Language May Affect How We Feel Pain

Discussion > Advanced 7



Exercise 1 – Vocabulary

bilingual	Able to speak two languages.
[adjective]	<i>Ex: There are a lot of advantages to being bilingual.</i>

identify	To decide or say that one belongs to a particular group.
[verb]	<i>Ex: Most of the men in the study identified as gay.</i>

monitor	To watch and check someone or something for a period of time.
[verb]	<i>Ex: The U.S. government monitors known terrorists in several countries.</i>

response	An answer or reaction to something.
[noun]	<i>Ex: My proposal got a positive response from my supervisor.</i>

intense	Of very great strength, force, etc.
[adjective]	<i>Ex: The competition for well-paying jobs in your field is always intense.</i>



Exercise 2 – Reading

Read the text aloud with your tutor and discuss the key points.

Language May Affect How We Feel Pain

A study from the University of Miami in Florida has shown that people who are bilingual and bicultural may feel pain more strongly when speaking one language than the other.

Researchers looked at 40 women and 40 men with an average age of 29. The participants met with bilingual researchers on two different days, one in which all conversations and materials were in Spanish, and one in which they were all in English.

All of the participants were fluent or native speakers of both English and Spanish, all having learned their second language by age 10. They also said they were bicultural, meaning they identified with American culture as well as Hispanic and Latino culture, though some identified more with one culture than the other.

Researchers applied the same amount of painful heat to participants' arms each day, monitoring their heart rates and sweat on their hands to measure their physical responses to pain. The participants also reported how intense the pain felt to them.



It was found that bilingual people who identified more strongly with Hispanic culture said they felt more intense pain when speaking Spanish, while those who identified more strongly with American culture felt more pain when speaking English. Each group also showed stronger physical responses to the pain when working in the language they identified more strongly with.

Similarly, those who identified equally with both cultures felt about the same amount of pain in both languages. But for those who identified strongly with Hispanic culture, language had a stronger effect on how intense they said the pain felt.

These differences could be particularly important in the US, where studies have found that Hispanic people tend to report more intense pain than white people, while they — and other minorities — tend to receive less pain medication from doctors.

Lead researcher Morgan Gianola said that the study was inspired by other research that had found differences in things like memory depending on the language people are speaking. He wondered if language could also affect responses like pain.



Exercise 3 – Discussion

Discuss the following questions with your tutor.

1. What are your thoughts on the findings of this study?
2. Do you find it surprising that language may affect how a person responds to pain?
3. Do you know anyone who is bilingual? Please describe them.
4. What would you say are the best things about being bilingual?
5. If you had kids, would you want them to learn a second language from a young age? Why? Why not?
6. Do you know any English speakers who are fluent in your language?
7. Do any of your friends or family speak more than two languages?
8. “The more languages you know, the more you are human.” What do you make of this statement?