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The Use of a Foreign Language Can Improve Decision Making Under Information Overload

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Abstract: Past research has suggested that the use of a foreign language worsen decision making because of the heavier cognitive load imposed by a foreign language than by a native language (Takano & Noda, 1993). We discovered, however, that the foreign language usage can be beneficial to decision making under information overload (when it is based upon a large amount of information). Seventy-eight Japanese university students participated in the experiment. First, they were presented with a complex decision problem either in a native language (Japanese) or in a foreign language (English). Foreign language fostered better decision making. Second, they underwent recognition task that measured their memory. Foreign language evoked greater gist memory reliance, and this reliance predicted the decision making performance. Finally, we measured the cognitive load imposed by the language usage. Foreign language imposed the heavier cognitive load, and interestingly, the magnitude of this load predicted the decision making performance.