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Is academic integrity bound to the English language in bilingual Chinese university students?

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Abstract

In China, the prevalence of academic dishonesty relative to the United States has attracted considerable negative attention—one explanation for observed differences in cultural norms around the acceptability of individual unethical academic behaviors. The unique academic experience of bilingual Chinese students enrolled in Sino-American universities presents an opportunity to investigate whether academic experience in English influences attitudes and behaviors about academic integrity. Drawing from research on the Foreign Language Effect, the present study tested the hypothesis that knowledge, and by extension behavior, associated with academic integrity is bound to the English language. Mandarin-English bilingual university students (n = 106) completed objective and self-reporting language experience assessments and responded to two dilemmas that mirror commonly experienced academic scenarios. All experimental stimuli were presented entirely in either Mandarin or English. We identified a modulatory role of English proficiency with higher levels associated with a lower likelihood of plagiarism when dilemmas were presented in English. Additional findings suggest that separable dimensions of the English experience interact to modulate responses to academic integrity dilemmas. This study reports evidence in support of a modulatory influence of English language experience on academic integrity attitudes and behaviors. Findings suggest that higher levels of English proficiency may reflect higher access to Western norms around academic integrity. The present study contributes to our growing understanding of how differences in language experience impact cognition in specific contexts.

Keywords: Academic integrity, Foreign language effect, Foreign language experience

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