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# MANY LANGUAGES, ONE VOICE: MENTAL STRENGTH THROUGH DIVERSITY

**Kai Xin Shen**
*Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto (Canada)*

## Abstract

This exploratory study investigates whether language-switching behavior in adolescence is used to conceal thoughts and its relationship with mental stability in adulthood among multilingual individuals. The theoretical framework suggests that language-switching, particularly in response to negative stimuli, may enhance emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility. Language-switching, also known as code-switching, is a common phenomenon among multilingual individuals, where they alternate between languages depending on the context, audience, or emotional state. Previous research has indicated that bilinguals and multilinguals often switch languages to better express their emotions or to align with the emotional context of a conversation. This study aims to extend this understanding by examining the long-term effects of language-switching on mental stability. Data collection for this empirical study is complete. Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk, resulting in a sample of 155 multilingual adults ($N_{Males}$ = 124, $M_{Age}$ = 34.12 years, $SD_{Age}$ = 5.95). Participants were selected based on their experience with language-switching and multilingualism. The survey included self-assessment Likert scale questions designed to measure the frequency and context of language-switching to conceal thoughts during adolescence, and the ability to maintain calmness and control in pressure situations as indicators of mental stability in adulthood. The independent variable, language-switching to conceal thoughts, was defined as the conscious choice to change languages during a conversation to hide one's thoughts from the interlocutor. The dependent variable, mental stability, was defined as the ability to remain calm and composed in stressful situations, measured through a self-assessment questionnaire. Data were analyzed using SPSS, and the results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between language-switching and mental stability ($r = 0.314$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that individuals who frequently switched languages to manage their emotions during adolescence tend to exhibit better mental stability in adulthood. The findings support the hypothesis that language-switching in adolescence is linked to better mental stability in adulthood. The positive correlation indicates that multilingual individuals who engage in language-switching as a strategy to conceal thoughts and manage emotions may develop enhanced emotional regulation skills over time. The study underscores the importance of multilingualism in fostering emotional and cognitive flexibility, offering valuable insights for future research on multilingualism and mental health. By understanding the benefits of language-switching, psychologists and educators can better support multilingual individuals in leveraging their linguistic abilities for improved emotional regulation and mental well-being.

***Keywords:*** *Language-switching, emotion regulation, adolescence, adulthood, mental stability.*

## 1. Background

As a second-generation immigrant, unique challenges are faced in navigating two languages. At home, the author personally spoke their native language with family members, while outside, they communicated in English. This bilingual environment created a dynamic where I could switch languages depending on the context. This language-switching strategy was used to conceal thoughts and opinions from parents, who had limited English proficiency. This behavior helped to avoid conflict and process situations more effectively. Over time, this practice contributed to the ability to regulate emotions and maintain mental stability in adulthood. Thus, highlighting the significance of language-switching in development and its potential impact on emotion regulation.

## 2. Methods

**Participants**: The study recruited 155 adults through Amazon Mechanical Turk, ensuring that participants had experience with language-switching and spoke more than one language. The final sample included participants aged 24-61, with a mean age of 34.12. Most participants were male (80%) and identified as White (94.8%). The majority spoke two languages, while a smaller percentage spoke three or more languages.

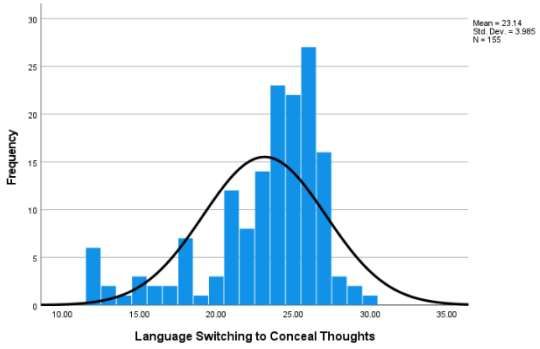
**Data Collection**: Data was collected via a Qualtrics survey, focusing on language-switching to conceal thoughts and mental stability. The independent variable was defined as the conscious choice to switch languages to hide thoughts, while the dependent variable was measured through a self-assessment Likert scale questionnaire. The survey included attention checks and honesty checks to ensure the quality of responses.

**Data Analysis**: SPSS was used for data analysis, with Cronbach's alpha indicating good internal consistency for survey items (0.808 for the independent variable and 0.772 for the dependent variable). The analysis included descriptive statistics, histograms, and Pearson Correlation Coefficient to measure the strength of the linear correlation between the two variables.

## 3. Results

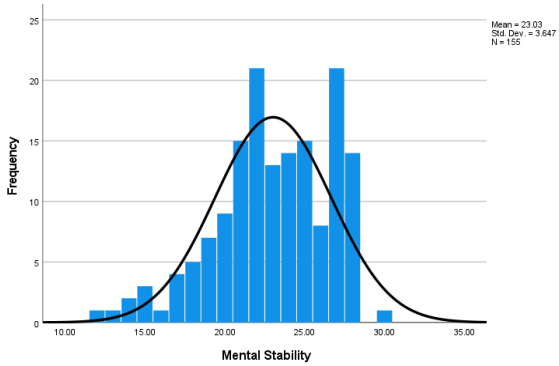
**Language-Switching to Conceal Thoughts**: The results showed a negatively skewed distribution, with most participants scoring high on language-switching items. This indicates that many participants frequently engaged in language-switching to conceal thoughts during adolescence. The mean score for language-switching was 23.14 (See Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Frequency of Language Switching to Conceal Thoughts Scores.*




**Mental Stability**: Similarly, the results for mental stability showed a negatively skewed distribution, with most participants scoring high on mental stability items. This suggests that many participants demonstrated good mental stability in adulthood. The mean score for mental stability was 23.03 (See Figure 2).

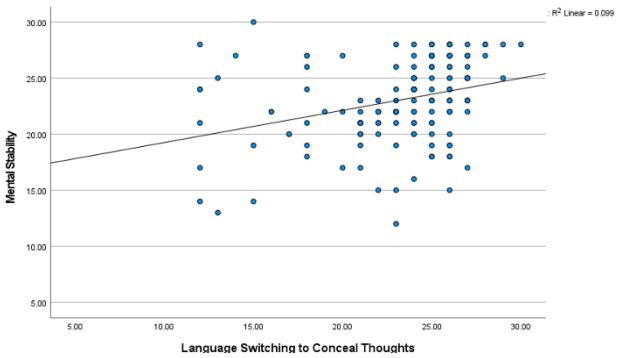
*Figure 2. Frequency of Mental Stability Scores*




**Correlation**: A Pearson Correlation Coefficient of 0.314 ($p<0.01$) indicated a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between language-switching to conceal thoughts and mental

stability. The scatterplot showed that most participants fell in the upper-right quadrant, indicating high scores on both variables. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Scatter plot of Combined Scores on IV and DV for each participant.*




## 4. Discussion

The findings support the hypothesis that language-switching to conceal thoughts in adolescence is related to better mental stability in adulthood. This suggests that multilingualism can enhance emotion regulation, with language-switching serving as a strategy to manage emotional states across different contexts. The results align with Liu (2023), Dewaele (2010), and Schulte-Nahring (2018), who found that language-switching is influenced by emotional intensity and cultural context. This highlights the importance of considering cultural factors and emotional contexts in understanding language-switching behavior.

## 5. Limitations and future directions

The study's limitations include the weak correlation, the need for a larger sample size, the absence of a comparison group, and potential reliability issues due to participants recalling information from different developmental periods. Future research should address these limitations to strengthen the findings and explore whether the language-switching component specifically contributes to better mental stability. Additionally, future studies could benefit from focusing on a single developmental period (either childhood or adolescence) to improve the reliability of the results.

## 6. Conclusion

The study concludes that adolescents who use language-switching to conceal thoughts tend to exhibit better mental stability in adulthood. This highlights the critical role of multilingualism in emotion regulation and suggests that changing languages in conversations can be a valuable strategy for managing emotional states. The findings provide insights into the potential benefits of bilingualism and language-switching for emotional well-being.

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