

## **UC Merced**

### **Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society**

#### **Title**

Language and Culture Interact in Moral Decision-Making

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7np3f5c1>

#### **Journal**

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 46(0)

#### **Authors**

Brieke, Ricarda

Wang, Chunru

Harris, Lasana

#### **Publication Date**

2024

Peer reviewed

# Language and Culture Interact in Moral Decision-Making

**Ricarda Brieke**

University College London (UCL), London, United Kingdom

**Chunru Wang**

UCL, London, United Kingdom

**Lasana Harris**

UCL, London, United Kingdom

## Abstract

A growing body of research indicates that moral decision-making is influenced by language status. Across studies and language combinations, participants make more utilitarian judgements when responding to moral dilemmas in a foreign (L2), compared to a native (L1) language. One explanation for the Foreign Language Effect is a reduced access to social norms in L2, since normative knowledge is acquired early in life in the native language. To test this account, we provided Chinese-English late bilinguals with “temporary social norms”: Upon dilemma presentation, response percentages of alleged previous participants were shown, representing either a deontological or utilitarian majority. We found that in English, participants conformed to utilitarian and deontological majority information, highlighting the malleability of moral decisions in an L2 context. In Chinese, participants only conformed to the utilitarian majority, potentially reflecting the influence of collectivist values. Our findings highlight the complex interplay between language, culture, and social norms in moral cognition.