Language is the mother of thought, a writer once said. Perhaps it is also a source of personality.

Bilingual people display differing personality traits depending on which language they are speaking, researchers have found. Psychologists at the University of Texas, Austin, asked bilingual Mexican-Americans a set of questions designed to assess personality, such as "Are you talkative?" and "Do you tend to be disorganized?" Many participants changed their answers when questioners switched from Spanish to English or vice versa.

When participants spoke in English, their responses emphasized assertiveness and achievement. These traits fit with the individualist ideals of the United States, as opposed to the group-oriented culture of Mexico, explains lead researcher Nairan Ramirez-Esparza.

Past research suggests that cultural cues, such as a picture of the Great Wall of China, prompt Chinese-Americans to evoke Eastern values and attitudes. The Great Wall triggered descriptions of groups, while Superman or an American flag brought out more self-centered statements.