

Competence Effects for Choices involving Gains and Losses

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Abstract

We investigate how choices for uncertain gain and loss prospects are affected by perceptions of knowledge about the underlying domain of uncertainty. Specifically, we test whether Heath and Tversky's (1991) competence hypothesis extends from gains to losses. We predict that the commonly-observed preference for high knowledge over low knowledge prospects for gains reverses for losses. We employ an empirical setup in which participants make hypothetical choices between gain or loss prospects in which the outcome depends on whether a high knowledge or low knowledge event occurs. We infer decision weighting functions for high and low knowledge events from choices using a representative agent preference model. For decisions involving gains, we replicate the results of Kilka and Weber (2001), finding that decision makers are more attracted to choices that they feel more knowledgeable about. However, for decisions involving losses, we find limited support for our extension of the competence effect.

Keywords: Uncertainty; Decision Weighting Function; Ambiguity; Knowledge; Competence Effect; Gains; Losses

JEL classification: C91, D81

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Decision makers often express a preference for betting on a particular source of uncertainty over another. Ellsberg (1961) provided the first and most famous demonstration of such a source preference. Ellsberg's simple setup involved two urns: a "clear" urn with 50 red balls and 50 black balls, and a "vague" urn with an unknown proportion of red and black balls (see also Keynes, 1921). Most individuals prefer to bet on the clear urn over the vague urn, even when they believe that the probability of drawing a red or black ball from either urn is identical (Becker and Brownson, 1964). Under the classical model of decision under uncertainty, subjective expected utility (SEU) (Savage, 1954), subjective probabilities are inferred from preferences over bets. Thus, the typical Ellsberg preferences are inconsistent with the Savage axioms, as these choices reveal that the subjective probabilities of both red and black are higher for the clear urn than the vague urn.

A large body of subsequent empirical research has explored numerous variants of this demonstration (for a review, see Camerer and Weber, 1992). The general conclusion of many of these studies, that individuals are ambiguity averse or reluctant to bet on vague probabilities, has been qualified by several recent studies. Heath and Tversky (1991) proposed and provided empirical support for the *competence hypothesis*: decision makers prefer to bet on ambiguous events over chance events when they consider themselves to be knowledgeable about the underlying domain of uncertainty (see also Frisch and Baron, 1988). In one study, Heath and Tversky recruited participants who were experts in either football or politics and non-expert in the other domain. Participants provided subjective probability assessments of future events involving both political events and football games. They then indicated their preferences for a chance lottery, a lottery based on the outcome of a football game, and a lottery based on the outcome of a political event. The lotteries were matched so that the participant's subjective likelihood of winning was identical in all cases. The results showed a source preference consistent with the competence hypothesis. Football experts ranked the lotteries in order: football, then chance, and finally politics. In contrast, political experts preferred politics to chance, and chance to football. This pattern of choices reflects a source preference, in which individuals are ambiguity seeking when they view themselves to be competent or knowledgeable about the underlying domain of uncertainty and ambiguity averse if the opposite is true.

The present investigation tests whether the competence effect reflects from gains to losses, as originally posited by Tversky and Wakker (1995). In particular, Tversky and Wakker (1995) hypothesized that participants prefer betting on the low knowledge source over the high knowledge source in the domain of losses. The intuition for this reversal and hence the source preference hypothesis outlined in the next section is that people shy away from gambles when they feel more confident about the loss they will face (see, e.g., Basili, Chateaufneuf, and Fontini, 2005). In this sense, we predict that preferences will *reflect* for decision under uncertainty, as they generally do for decision under risk (e.g., Tversky and Kahneman, 1992).

We test this generalization of the competence hypothesis using a variant of one of Heath and Tversky’s studies. Participants make a series of choices between pairs of gambles that differ on knowledge (high or low) and domain (gain or loss). Participants also choose between the complements of these gambles. We fit four probability weighting functions to these data, separately for high knowledge gains, low knowledge gains, high knowledge losses, and low knowledge losses. For choices involving gains, we replicate Kilka and Weber’s results, finding that decision makers prefer high knowledge gambles to low knowledge gambles. For choices involving losses, we find little support for our extension of the competence hypothesis. There is a significant preference for low versus high knowledge for 1 of our 6 loss tests (and a marginal preference for another test), but the probability weighting functions estimated for low and high knowledge gambles are not significantly different. Thus, the competence effect for choices involving losses appears to be less reliable than the competence effect for gains.

Our paper makes one additional contribution. Our empirical study uses direct choices rather than certainty equivalents, as used by Tversky and Fox (1995) and Kilka and Weber (2001) and thus investigates the robustness of Kilka and Weber’s findings to alternative choice procedures. Certainty equivalents are traditionally used when utility and weighting functions are estimated because they provide considerably more information than binary choices. However, participants find providing direct certainty equivalents extremely difficult, and choice-based elicitation of certainty equivalents is tedious (see, e.g., Fischer, Carmon, Ariely, and Zauberman, 1999). This procedure, therefore, involves a tradeoff: it is relatively straightforward for participants, but lacks the power to examine individual differences as was done in Abdellaoui, Vossman, and Weber (2005).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 1 reviews previous research on ambiguity. We also review cumulative prospect theory, Fox and Tversky’s (1995) two-stage model, and describe the hypothesis we test. Section 2 presents the experimental study. Section 3 discusses the results. We conclude in Section 4.

1 Background

1.1 Literature

A number of studies have refined the competence hypothesis. Fox and Tversky (1995) suggested that the feeling of competence or incompetence arises from a comparison of one’s knowledge about an event with either one’s knowledge about another event or another person’s knowledge of the same event. Thus, the feeling of knowledge reflects an inherently comparative process. One implication of their *comparative*

ignorance hypothesis is that the classic Ellsberg preferences for the clear urn over the vague urn should be significantly diminished if participants evaluate the vague and clear urns in isolation. Consistent with this prediction, Tversky and Fox replicated the classic Ellsberg preferences when participants priced the vague and clear bets in a within-subject design but found no ambiguity aversion when the two bets were presented in a between-subject study. Using a similar setup, Chow and Sarin (2001) found significant between-subject *and* within-subject price differences. Nevertheless, ambiguity aversion was significantly weaker in the comparative condition than the non-comparative condition. In another study, Fox and Tversky documented how an interpersonal comparison might influence the feeling of competence. San Jose State University undergrads were much less willing to choose an uncertain financial prospect when they were told that the same prospect was being evaluated by more knowledgeable individuals, graduate students in economics at Stanford University and professional stock analysts (see also, Fox and Weber, 2002). See (2009), Taylor (1995), and Trautman, Vieider, and Wakker (2008) provide other psychological accounts of ambiguity aversion.

A number of theoretical models have been proposed to accommodate ambiguity aversion (see Camerer and Weber, 1992). A particularly useful formulation for modeling source preference was proposed by Gilboa (1987) and Schmeidler (1989). These models, termed Choquet expected utility, relax the Savage axioms to permit nonadditivity of subjective probabilities. Savage’s Sure Thing Principle then no longer applies to all acts, but only to the subset of acts that are “comonotonic,” i.e., that share the same weak ranking of states. Choquet expected utility permits nonadditive probability measures, replacing the standard subjective expected utility calculus with a scheme that involves Choquet integration (Choquet, 1954).¹

Tversky and Kahneman’s (1992) cumulative prospect theory (CPT) extended Choquet integration to permit sign-dependence. Under cumulative prospect theory, the value of a mixed prospect involving the possibility of gains as well as the possibility of losses is the sum of Choquet integrals of the gain and loss portions of the prospect. Cumulative prospect theory also extended the scope of Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) original prospect theory from prospects with at most two non-zero outcomes to prospects with multiple outcomes, and from decision under risk (prospects with objective probabilities) to decision under uncertainty (prospects defined on events). The representation for decision under risk uses a rank-dependent expected utility form for both gains and losses (Quiggin, 1982). In rank-dependent models, the weight attached to an outcome depends on the rank of the outcome relative to other outcomes. See Wakker (1990) for a detailed discussion of the relationship between rank-dependent utility and Choquet expected utility.

¹Machina (2009) presented a four-color generalization of the Ellsberg Paradox that violates expected utility, as well as Choquet expected utility. Baillon, l’Haridon, and Placido (2008) showed that this counter-example violates most existing models of ambiguity as well.

Tversky and Kahneman (1992) also scaled prospect theory for decision under risk, assuming parametric forms for the value function and probability weighting function. Tversky and Fox (1995) extended the measurement of prospect theory to decision under uncertainty and proposed a two-stage model. Consider a lottery in which the decision maker wins x if event E occurs. The two-stage model posits that individuals first judge the probability of event E , then transform this subjective probability by the probability weighting function for risk (see also Fox and See, 2003; Fox and Tversky, 1998; Wu and Gonzalez, 1999). The two-stage model proposed by Tversky and Fox, however, does not permit source preference, and thus cannot accommodate the Ellsberg Paradox. To deal with this shortcoming, Kilka and Weber (2001) extended the two-stage model, allowing the transformation of subjective probabilities to depend on the source of uncertainty. They elicited certainty equivalents for uncertain prospects involving two different sources of uncertainty, a more and a less familiar source. The certainty equivalents were consistent with Heath and Tversky's competence hypothesis. Kilka and Weber estimated significantly different probability weighting functions for the two sources, with the weighting function more elevated when the source was more familiar.

This paper investigates how choices for gain and loss prospects are affected by the level of knowledge one has about the decision being made. Numerous studies have shown differences in choices for gains and losses. Kahneman and Tversky (1979) documented a reflection effect for decision under risk. Most participants preferred \$3000 for sure to an 80% chance at \$4000, but preferred an 80% chance at losing \$4000 to losing \$3000 for sure. Consistent with this reflection effect, Tversky and Kahneman (1992) estimated nearly identical value and weighting functions for gains and losses, though subsequent studies have shown significant differences between gain and loss weighting functions (e.g., Abdellaoui, 2000; Etchart-Vincent, 2004). Several studies have extended the Ellsberg Paradox from gains to losses. These studies have produced mixed results, with some studies showing ambiguity seeking for losses, particularly for high probability losses (Cohen, Jaffray and Said, 1985; Einhorn and Hogarth, 1986; Hogarth and Einhorn, 1990; Kahn and Sarin, 1988). Most recently, Abdellaoui, Vossman, and Weber (2005) elicited decision weights for gains and losses under uncertainty and found that the weighting function for losses was significantly more elevated than the weighting function for gains.

1.2 Preliminaries

We use cumulative prospect theory (CPT) as our theoretical framework, since it permits a differential treatment of gains and losses. Under CPT, preferences for uncertain prospects are represented by a *value function* $v : R \rightarrow R$ defined for changes in wealth, and by a *decision weighting function* or *capacity* $W : 2^S \rightarrow [0, 1]$ defined on the events under consideration, where S represents the (finite) state space and 2^S is

the collection of all events. Let A^c , as well as $S - A$, denote the complement of event A , i.e., A and A^c are disjoint and $A \cup A^c = S$. Let \mathcal{A} and \mathcal{B} represent two distinct families of events that are each closed under union and complementation. Each family represents a distinct source of uncertainty. For example, the final point differential of a football game and the noon temperature in Chicago constitute two sources of uncertainty.

Let (A, x) denote a prospect that provides x if event A happens and 0 otherwise. (A, x) is a *positive prospect* if the prospect involves a gain (i.e., $x > 0$) and a *negative prospect* if a loss is possible (i.e., $x < 0$). Under CPT,

$$(A, x) \succeq (B, y) \iff W^i(A)v(x) \geq W^i(B)v(y),$$

where i is equal to “+” if (A, x) is a positive prospect and “−” if (A, x) is a negative prospect. Thus, the decision weighting function W is sign-dependent.

The value function v is defined on changes of wealth, in contrast to expected utility and subjective expected utility, which are most commonly defined on wealth levels directly. The function is normalized such that $v(0) = 0$. Empirical studies have found that v is most commonly concave for gains, convex for losses and is steeper for losses than for gains (i.e., v exhibits loss aversion) (Abdellaoui, Bleichrodt, and Paraschiv, 2007; Tversky and Kahneman, 1992).

The decision weighting function satisfies two properties: i) $W^i(\emptyset) = 0$ and $W^i(S) = 1$, where \emptyset denotes the empty set, and S denotes the state space; and ii) $W^i(A) \leq W^i(B)$, $\forall A \subset B$. Therefore, W^i does not need to be additive, as is the case with subjective expected utility. Indeed, studies of decision making under uncertainty have shown that the decision weighting function is typically a non-additive function (e.g., Kilka and Weber, 2001; Tversky and Fox, 1995; Wu and Gonzalez, 1999).

We now present some properties of the decision weighting function that have been documented in previous empirical studies.

Definition 1: A decision maker’s weighting function W^i displays *bounded subadditivity* (SA) for the source \mathcal{A} if the two conditions below are satisfied for all $A, A' \in \mathcal{A}$:

- i) *Lower subadditivity* (LSA): $W^i(A) \geq W^i(A \cup A') - W^i(A')$, when $W^i(A \cup A')$ is bounded away from 1;
- ii) *Upper subadditivity* (USA): $1 - W^i(S - A) \geq W^i(A \cup A') - W^i(A')$, when $W^i(A')$ is bounded away from 0.

Intuitively, these conditions mean that the decision maker uses impossibility and certainty as reference points when choosing. Lower subadditivity (LSA) implies that the impact of an event A is higher when

added to the null event (\emptyset) than when it is added to another event A' , provided the two events, $A \cup A'$ are bounded away from one. Upper subadditivity (USA) implies that the impact of an event A is higher when subtracted from the certain event S than when it is subtracted from another event $A \cup A'$, provided that event A' is bounded away from zero. Preference conditions for LSA and USA are provided by Tversky and Wakker (1995), and the basic properties have been documented empirically by Kilka and Weber (2001) and Tversky and Fox (1995) for gains and Abdellaoui, Vossman, and Weber (2005) for losses.²

We compare decision weighting functions for different sources in order to analyze how knowledge affects choices. Let \mathcal{A} and \mathcal{B} be two distinct families of events that correspond to different sources of uncertainty. For our purposes, we can think of \mathcal{A} as a high knowledge source, that is, composed of events which the decision maker feels more knowledgeable about, and \mathcal{B} as a low knowledge source, that is, composed of events which the decision maker feels less knowledgeable about. We represent general events in \mathcal{A} by A, A' , etc. and general events in \mathcal{B} by B, B' , etc. We also assume that events A, A' (and B, B') are disjoint.

Tversky and Wakker also proposed a second property of $W^i(A)$, termed *source sensitivity*:

Definition 2: A decision maker displays *less sensitivity* to source \mathcal{A} than to source \mathcal{B} in the domain $i = +, -$ if the two conditions below are satisfied:

- i) If $W^i(A) = W^i(B)$ and $W^i(A \cup A') = W^i(B \cup B')$ then $W^i(A') \geq W^i(B')$, $W^i(A \cup A')$ and $W^i(B \cup B')$ are bounded away from 1.
- ii) If $W^i(S - A) = W^i(S - B)$ and $W^i(S - A') = W^i(S - B')$ then $W^i(S - A - A') \leq W^i(S - B - B')$, $W^i(S - A - A')$ and $W^i(S - B - B')$ are bounded away from 0.

Tversky and Fox (1995) studied source sensitivity by comparing decision weights inferred from choices involving risk (objective probabilities) and choices involving five domains of uncertainty. They found that individuals were more sensitive to risk than uncertainty.

We now turn to the property that is the central focus of our paper, *source preference* (Tversky and Wakker, 1995):

Definition 3: In the domain of gains, a decision maker displays *source preference* for source \mathcal{A} over source \mathcal{B} if $W^+(A) = W^+(B)$ implies $W^+(A^c) \geq W^+(B^c)$, for all $A \in \mathcal{A}$ and $B \in \mathcal{B}$. In the domain of losses, a decision maker displays *source preference* for source \mathcal{A} over source \mathcal{B} if $W^-(A) = W^-(B)$ implies $W^-(A^c) \leq W^-(B^c)$, for all $A \in \mathcal{A}$ and $B \in \mathcal{B}$.

²Wu and Gonzalez (1999) showed that the weighting function satisfies a stronger property for gains, concavity for low probability events and convexity for high probability events.

For both gains and losses, source preference can be written in preference terms, $(A, x) \sim (B, x)$ implies $(A^c, x) \succeq (B^c, x)$ (see Tversky and Wakker, 1995, pp. 1270-1271). Note that the inequality in Definition 3 reverses for losses, since $(A^c, x) \succeq (B^c, x)$ holds for $x < 0$ if $W^-(A^c) \leq W^-(B^c)$. Therefore, source preference enhances the weighting function for gains and reduces the weighting function for losses. The Ellsberg two-urns experiment described in the Introduction indicates that people usually display a source preference for risk over ambiguity when gains are involved. If we denote by E the event of a red ball in the clear urn and by A the event of a red ball in the vague urn, the standard Ellsberg demonstration shows that $(E, x) \succeq (A, x)$ and $(E^c, x) \succeq (A^c, x)$.

Next we state our hypothesis about the generalization of the competence effect from gains to losses.

Hypothesis: Decision makers prefer betting on high knowledge domains over low knowledge domains for gains. However, they prefer betting on low knowledge domains over high knowledge domains for losses.

The gain part of the hypothesis is in accord with the findings of Heath and Tversky (1991) and Kilka and Weber (2001), with the loss portion previously untested.

Our hypothesis extends Kahneman and Tversky's original reflection effect (1979) to include source dependence. Kahneman and Tversky showed that preferences are generally risk averse for gains but risk seeking for losses. For uncertainty, Heath and Tversky's competence hypothesis asserts that participants tend to bet on events that they feel more knowledgeable about when choices involve gains. We speculate, however, that there is an opposite tendency when choices involve losses: participants tend to bet on events that they feel *less* knowledgeable about. This is a fundamental behavioral difference between choices with gains and choices with losses that was not yet investigated.

The basic motivation follows from the fourfold pattern of risk attitudes documented by Tversky and Kahneman (1992). Decision makers are typically risk averse for medium to high probability gains and risk seeking for low probability gains. This pattern reverses for losses. Tversky and Fox (1995) suggest that risk aversion and risk seeking might be explained in part by affective feelings such as fear and hope. Thus, the medium to high probabilities that produce fear for gains correspond to hope for losses, with low probabilities resulting in hope for gains and fear for losses. We hypothesize that a similar pattern holds for ambiguity. High knowledge domains are relatively more hopeful for gains but relatively more fearful for losses.

A similar intuition is expressed in Basili, Chateauneuf, and Fontini (2005). They extend prospect theory, dividing outcomes into familiar and unfamiliar ones, and propose that preferences reflect pessimism for gains and optimism for losses when outcomes are unfamiliar. The reason for this reflection from a preference for high knowledge for gains to low knowledge for losses is straightforward. For sources that differ in competence,

it means that people tend to shy away from the certainty of having a loss. Therefore, when choosing between two uncertain events that differ only in the relative feeling of competence, decision makers choose the one they feel less competent about.

We quantify our main hypothesis by using the two-stage process originally proposed by Tversky and Fox (1998) and extended by Kilka and Weber (2001). Tversky and Fox proposed that decision makers evaluate an uncertain prospect, (A, x) , by first judging the probability of the event A and then transforming this judged probability using a risky weighting function:

$$W(A) = w_R(P(A)),$$

where W is the weighting function for uncertainty, $P(A)$ is the judged probability for event A , and w_R is the risky weighting function, i.e., the weighting function applied to prospects with objective probabilities. Tversky and Fox (1995) and Fox and Tversky (1998) provided empirical support for this two-stage model, and Wakker (2004) offered a formal justification for this approach. However, this account is clearly incompatible with the Ellsberg Paradox. Thus, Kilka and Weber (2001) extended the two-stage model to account for source preference:

$$W(A) = w_S(P(A)),$$

where w_S is the weighting function for source S of uncertainty. Source preference and source sensitivity can be captured with the functional specification originally proposed by Goldstein and Einhorn (1987) for risk:

$$w(p) = \frac{\delta p^\gamma}{\delta p^\gamma + (1-p)^\gamma}. \tag{1.1}$$

This function was used by Birnbaum and McIntosh (1996), Gonzalez and Wu (1999), Kilka and Weber (2001), Lattimore et al (1992), and Tversky and Fox (1995), among others. All of the participants in Gonzalez and Wu (1999) exhibited an inverse S-shaped probability weighting function, such that low probabilities were overweighted and high probabilities were underweighted. However, there was considerable heterogeneity across participants, and Gonzalez and Wu showed that this two-parameter function was better able to capture the heterogeneity than standard one-parameter weighting functions. The weighting function estimates for the median data in Gonzalez and Wu (1999) are plotted in Figure 1.

Each parameter, δ and γ , in Eqn. (2.1) captures a different psychological characteristic. Expected utility corresponds to $w(p) = p$, or $\gamma = 1$ and $\delta = 1$. The parameter γ measures the curvature of the weighting

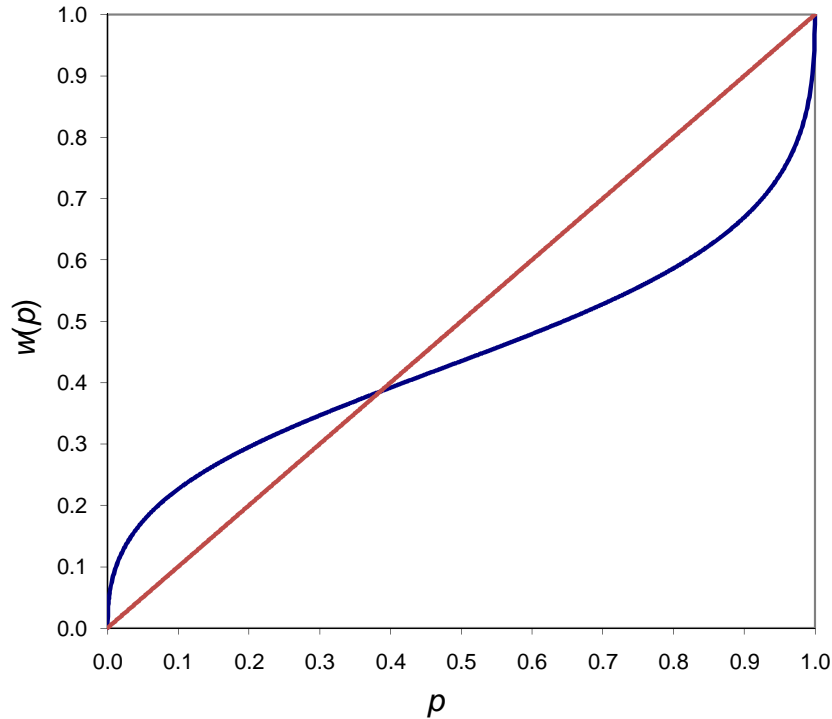


Figure 1: Probability weighting function estimates, from median participant data of Gonzalez and Wu (1999).

function, capturing the way the decision maker discriminates between probabilities. As γ approaches 0, the function approaches a step function. The parameter δ measures the elevation of the weighting function, capturing how attractive gambling is to the decision maker, with higher δ corresponding to more risk-seeking for gains and more risk aversion for losses. Therefore, the curvature parameter γ is a measure of source sensitivity and the elevation parameter δ is a measure of source preference. If γ for source \mathcal{A} is higher than for source \mathcal{B} , then source \mathcal{A} displays more source sensitivity than source \mathcal{B} (see Definition 2). For source preference, the relation is different for gains and losses. In accord with Definition 3, for gains, larger δ indicates more source preference; for losses, a smaller δ indicates more source preference. For a more thorough discussion about the psychological interpretation of these two parameters, see Gonzalez and Wu (1999).

Thus, we extend Eqn. (2.1) to accommodate source dependence, following Kilka and Weber (2001):

$$w_k^i(p) = \frac{\delta_k^i p^{\gamma_k^i}}{\delta_k^i p^{\gamma_k^i} + (1-p)^{\gamma_k^i}}.$$

where $i = "+"$ or $"-"$ (corresponding to gains and losses, respectively) and $k = H$ or L (corresponding to high and low knowledge, respectively). Estimating the values of γ and δ for different sources thus allows us

to test for source preference. In particular, we can test whether our hypotheses holds, by comparing δ_H^+ and δ_L^+ , and δ_H^- and δ_L^- . Our hypothesis requires that $\delta_H^+ > \delta_L^+$ and $\delta_H^- > \delta_L^-$.

Finally, following Fox and Tversky (1998), who showed that judged probabilities satisfy support theory (Tversky and Koehler, 1994), we also test whether judged probabilities satisfy binary complementarity, i.e., the probabilities of complementary events sum to one:³

Definition 4: Judged probabilities satisfy *binary complementarity* for a given source (A) if $P(A) + P(A^c) = 1$ for all $A \in \mathcal{A}$.

Empirical support for binary complementarity is provided by Tversky and Koehler (1994) and Tversky and Fox (1995). Violations of binary complementarity, however, have been documented by Brenner and Rottenstreich (1999) and Macchi, Osherson, and Krantz (1999).

2 Experimental Design

We examined source preference for gains and losses by asking participants to make a series of hypothetical choices between two uncertain prospects, a “high knowledge” (HK) prospect and a “low knowledge” (LK) prospect. We selected events for the prospects such that most participants would feel more knowledgeable about the high knowledge prospect than the low knowledge prospect. To illustrate, we expected most of our University of Chicago student participants to be more familiar and hence more knowledgeable about Chicago weather than Bucharest weather. Thus, to test for source preference, participants were given a choice between a “high knowledge” prospect for which they would win \$160 if the high temperature in Chicago was greater than 85° Fahrenheit on July 15, 2005 (and \$0 otherwise) and a “low knowledge” prospect for which they would win \$160 if the high temperature in Bucharest was greater than 85° Fahrenheit on July 15, 2005 (and \$0 otherwise). Note that most features of the prospects are identical so as to heighten the comparative ignorance. The only difference is whether participants preferred to “bet on Chicago” or “bet on Bucharest.” Participants were also given a choice between prospects that paid the same \$160 on the complementary events (e.g., the high temperature in Chicago was less than 85° on July 15, 2005), and loss prospects in which they would either win or lose \$160 if the relevant event obtained.

We used hypothetical gambles throughout for a pragmatic reason: It is extremely difficult to run studies that might expose participants to real losses. Some studies avoid this problem by endowing participants

³Support theory allows nonadditive probability judgments, $P(A \cup A') \leq P(A) + P(A')$. There are other hypotheses besides binary complementarity that follow from support theory, such as proportionality, product rule, and unpacking principle. However, binary complementarity is the only one that our design permits us to test.

with a generous show-up fee to offset losses incurred in the study (e.g., Cohen, Jaffray, and Said, 1985). However, this endowment procedure might create a house money effect (see Thaler and Johnson, 1990). Empirically, reviews have reached different conclusions about whether financial incentives changes behavior. Camerer and Hogarth (1999) reviewed 74 studies in which performance-based incentives were zero, low, or high. Although higher incentives seem to improve performance on some tasks (e.g., memory tasks), they harm performance on other tasks (e.g., difficult tasks for which simple and intuitive heuristics can perform well). Most critically, Camerer and Hogarth conclude that “(t)here is no replicated study in which a theory of rational choice was rejected at low stakes in favor of a well-specified behavioral alternative, and accepted at high stakes.” (p. 33). In contrast, Hertwig and Ortmann (2001) review a number of decision studies that involve both payment and non-payment conditions. They conclude: ”In the majority of cases where payments made a difference, they improved peoples performance.” (p. 394)

2.1 Participants

We recruited 107 University of Chicago undergraduate students in May 2005 to participate in our study. Participation was voluntary, and participants received \$3 for participating.

2.2 Procedure

The experiment was entirely computer-based.⁴ Participants first saw an opening page that provided an overview of the study. The opening page was followed by an instruction page that explained the subsequent trials. After the instruction page, participants were given three practice trials, aimed to familiarize them with the structure of choices and the procedure involved for making these choices. The trials appeared on their own page, with one choice involving gains, one choice involving losses, and one page involving a probability assessment.

2.3 Stimuli

The bulk of the experiment consisted of three sections. In the first section, participants chose between pairs of similar ambiguous gambles like the ones described above. The gambles are listed in Table 1. In all cases, the choice involved one gamble for which we expected participants to be knowledgeable about (e.g., **ChiTemp**) and one gamble which we expected participants to be less knowledge about (e.g., **BuchTemp**). Participants also chose between the complements of the same gambles (e.g., **ChiTemp^c** vs **BuchTemp^c**). The events were

⁴Full instructions and program code are available upon request.

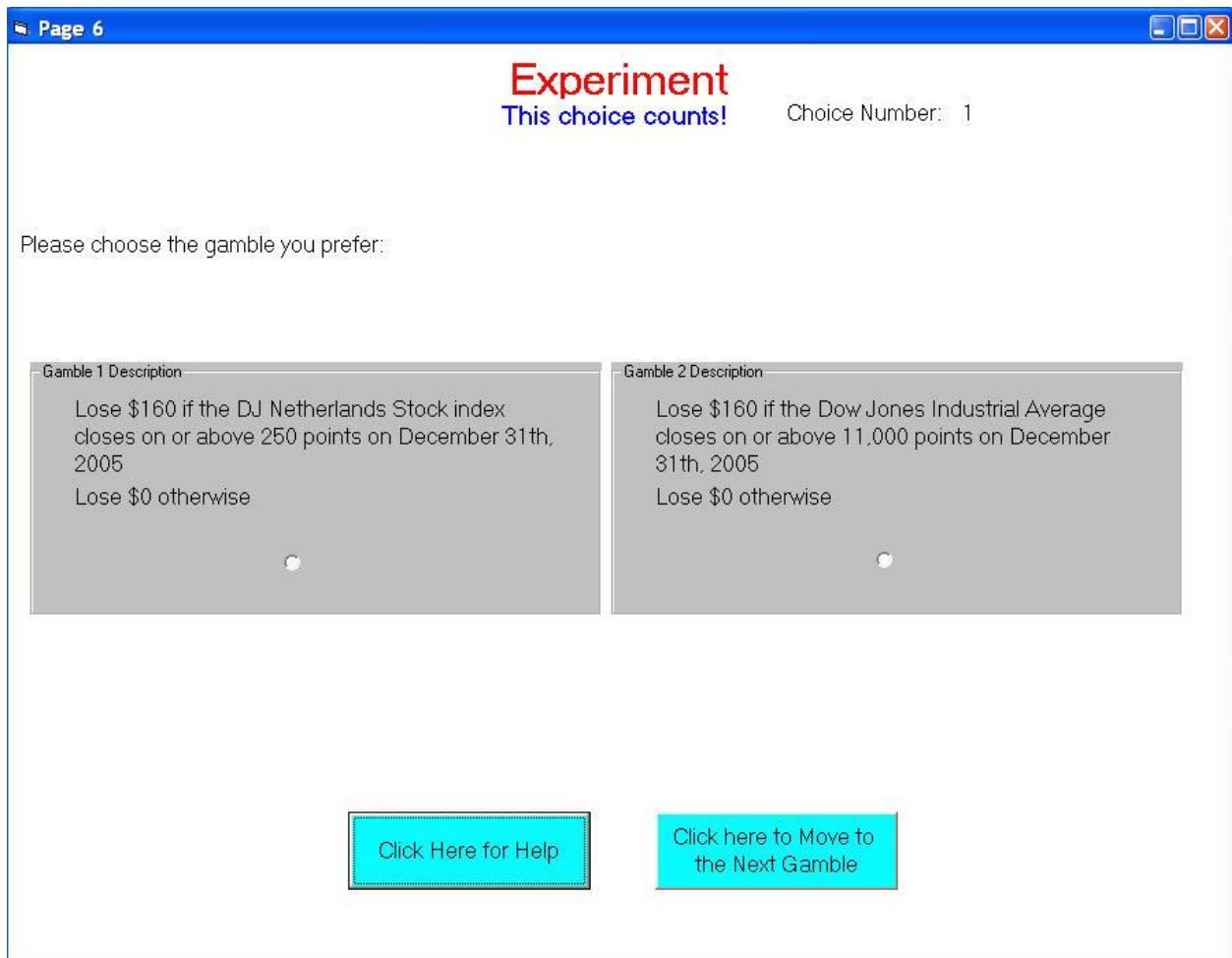


Figure 2: A screenshot of a choice between two loss prospects.

repeated for both the gains and losses domains, with the outcomes being winning either \$160 or \$0 for the gain prospects, or losing either \$160 or \$0 for the loss prospects. Each participant made a total of 24 choices, 12 for gains and 12 for losses. Figure 2 contains a screenshot of a typical choice window.

We chose events that were similar to ones used in Fox and Tversky (1995) and Kilka and Weber (2001). In particular, events were paired in choices to heighten a participant's feeling of comparative ignorance. For example, the Chicago temperature gamble was paired with the Bucharest temperature gamble. Both gambles involved the same fixed high temperature and the same date in the future. Finally, both cities were chosen to have similar weather conditions for the date specified. Although we expected **ChiTemp** to be the high knowledge gamble and **BuchTemp** to be the low knowledge gamble since our study took place in Chicago, participants provided their own self-rating of knowledge for each domain. We used these ratings as both a manipulation check and an independent variable in our analyses below.

ChiTemp	High temperature in Chicago is AT LEAST 85F on July 15, 2005
BuchTemp	High temperature in Bucharest is AT LEAST 85F on July 15, 2005
ChiTemp ^c	High temperature in Chicago is AT MOST 85F on July 15, 2005
BuchTemp ^c	High temperature in Bucharest is AT MOST 85F on July 15, 2005
MH	Miami Heat wins next year's NBA championship
Juve	Juventus wins next year's Italian series A soccer championship
MH ^c	Miami Heat loses next year's NBA championship
Juve ^c	Juventus loses next year's Italian series A soccer championship
DJIA	The Dow Jones Industrial Average closes BELOW 11,000 points on Dec 31, 2005
DJNeth	The DJ Netherlands Stock index closes BELOW 250 points on Dec 31th, 2005
DJIA ^c	The Dow Jones Industrial Average closes ON OR ABOVE 11,000 points on Dec 31, 2005
DJNeth ^c	The DJ Netherlands Stock index closes ON OR ABOVE 250 points on Dec 31th, 2005
USInf	The United States inflation rate is BELOW 4% for the 2006 year
SwInf	The Swedish inflation rate is BELOW 4% for the 2006 year
USInf ^c	The United States inflation rate is ON OR ABOVE 4% for the 2006 year
SwInf ^c	The Swedish inflation rate is ON OR ABOVE 4% for the 2006 year
USOly	The United States wins more than 100 medals in the Olympic Games in Beijing 2008
Po10ly	Poland wins more than 10 medals in the Olympic Games in Beijing 2008
USOly ^c	The United States wins less than 100 medals in the Olympic Games in Beijing 2008
Po10ly ^c	Poland wins less than 10 medals in the Olympic Games in Beijing 2008
ChiSnow	Snows more than 1 inch in Chicago on January 10, 2006
OsloSnow	Snows more than 1 inch in Oslo on January 10, 2006
ChiSnow ^c	Snows 1 inch or less in Chicago on January 10, 2006
OsloSnow ^c	Snows 1 inch or less in Oslo on January 10, 2006

Table 1: Uncertain events used for gambles. Gambles were constructed from these uncertain events such that for gains, participants won \$160 if the event obtained, and for losses, participants lost \$160 if the event obtained.

One critical difference between our study and those of Fox and Tversky (1995) and Kilka and Weber (2001) is that our study involved direct choices, whereas their experiment required participants to assign cash equivalents to various prospects. We used direct choices because trying to elicit certainty equivalents would increase enormously the number of choices a typical participant would have to make.

The order of the questions were randomized within section. We also randomized the position of the gamble in the choice window, left or right (see Figure 2). Finally, to minimize confusion, all the gain prospects and all the loss prospects were kept together, although we randomized the domain participants saw first.

In the second section, participants provided probability assessments for the 24 events listed in Table 2. The order of the assessments was randomized within this section. In the third section, participants reported their knowledge ratings for the events underlying the prospects in Table 1. For the `ChiTemp` question, subjects were asked to rate their knowledge about “Chicago weather” in the following way: “Using the scale below, check the option you think that best describes your knowledge about the weather in Chicago.” Knowledge ratings were assessed using a 1 (“no knowledge at all”) to 7 (“expert knowledge”) scale.

3 Results

3.1 Summary Statistics

We first present summary statistics for the knowledge ratings and probability assessments and then summarize the choice data.

Knowledge ratings are summarized in Table 2. The ratings served as a manipulation check to validate our selection of high and low knowledge events. The vast majority of participants gave higher knowledge ratings for the source we designated to be high knowledge than for the source we designated to be low knowledge. For example, 98% of participants reported higher knowledge for Chicago weather than Bucharest weather (last row, Table 2). In addition, the knowledge rating question for Chicago weather was repeated and thus provided a measure of the reliability of knowledge ratings: 95 out of 107 participants provided identical knowledge ratings for the two questions, with the ratings for the remaining 12 participants differing by only one rating point. Note also that the largest discrepancy in reported knowledge across the 6 domains was found for the weather questions where participants tended to feel the most knowledgeable about the high knowledge event.

Although the majority of participants rated their *relative* knowledge as hypothesized, we coded participants according to their knowledge ratings in the analysis that follows. Thus, if a non-modal participant

reported higher knowledge for Italian soccer than U.S. basketball, then we coded **Juve** as the high knowledge event and **MH** as the low knowledge event for that participant.

Table 2: Knowledge Ratings

	Weather	International Sports	Economic Indicators	Financial Markets	International Sports	Weather
			High Knowledge (HK)			
	Chicago	US BBall	US	US	US	Chicago
Average	4.85	3.34	3.20	3.15	3.59	4.83
Std Dev	1.14	1.63	1.47	1.38	1.43	1.14
			Low Knowledge (LK)			
	Bucharest	Ital Soccer	Sweden	Netherlands	Poland	Oslo
Average	1.90	2.36	1.74	1.53	1.75	2.21
Std Dev	1.08	1.66	0.96	0.88	0.97	1.31
HK Ratings > LK Ratings	98%	84%	98%	95%	95%	100%

Probability assessments are summarized in Table 3. The majority of probability assessments (64%) fell between .30 and .70, with 23% of assessments being .50. Probabilities of .50 were more common for low knowledge events such as **DJNeth** (28.8%) than high knowledge events such as **ChiTemp** (18.0%), consistent with the rule of thumb documented by de Bruin et al. (2000). We also tested for binary complementarity of probability judgments using a *t*-test. Binary complementarity was not rejected for any of the 12 events, using the standard 5% significance level (*p*-values are shown in Table 3).

Table 3: Probability Assessments

	Weather	International Sports	Economic Indicators	Financial Markets	International Sports	Weather
	ChiTemp	MH	DJIA	USInf	US01y	ChiSnow
Average	0.631	0.372	0.482	0.449	0.513	0.545
Std Dev	0.206	0.217	0.209	0.244	0.295	0.215
	ChiTemp^c	MH^c	DJIA^c	USInf^c	US01y^c	ChiSnow^c
Average	0.493	0.609	0.423	0.488	0.502	0.458
Std Dev	0.225	0.234	0.200	0.230	0.274	0.219
<i>t</i> -test for Binary Complementarity (<i>p</i> -value)	0.66	0.94	0.73	0.82	0.95	0.99
	BuchTemp	Juve	DJNeth	SwInf	Po101y	OsloSnow
Average	0.545	0.500	0.463	0.525	0.427	0.557
Std Dev	0.219	0.205	0.191	0.214	0.216	0.255
	BuchTemp^c	Juve^c	DJNeth^c	SwInf^c	Po101y^c	OsloSnow^c
Average	0.478	0.489	0.417	0.430	0.536	0.423
Std Dev	0.185	0.187	0.181	0.207	0.218	0.231
<i>t</i> -test for Binary Complementarity (<i>p</i> -value)	0.93	0.96	0.67	0.87	0.86	0.94

Table 4 provides an initial summary of the choice data. We consider choices of participants who report

a knowledge difference of 2 or more (e.g., if a participant gave a rating of 5 for Chicago weather and 3 for Oslo weather).⁵ Thus, the “Total” row in Table 4 omits participants who were equally knowledgeable about both domains. Consider the choice between the `ChiTemp` and `BuchTemp` gambles, and the `ChiTempc` and `BuchTempc` gambles. Under SEU for gains, a participant who prefers `ChiTemp` over `BuchTemp` must judge $P(\text{ChiTemp}) > P(\text{BuchTemp})$, and thus must prefer `BuchTempc` over `ChiTempc`. To test for source preference, we count the number of participants who chose the high knowledge gamble over its low knowledge counterpart gamble (denoted, $\text{HK} \succ \text{LK}$) and also chose the complement of the high knowledge gamble over the complement of the low knowledge gamble (denoted, $\text{HK}^c \succ \text{LK}^c$). We also count the number of participants with the opposite pattern. For example, for the Chicago-Bucharest temperature gambles over gains, 20 participants chose HK over LK and HK^c over LK^c compared to 15 participants who chose LK over HK and LK^c over HK^c . Recall that we scored knowledge according to a participant’s reported knowledge, not our initial designations.

If participants satisfied SEU strictly, then all entries should be in the “Other” row. However, since participants make choices with error (e.g., Ballinger and Wilcox, 1997; Blavatskyy, 2007; Harless and Camerer, 1994; Hey, 1995; Loomes and Sugden, 1998), we used a sign test to determine whether choices exhibited a systematic bias. All 6 of the gain choices are directionally consistent with our hypothesis, with the patterns significant at the .05 level for 3 of the 6 gain questions. In contrast, 4 of the 6 loss choices are directionally consistent with our hypothesis, with only 1 of the 6 loss questions significant (with another marginally significant). Thus, the competence effect is stronger for gains than for losses: the discrepancy between HK and LK choices for gains is higher than the discrepancy between LK choices and HK choices for losses. Recall that the competence hypothesis for losses implies a preference for low knowledge prospects, since participants are more comfortable in choosing a less knowledgeable event in the hope that this event will turn out more favorably.

We next examine whether there is a significant difference in choices for gains and losses, using a Stuart-Maxwell chi-square test (Maxwell, 1970; Stuart, 1955) to determine if the marginal frequency of responses for gains is similar to the one for losses. This test is a version of the Pearson chi-square test that is valid for dependent data.⁶ For example, for the temperature gambles, we tested whether the responses for gains (20, 15, and 58) are similar to the responses for losses (18, 30, 45). Since the competence effect for losses implies a preference for the low knowledge source for losses, we also ran an inverted Stuart-Maxwell chi-square test, i.e., we tested whether the responses for gains (20, 15, and 58) are different from the inverse of the

⁵The same basic findings discussed below hold if we use different criteria to distinguish between low and high knowledge domains.

⁶We also computed Pearson statistics and found similar results.

Table 4: Choice Patterns, Knowledge Difference at least 2

	Gains					
	ChiTemp - BuchTemp	MH - Juve	DJIA - DJNeth	USInf - SwInf	USOly - PolOly	ChiSnow - OsloSnow
HK \succ LK , HK ^c \succ LK ^c	20	15	20	8	11	27
LK \succ HK , LK ^c \succ HK ^c	15	3	5	5	5	5
Other	58	36	27	34	47	49
Total	93	54	52	47	63	81
Sign Test (p -value)	0.25	< 0.01	< 0.01	0.29	0.10	< 0.01

	Losses					
	ChiTemp - BuchTemp	MH - Juve	DJIA - DJNeth	USInf - SwInf	USOly - PolOly	ChiSnow - OsloSnow
HK \succ LK , HK ^c \succ LK ^c	18	14	11	10	8	23
LK \succ HK , LK ^c \succ HK ^c	30	10	15	12	18	18
Other	45	30	26	25	37	40
Total	93	54	52	47	63	81
Sign Test (p -value)	0.06	0.85	0.28	0.42	0.04	0.73

responses for losses (30, 18, and 45). The Stuart-Maxwell tests show that the marginal distribution for gains is statistically different from the one for losses, for all six types of gambles. The inverted Stuart-Maxwell test shows that the competence hypothesis does not reflect strictly, except perhaps for the DJ, Olympics, and Inflation gambles. Table 5 reports these test statistics.

Table 5: Tests for Differences in Choices between Gains and Losses

	ChiTemp - BuchTemp	MH - Juve	DJIA - DJNeth	USInf - SwInf	USOly - PolOly	ChiSnow - OsloSnow
Stuart-Maxwell $\chi^2(1)$	31.84	11.00	9.74	21.54	31.81	15.13
p -value	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.01	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001
Inverted Stuart-Maxwell $\chi^2(2)$	21.44	10.95	2.51	4.60	2.67	15.16
p -value	< 0.001	< 0.01	0.27	0.10	0.26	< 0.001

3.2 Estimation of the Probability Weighting Function

The preceding analysis of choices did not take into account probability judgments. In this section, we use the judgments of probabilities provided by our participants to estimate probability weighting functions for high and low knowledge sources of uncertainty. To do so, we assume a random utility model where all agents have

the same underlying preferences and thus estimate an empirical representative agent (Wilcox, 2008). Similar procedures have been used in decision under risk by Camerer and Ho (1994), Wu and Gonzalez (1996), and Wu and Markle (2008) (see also Stott, 2006).

As in Camerer and Ho, we assume that all agents have the same preferences (i.e., decision weighting and value function). We also assume that the source of uncertainty affects only the probability weighting function and not the value function. Variation in choices is accounted for by the stochastic part in the utility function, as well as differences in assessments of the likelihood of the events. Let A_k represent the ambiguous event, and $G_k^i = (A_k, x)$ be the uncertain prospect corresponding to the ambiguous event A_k , where k indexes the source of ambiguity and $i = "+"$ if $x > 0$ and $i = "-"$ if $x < 0$. Then, the random utility model is written as:

$$U_j(A_k, x) = W_{j,k}^i(A_k)v^i(x) + \varepsilon_j, \quad (3.1)$$

where U_j denotes the utility of G_k^i to individual j . The weighting function $W_{j,k}^i$ is modelled using Eqn. (2.2):

$$W_{j,k}^i(A_k) = w_k^i(P_j(A_k)) = \frac{\delta_k^i P_j(A_k) \gamma_k^i}{\delta_k^i P_j(A_k) \gamma_k^i + (1 - P_j(A_k)) \gamma_k^i}, \quad (3.2)$$

where $P_j(A_k)$ is individual j 's subjective probability that event A_k occurs.⁷ The parameter δ_k^i measures the elevation of w_k^i and is sign- and source-dependent, with a higher (lower) δ_k^i corresponding to more risk-seeking behavior for gains (losses). $\delta_k^i = 1$ generates a symmetric weighting function with $W_{j,k}^i(A_k) = .5$ when $P_j(A_k) = .5$. The parameter γ_k^i measures the curvature of w_k^i , with a lower γ_k^i yielding a more curved weighting function and $\gamma_k^i = 1$ and $\delta_k^i = 1$ corresponding to the identity function, $W_{j,k}^i(A_k) = P_j(A_k)$ for all A_k .

We model the competence effect through the elevation parameter, δ_k^i . To determine if there are any substantial differences between the elevation parameters for the high and low knowledge domains. We let $\delta_H^i = \delta_L^i + \Delta^i$, and thus test the null hypothesis that $\Delta^i = 0$, where $i = +, -$. Our hypothesis requires that $\Delta^+ > 0$ and $\Delta^- > 0$.

We use a logit model to account for the randomness in choice:

$$Q_j(G_H^i \succeq G_L^i) = \frac{1}{1 + \exp[-\mu^i (U_j(G_H^i) - U_j(G_L^i))]}, \quad (3.3)$$

where Q_j denotes the likelihood that individual j chooses one option over another, and μ^i is a scaling

⁷We also produced similar results using Prelec's (1998) two-parameter function.

parameter that reflects the sensitivity of choices to utility differences. When $\mu^i = 0$, the decision maker chooses randomly between all options, and as $\mu^i \rightarrow \infty$, the decision maker always chooses the option with the highest utility. We rewrite Eqn. (4.3) as follows:

$$Q_j(G_H^i \succeq G_L^i) = \frac{1}{1 + \exp \left[-\lambda^i \left(W_{j,k}^i(A_H) - W_{j,k}^i(A_L) \right) \right]},$$

where $\lambda^+ = (\mu^+)v(160)$ for gains and $\lambda^- = (\mu^-)v(-160)$ for losses. Thus the value function is subsumed in λ^i and drops out of the estimation.

The likelihood function is given by

$$\ln(L) = \sum [I_j^i \ln Q_j(G_H^i \succeq G_L^i) + (1 - I_j^i) \ln(1 - Q_j(G_H^i \succeq G_L^i))], \quad (3.4)$$

where n is the number of observations and I_j^i is a characteristic function such that $I_j^i = 1$ if individual j chose G_H^i over G_L^i and $I_j^i = 0$ otherwise.

Our problem is then to find the values of δ_k^i , Δ^i , γ_k^i , and λ^i that maximize the log-likelihood function above, where Eqn. (4.4) is maximized separately over the 1284 gain choices and 1284 loss choices (107 participants and 12 choices for both gains and losses). The two parameters of the weighting function are highly multicollinear (see Gonzalez and Wu, 1999, footnote 11). Thus, due to data restrictions and because our primary concern was estimating Δ^i , we equated the curvature parameters $\gamma_H^i = \gamma_L^i$ and varied the levels between .30 and 1.00 to test the robustness of our results. The maximization problem was implemented in MATLAB. Table 6 shows the results of this estimation procedure for gains and losses.

The gain estimates are consistent with the competence hypothesis. We find a significantly higher elevation parameter for the high knowledge source than for the low knowledge source for all values of $\gamma_H^+ = \gamma_L^+$, with Δ^+ ranging from 0.17 to 0.30. The parameter estimates generally agree with the results of Kilka and Weber. Their estimates of δ_H^+ ranged from 0.89 to 1.32, while their estimates of δ_L^+ ranged from 0.79 to 1.17. Thus, for gains, we find that individuals are more attracted to high knowledge gambles than low knowledge gambles. The left panel of Figure 3 illustrates the estimated weighting functions for $\gamma_H^+ = \gamma_L^+ = .7$.

For losses, we find no evidence for the competence effect. $\Delta^- < 0$ for all values of $\gamma_H^- = \gamma_L^-$, with the values not significant in any case.⁸ Therefore, knowledge is not consistently used to differentiate uncertainty in the domain of losses. The right panel of Figure 3 shows the estimated weighting functions for $\gamma_H^- = \gamma_L^- = .7$.⁹

⁸We also performed an additional estimation, restricting the sample of the observations in which the reported knowledge difference exceeded 3, leaving us with 468 of 1284 observation. This analysis produced qualitatively similar results (Gains:

Table 6: Maximum likelihood estimates for gains and losses, assuming different values for γ

	γ values ($\gamma_H^i = \gamma_L^i$)							
	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.0
Gains								
δ_L^+	1.10	1.01	0.94	0.89	0.85	0.82	0.79	0.77
Δ^+	0.17	0.20	0.22	0.24	0.25	0.27	0.28	0.30
t -value	3.59	3.49	3.38	3.28	3.18	3.09	3.01	2.93
λ^+	6.98	5.68	4.86	4.29	3.88	3.57	3.32	3.12
$\ln(L)$	-786.11	-781.97	-779.54	-777.93	-776.82	-776.01	-775.41	-774.98
Losses								
δ_L^-	1.03	1.00	0.99	0.99	0.99	1.01	1.02	1.04
Δ^-	-0.05	-0.06	-0.07	-0.08	-0.09	-0.09	-0.10	-0.11
t -value	-0.88	-0.90	-0.90	-0.89	-0.87	-0.85	-0.82	-0.79
λ^-	4.17	3.48	2.99	2.64	2.37	2.17	2.00	1.87
$\ln(L)$	-846.00	-844.00	-843.23	-843.14	-843.08	-843.28	-843.55	-843.87

4 Conclusion

In this paper, we investigated the effect that knowledge has on choices involving gains and losses. We found that feelings of competence affects choices involving gains, thus replicating a common result in the literature (Chow and Sarin, 2001; Fox and Tversky, 1995; Fox and Weber, 2002). Like Kilka and Weber (2001), the competence effect for gains was demonstrated in a larger weighting function elevation parameter for the high knowledge source than the low knowledge source. This result is consistent with the psychological hypothesis that decision makers are more likely to bet on the source of uncertainty that they feel more competent about. Our study also extended the results of Kilka and Weber by using direct choices instead of certainty equivalents. Therefore, our study provides an important robustness check of the methods used in most studies, as choices are considerably less involved cognitively than eliciting certainty equivalents.

In the domain of losses, Tversky and Wakker (1995) conjectured that participants should prefer betting on the low knowledge source over the high knowledge source. The intuition for this reversal and hence the source preference hypothesis tested in this paper is that people shy away from gambles when they feel more confident about the loss they will face. Thus, we, like Tversky and Wakker, hypothesized that preferences

$\Delta^i \approx .50, p < .001$; Losses: $\Delta^i \approx -.05$, n.s.).

⁹We also compared expected utility to our more general model. The expected utility restriction was conducted by setting all parameters equal to 1. A likelihood ratio test strongly rejected the expected utility model for both gains and losses.

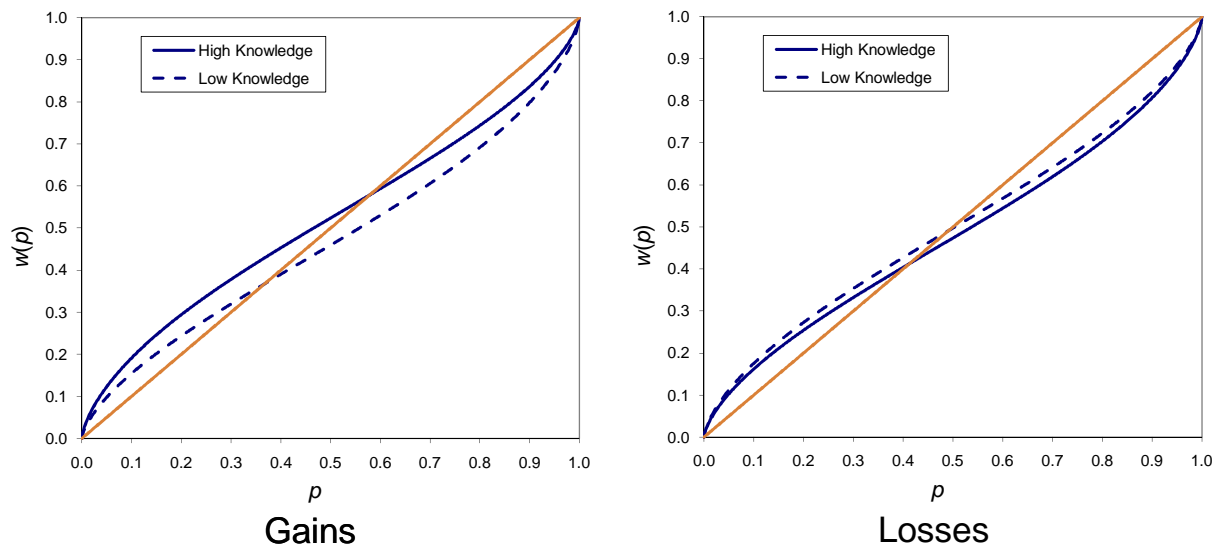


Figure 3: The decision weighting functions for gains (left panel) and losses (right panel), estimated from choices ($\gamma_H^i = \gamma_L^i = .7$).

reflected as they moved from gains to losses. In decision under risk, decision makers are typically risk-averse for gains and risk-seeking for losses. The focal point for choice changes from gaining with certainty to the possibility of losing nothing, a crucial psychological distinction between choices in the domain of losses and choices in the domain of gains that has been observed in previous research on decision under risk.

Interestingly, we found that the hypothesized extension of the competence effect did not extend well to losses. The hypothesized pattern was significant in only 1 of 6 tests (and marginally significant in another), and the decision weighting function parameters estimated were not significantly different for less familiar domains compared to more familiar domains.

We suggest several reasons for the absence of a significant competence effect for losses. First, in Section 2, we reviewed studies of ambiguity aversion for losses. Past studies like Cohen, Jaffray and Said (1985, see also Einhorn and Hogarth, 1986; Hogarth and Einhorn, 1990; Kahn and Sarin, 1988) show that results are usually mixed for losses. One reason for this is that choices for losses are noisier. This interpretation is supported by our estimates of the logit parameter λ , which are lower for losses than gains, indicating that choosing among losses is noisier than choosing among gains.

Second, by equating the amount to win for each choice gamble, as well as many of the characteristics of the underlying events, our experimental design provides a stark test of the competence hypothesis. For example, the events **ChiTemp** and **BuchTemp** shared the same target temperature and target day. As a result, a participant confronted with the choice of whether to select (**ChiTemp**, x) or (**BuchTemp**, x) might

have simplified the choice to a judgment of whether Chicago or Bucharest was more likely to be 85° on July 15, 2005. Of course, such a simplifying strategy would have produced choices consistent with SEU. Apparently participants did not resort to such an approach when choosing among gains, but it is possible that they did so when faced with losses. Such a speculation is consistent with two well-documented observations: (i) response times are higher for losses than gains (Dickhaut et al, 2003); and (ii) participants are more likely to use constructive decision processes as task complexity increases (e.g., Bettman, Luce, and Payne, 1998). If this conjecture is true, then the competence effect for losses may be observed when participants provide cash equivalents, as in Kilka and Weber (2001), a response mode that is incompatible with the simplifying strategy outlined above.

Finally, competence may simply not be used to differentiate events when choices involve losses. Indeed, studies point to neurophysiological differences between reactions to gains and losses (e.g., Samanez-Larkin et al, 2007). If this is the case, it means that there is a crucial behavioral difference in choices involving gains from choices involving losses. The psychological reasons for this difference in behavior across the two domains awaits further investigation.

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