

Languages in the News

The Bilingual Brain is Sharper and More Focused, Study Says

Researchers at Northwestern University found differences between bilinguals and monolinguals in how speech sounds are processed. The study involved testing 23 high school students who were fluent in English and Spanish and 25 who only spoke English. Researchers tested involuntary neural responses to speech sounds.

In comparing the two groups, the bilingual adolescents were found to be better at detecting the fundamental frequency of speech sounds when there was background noise. The researchers claim that bilinguals are good at determining what is and what is not relevant, have more resilient brains, and are more proficient at multitasking and setting priorities. Preliminary research also shows that speaking more than one language aids the memory and delays the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

The Center for Health Studies in Luxembourg reports that the more languages a person is able to speak, the less likely she or he will develop cognitive problems. The report concludes with current findings from the researchers at the University of British Columbia's Infant Studies Centre who claim that babies raised in a bilingual family show from birth a preference for each of the native languages they heard while still in the womb and can readily distinguish between them, even when the languages are very different, such as English and Punjabi.

Click here to read [*The Bilingual Brain is Sharper and More Focused, Study Says*](#).

Bilingual Babies Get an Early Edge

A 2009 study by Italian researchers concluded that babies who are exposed to two languages on a regular basis develop certain advantages in what is called "executive function" of the brain. Even though the babies in the study could not yet speak, the researchers tested their ability to perceive changes in auditory and visual cues. Bilingual and monolingual babies were taught to associate a sound cue to a visual "reward" of an image of a puppet. The image was consistently shown to them on one side a screen, and as babies learned the cue, they anticipated the image by looking to one side of the screen. Researchers then switched the side of the screen that provided the image, and measured how quickly babies learned to adapt their anticipatory look. Bilingual babies consistently adapted to the change while monolingual babies did not.

The study concluded that bilingual babies demonstrated increased executive function, which helps regulate the ability to stop and start actions, quicker than monolingual babies. The results show that, beyond benefits in language acquisition, bilingual exposure at a young age benefits brain development.

Click here to read more of the article [*Bilingual Babies Get an Early Edge*](#) by Jeremy Hsu.

Tips and Tools for Early Language

WEBSITES

Kids Web: Japan

On this site children can explore Japan, the Japanese language and its culture through a variety of activities.

Click here to access [Kids Web: Japan](#).

Alien Language

This animated site leads players through a series of games related to vocabulary for parts of the body. The game is available in English, French, Spanish and German and is designed for students age 11-14. Players practice their reading, spelling, grammar and sentence construction skills while interacting with an alien doctor aboard a spaceship. In addition to four on-line games, there is a visual dictionary and a few downloadable worksheets. To avoid any glitches (working with the accented letter pads or other keyboard issues), make sure your Flash plug-ins are updated. The site was developed to correspond with the UK National Curriculum.

Click here to access [Alien Language](#).

Mommy Maestra-- Discoveries of a Latina Homeschooler

This website is offered by a Miami homeschooling mom. It has many ideas and links, which include: Arts and Crafts, Books and Lesson Plans, History and Cultura, Homeschooling Basics, Language and Reading, Matemática, Música, Opportunities, Science and Nature. There are many free materials such as music samplings, lesson plans, coloring sheets, and ideas to go with the calendar.

Click here to access [Mommy Maestra](#).

APPS for iPads, iPods and iPhones

MindSnacks app

Mindsnacks is an app that teaches languages through games and challenges. Each level includes up to 25 vocabulary words in themes like Numbers, Parts of the Body, and Seasons and Weather.

When users are reviewing the vocabulary, words are pronounced by a native speaker and have an accompanying photo. Games are designed to reinforce reading and spelling (writing) skills. Each word is pronounced multiple times during the games to develop listening skills. When all words in a level have been learned, users move on to the next set of vocabulary.

Mindsnacks is available for Spanish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, and English (for speakers of multiple languages). There is an SAT vocabulary version to help high school kids prepare for the test. The free version includes one level; all 50 levels are available for \$4.99.

This issue of *Newsworthy* was compiled by Tammy Dann. Send any comments, questions, or information for future issues of *Newsworthy* to Tammy Dann at tdann@nnell.org

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