Should my child learn two languages?
The Latest on Bilingualism
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Objectives:
1. What is bilingualism?
2. What are some of the misconceptions?
3. What are the benefits?

A bit about you...
1. Do you speak two languages? Three or more?

1. Are you a parent, relative, or a provider?
Who am I?

MGH Chelsea HealthCare Center

19% English only
81% language other than English

Who am I?

What are some of the things that you have heard about being bilingual?

Princess Charlotte already speaks two languages at just two-years-old.
mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/p...
Mixed Messages

What is bilingualism?

What does it mean to be bilingual?

- **Monolingual** - A person who communicates in 1 language
- **Bilingual** - A person who communicates in 2 languages
- **Multilingual** - A person who communicates in 3 or more languages
What does it mean to be bilingual?

Bilingual ≠ Equally Proficient

Most bilingual speakers show a dominance in one of their languages which often fluctuates and changes over time and context.
How common is it to speak more than one language?

United States
27% children under 6 come from homes where a language other than English is spoken (2000 Census)
Projected to reach 40% by 2030

Globally
More children learning 2+ languages than one
% of the world's population

What is the context for learning 2+ languages?

There are lots of different situations in which children may learn two or more languages.
Can you think of some examples?

Types of Bilingualism

Sequential
Acquire first language (L1) before age 3 and the second language (L2) at some point thereafter

Simultaneous
Acquire both languages as first languages (two L1s) from birth or shortly after
## Language Development: What can I expect?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Language</th>
<th>2 Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babbling</td>
<td>6-9 months</td>
<td>6-9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Words</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Combinations</td>
<td>18-24 months</td>
<td>18-24 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Language Delay/Disorder</td>
<td>7% school-aged children</td>
<td>7% school-aged children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"the average human brain is equally equipped to learn multiple languages"

But...that's not what I heard?!
Confounding Variables

1. Risk Factors

1. Lack of Solid Research
   Historically

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Monolingual vs. Bilingual

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Misconceptions

5 Common Myths... and the Facts behind them
Myth 1: The “Monolingual” Brain

Infants are able to hear the differences between all speech sounds.
This ability begins to fade by the 1st birthday as they start to “tune out” sounds that do not occur in the native language(s).
Myth 2: Bilingualism Causes Confusion

- **Code-switching** is a normal part of being bilingual
- Pull the words that come up first
- Occurs in children...and adults

Myth 3: Bilingualism Causes Language Delays

Study of children's vocabulary growth and grammatical development (Hoff et al., 2012)

**English Language Development:**

Monolingual English toddlers had larger vocabularies and showed more advanced grammatical development
Myth 3 Bilingualism Causes Language Delays

Monolingual English children were also hearing a lot more English!

Children learning two languages learn at a rate that is comparable to or greater than children who only hear one.

When we look at just one language it looks like the monolingual children perform better.

When both languages are considered we see that children are developing at a similar rate.

Look at the total language skills.
Myth 3 Bilingualism Causes Language Delays

We need to know how to accurately measure language development in children who are bi- or multilingual.

Myth 4 Children with Disabilities Should Stick to One Language

Children with language, learning, and intellectual disabilities can become bilingual.

Myth 4 Children with Disabilities Should Stick to One Language

There is NO evidence that removing a language will result in higher language skills.
Myth 5 I have to speak in English

Children should learn language from **native/fluent** speakers

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**Benefits**

5 Things We Must Consider

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1. **Cognitive**

- Attention
- Working Memory
- Delayed onset Alzheimer's
- Brain tissue density
2. Linguistic
- Tuning-in to language
- Learning new words
- Perceiving sounds
- Early Literacy

3. Social
- Perspective Taking
- Problem Solving

4. Opportunity
- Employment
- Travel
- Being a Global Citizen
5. Relationships

- Family
- Community
- Culture
- Identity

The Bottom Line on Bilingualism

- little if any risk
- many benefits
- much more to consider than just speaking a language
- ...it is never too late!

How can I help my child become bilingual?
Part II. Raising a Bilingual Child

Thursday June 13th 12pm - 1pm

References


References


Questions/Comments?

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