

Mind*Brained* Think Tank+

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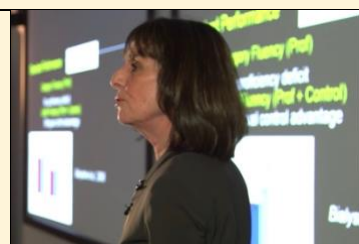
Mind*Brained* Think Tank+

The Bilingual Brain and the L2 Classroom

START HERE! [日本語の字幕について](#)

DEEP Ellen Bialystok - [How Bilingualism Uses Your Brain](#)

LITE Naja Ferjan Ramirez - [Creating Bilingual Minds](#)

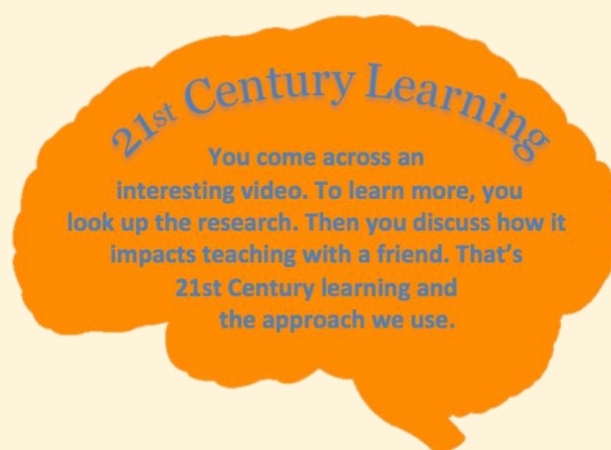


In this issue:

Ellen Bialystok is recognized as the leading neuroscientist on bilingualism and this video shows why. She explains how bilingualism affects the brain in mainly positive ways. Her talk is long, but listen to as much as you have time for. Every bit has useful information. **Curtis Kelly** will review the main videos in the first article.

Then **Eleanor Carson** will start off the Think Tank by discussing other advantages to bilingualism and will comment on common student views about learning English. Then, **Michelle Ocriciano** will give us an introduction to an increasingly popular concept, translanguaging, which means allowing learners to use their L1 resources to learn L2. **Mary Nobuoka** leads us into a different aspect of bilingualism, exploring the benefits that non-native speaker teachers of English, too often undervalued, can offer.

In the Plus section, **Pauline Bunce** (our favorite for shaking things up) pokes at misconceptions about bilingualism with a delightful review of a paper by Ingrid Piller. Piller points out that monolingual way of seeing bilingualism has tended to distort it. We will close the issue with a list of future Think Tank topics, hoping you might give us a few ideas.



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Bilingualism

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Call for Contributions and a Couple Messages

Think Tank Staff



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Curtis Kelly

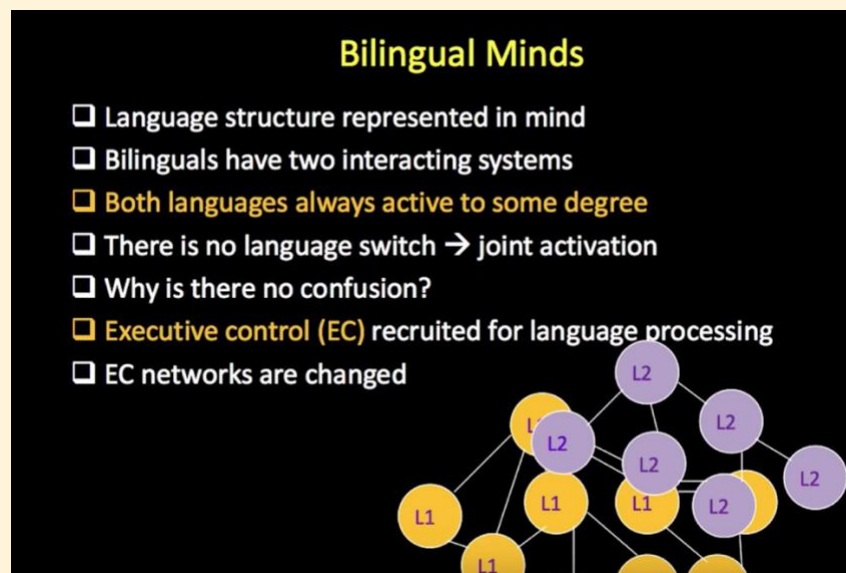


On the Bialystok and Ramirez Starting Videos

Ellen Bialystok, a prominent authority on the neuroscience of bilingualism, runs the [Lifespan Cognition and Development Lab](#) at York in Toronto. The [Bialystok video](#) starts light, with some basic concepts about the brain, and digs deeper later, with specific research. Her methodical progression reduces the complexity and makes her claims convincing.

First 20 minutes: general

Bialystok starts by discussing neuroplasticity: how environment, experience, and even the experiences our parents had (inherited through DNA methylation), change cognitive abilities. She mentions some big influences—formal education, musical training, and aerobic exercise—as a way to show how plasticity works, and then adds bilingualism to the list. As she puts it: “Of all human experience, I don’t think there is anything as intense as the way we interact with language.” It is something we use every second we are awake, in one way or another, and it uses the entire brain.



The key idea about bilingualism in the brain is that bilinguals have two overlapping representations of language, and both are always active to some degree: There is no on-off language switch. We don’t mix them up when we use them, because the executive control system in the prefrontal cortex decides which language is appropriate for each interaction. Since bilinguals are using that executive control

system all the time, it becomes stronger, and according to Bialystok, “of all the cognitive processes that our mind has available, the executive control system is the most important, by far.” It also takes years to develop and declines sooner with aging than other functions, so the strengthening which results from bilingualism has positive consequences both for cognitive development and for fighting the effects of aging. She also discusses the linguistic consequences of bilingualism, not all of which are positive.

The next 40 minutes: research

Research on bilingualism shows that its effects are somewhat complicated. On one hand, bilinguals, and even children studying a second language, do not perform quite as well as monolinguals in language and metalanguage tasks in a single language. That is expected, since bilinguals know fewer words in either language than monolinguals. On the other hand, and this benefit extends to all cognition—bilinguals perform better at executive control tasks—including those that are independent of language and this result occurs irrespective of socioeconomic status. Executive control is the part of your prefrontal cortex that keeps things in order.

Bialystok also points out that monolingualism/bilingualism is not dichotomous, but exists on a continuum. Research in this area found that the strongest differences exist at the ends of the continuum, rather than in the middle, but even a few years of language study shows some benefits. Then she looks at the effects of bilingualism on memory. The effects on working memory are mixed. Since executive control is stronger in bilinguals, there is less interference between recent and new memories. In other words, bilinguals are better at keeping things in working memory straight.

Bilingualism has important benefits related to aging as well. The appearance of Alzheimer’s symptoms and dementia is delayed in bilinguals, by about five years on the average. Interestingly, bilingualism does not delay Parkinson’s, but that makes sense since Parkinson’s is related to executive control deterioration.

Bialystok closes by telling us that there might be other effects of bilingualism that we can predict but have not yet fully examined, such as how bilingualism might affect episodic memory and [cognitive reserve](#): the mind’s resistance to damage.

Ramirez video

The Naja Ferjan Ramirez TED Talk—[Creating Bilingual Minds](#)—talks about bilingualism in babies, how it develops and the benefits it brings. The discussion is not as deep, but definitely worth listening to, and it confirms some of the research Bialystok referred to. The Talk had special value to me, since I instantly realized that she was one of Pat Kuhl’s students at the University of Washington. Pat Kuhl, one of my heroes, gave us a fascinating view of a critical period (or as neuroscientists put it, a sensitive period) when babies learn phonetic systems. Pat’s [TED Talk](#) is almost ten years old, but still one of the best.



Think Tank: Bilingualism

Eleanor Carson



Bilingualism Benefits: Early, Late, or Never?



Being a Canadian English language educator in a university in Japan, I sometimes ask my students what they think about learning a second language and, in particular, when they think language learning should begin. Over the years, these young adults (most of whom are 18-20 year old Japanese university students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) have told me several reasons for and against

learning a second or additional language and, if they were in favor, the age at which they believed learning should begin. As one might expect, these sentiments often reflected learners' anticipation of their own final grade in their EFL class. If they anticipated high scores, their ideas generally supported developing bilingualism and, often, starting early; while, if they worried that their EFL class scores might negatively impact their overall grade average, they preferred a late start. Indeed, some were skeptical about the need to study a foreign language at all. Out of curiosity, I asked them why they felt as they did.

My Japanese EFL learners supported their beliefs with the following principal reasons: On one hand, some learners said that children should begin learning the L2 later in their school years. They claimed that children need to learn their L1 first, since learning an L2 can interfere with learning an L1. On the other hand, some learners favored starting to learn an L2 early. They claimed that it is easier for children than for adults to learn a second language. Finally, some learners questioned the value of learning a second language at all. They claimed that bilingualism has no benefits beyond actually speaking the second language. Whose beliefs do the research findings support?

First, it is important to be clear what I mean by the "L1" and "L2." Since I am writing from the perspective of learners, unless



otherwise specified, the L1 refers to the learner's first or native language (ex., for Japanese university students in foreign language (FL) classes, Japanese), and the L2 means the learner's second or other language (ex., for Japanese FL university students, English, Chinese, or German). It is more complicated when referring to the languages used by immigrants. For immigrants, the L1 is the immigrant learner's home language (for example, German) and their L2 is the community language they are immigrating into (for example, English in Toronto or French in Quebec City). Finally, "bilingual" means the ability to use two (or more) languages, regardless of proficiency.

Favoring a Late L2 Start

Learners favoring a late L2 start objected to an early start because they claimed that children should learn their L1 first. This belief was grounded by the following rationale. First, some learners thought that learning an L2 impairs their ability to learn, especially to learn their L1. Next, some learners thought that learning an L2 can only happen with a solid L1 foundation. Finally, some learners thought that when two languages are learned at the same time, the languages could be confused with each other. Each possibility will be addressed in turn.



L2 learning is an overwhelming cognitive demand

Some students believed that learning an L2 is a disadvantage because it impairs their ability to learn, including learning their community's L1. This notion actually has a precedent in research. Previous researchers had claimed that bilingualism was related to decreased cognitive performance. Educators conducting research in the 1920s–1950s labeled this notion the “the problem of the bilingual child” (e.g. Smith, 1923, cf. Antoniou, 2019, p. 396). Based on [IQ tests](#) that largely tested vocabulary knowledge in a language unfamiliar to many participating immigrant children, researchers believed that bilingual children's foreign language interfered with learning, because bilinguals did not know as many L1 words as monolinguals and learners spent too much mental energy distinguishing between languages. Researchers then overextended the findings to claim that bilingualism interfered with learning and led to learning deficits. Consequently, at one time, bilingualism and multilingualism were thought to cause hardship and possibly retardation among young children (Antoniou, 2019), as discussed by Brenda Gorman in [Myths About Bilingual Children](#). These studies are now considered to have serious design flaws because many used vocabulary-dependent IQ tests to make claims that bilingualism degraded intelligence and they did not account for confounding factors such as socioeconomic status, age, degree of bilingualism, or immigration.

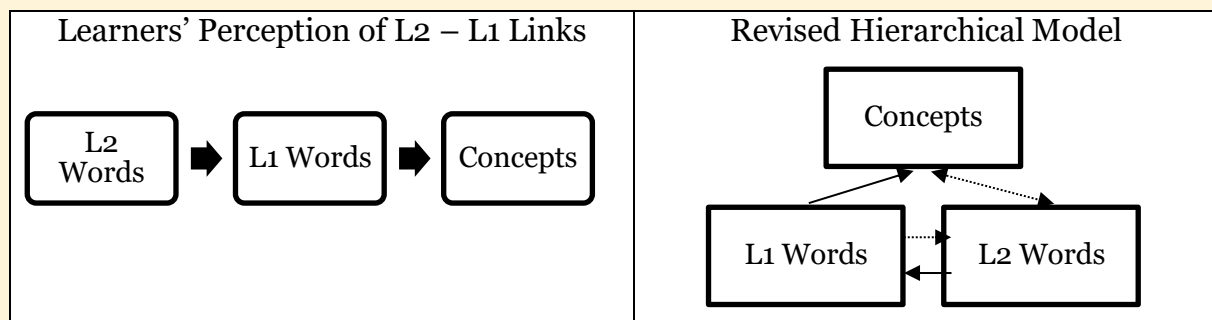
Contrary to the findings of this early research, bilingualism has been found to have cognitive advantages. Seminal research conducted by Peal and Lambert (1962) compensated for previous design flaws as they compared degree of bilingualism, attitudes towards the community's L1, and the school achievement of 10-year-old school children from six French language schools in Montreal. The participants were balanced bilinguals (about equal in proficiency in French and English) compared with monolingual students (proficient in only French); all other, unbalanced, bilinguals were excluded. English L1 speakers administered tests to measure English verbal ability. All other instructions for questions covering nonverbal intelligence and attitudes were given in French by French L1 speakers. Results revealed that bilinguals performed better than monolinguals on both verbal and nonverbal tests "involving concept-formation or symbolic flexibility" (Peal & Lambert, 1962, p. 141). The researchers suggested that bilingual children might have performed better due to having a more diversified set of mental abilities than the monolinguals. Thus, this landmark study overturned prior beliefs that bilingualism impaired learners' cognitive or learning abilities, particularly with reference to learning the L1 of their community.



L1 required to be foundation for L2

Next, some learners I talked to believed that children must focus on learning their L1 first. They felt that learning an L2 can only occur once a good L1 foundation has been attained. For example, considered from the basic level of words linked to their corresponding concepts, by implication, the L2 must be joined to the L1 and then to concepts; learning an L2 is assumed to be a case of translation. While there is evidence that L2 words are often learned in the early stages by linking them to L1 words and then to their concepts, with repeated use the links between the L2 words and the concepts become strong enough that L1 mediation (translation) is no longer needed and the original concept itself adapts to accommodate nuances of the L2 word linked to it (Kroll & Stewart, 1994). Therefore, while knowing L1 words can help build a vocabulary of L2 words, they are not essential. It is possible for L2 words to be linked directly to concepts and not require L1 mediation. Furthermore, even if learning L2 words occurs via the mediation of L1 words, with sufficient practice and proficiency, L2 words can link directly to concepts without the aid of L1 mediation.

These ideas are illustrated below.



Note. “Revised Hierarchical Model” adapted from Kroll & Stewart, 1994, p. 158. Solid arrow links show strong connections, while dotted arrow links show weak connections that can gain strength with fluency.

However, the ability to mediate L2 words via L1 words to their concepts was not the only reason learners felt it was important to learn their L1 first. The second reason, social rather than linguistic or cognitive in nature, was that they needed their L1 to function in their L1 (home) community. They believed that time spent learning the L2 would take away from time spent learning their home L1.

There is evidence to support their claim that monolingual children know the L1 better than bilingual children (for example, they have been found to know more L1 words than bilinguals). However, as explained by Bialystok in [this video](#), this research finding is flawed; the disparity is only true if only L1 words are counted. The difference between the number of L1 words known by monolinguals and bilinguals is small, and most bilingual children’s L1 vocabulary overlaps with that of their L2. If the L2 words are counted as well, bilingual children know as many, if not more words, than their monolingual cohorts.

Furthermore, the existence of very young children exhibiting balanced multilingualism demonstrates that more than one language can be learned at the same time without the previous existence of a single L1. For example, a 3-year-old boy can be observed in [this video](#) both understanding and responding to questions when speaking Mandarin Chinese, English, and Hakka..

Bilingualism might cause confusion between L1 and L2

Learners favoring a late start might be concerned that the L2 may become confused with their L1. Similarly, some parents worry that raising their children to be balanced bilinguals might cause problems for their children. However, children can learn two languages at the same time without becoming confused. For example, a male colleague told me that he and his wife were raising their daughter to use both English and Japanese, using the “One Parent One Language” approach (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004). He spoke only English to his daughter, while his wife spoke only Japanese, and at home they spoke English to each other. He said that their little girl knew words for the same objects in both languages. For example, she knew that daddy said “chair” while mommy said “isu.” The little girl always talked with her father in English and her mother in Japanese and was always aware of the appropriate language to use.



This is not to say mix-ups don't happen. The author herself (an English-speaking Canadian with an uncertain grasp of French) fell prey to this embarrassing problem, which is likely familiar to many readers. When responding to a compliment by a Japanese woman about my Japanese language ability, I said, "*Nihongo ga mal desu*," making a French Canadian male colleague who witnessed the exchange grin. The Japanese lady was thoroughly confused, I had the sinking feeling that something I'd said was wrong, and it wasn't until later that I realized that "*mal*" was French for "*bad*;" I had meant to say, "*warui desu*," (which was probably ungrammatical, anyway). But look again. I did not mistakenly mix my L2 and L1. I mixed up words in my two L2s, since I hadn't had a firm grasp of either yet. Confusion seems to occur only with words and grammar in inadequately learned languages, but bilingualism itself does not cause language confusion.

In fact, there are several advantages for learners starting to learn their L2 later in life. Children may be better at learning language sounds, but older learners are better at understanding explicit grammar instruction. By the time

learners have reached their teen years, their brains have cognitively matured compared to younger children, and teens can benefit from explicitly taught grammar and explicit feedback about their errors. Adolescents and adults can also use their well-established L1 to connect new L2 words to the concepts originally established through their L1, making learning more efficient (Kroll & Stewart, 1994).

Additionally, as Mia Nacamulli comments in [the benefits of a bilingual brain](#), those who learned a second language in adulthood are less emotional and more rational when facing problems in the L2 than in their L1. Finally, there are cognitive and neurological benefits to bilingualism even for mature and elderly adults, as discussed later in this article.

In effect, there may be different benefits from bilingual development, whether one starts early or late. Benefits from learning an L2 vary with age, because teens and adults are better at understanding explicit grammar instruction than children are, but that does not necessarily mean they are better than young children at learning grammar implicitly from exposure and experience. Next, I consider the potential benefits of an early start.

Favoring an Early L2 Start

Learners favoring an early start to second language learning said that elementary-aged children learn languages better than learners in university, as suggested by Judith Kroll in [*The Bilingual Brain*](#).

While this video shows that there is merit to this claim, due to limitations on older learners who attempt to acquire a native-like accent, Laura-Ann Petitto suggests in [*When is the best time to learn language?*](#) that learners have missed the point if they believe that language learning is successful *only* if one acquires a native-like accent. However, there are other advantages to an early start, as outlined next.



In fact, some research supports the students who prefer an early start. Many researchers believe that children can learn additional languages well enough to acquire not only a native accent, but also good grammar and a pragmatic understanding of the language sufficient to pass for native speakers, a theory called the Critical Period Hypothesis (Long, 2005), one of the most controversial theories in SLA. These researchers argue that, between the age of two and puberty, a child's ability to acquire an L2 is superior compared to after this period.

The decline in the ability to acquire native-like L2 abilities has been attributed to several factors. First, as young children mature, their brain structure alters through brain lateralization, in which cognitive abilities tend to focus in either the left or right hemispheres of the brain (Lenneberg, 1967). Second, localization within hemispheres for phonological learning further constrains language learning, suggesting that accent acquisition tends to be fixed by puberty (Seliger, 1978). Third, the physical

Some researchers have argued that the critical period occurs in phases.

development of muscles used to speak was seen to be set at an earlier age than the development of non-physical cognitive skills (Scovel, 1988). Finally, increasing myelination of neural axons could reduce plasticity in language areas of the brain prior to puberty (Pulvermüller & Schumann, 1994).

While some researchers have presented evidence to support the critical period hypothesis, other evidence has revealed that the end of the critical period is far from clear. Some researchers argued that the critical period occurs in phases, with optimal accent acquisition occurring before age seven and slightly decreasing language

learning ability to age 12 before an abrupt decline in language learning makes language learning cognitively challenging (Johnson & Newport, 1989). This decline has been attributed to decreasing cerebral plasticity (Penfield & Roberts, 2014). Conversely, recent research has called the early start of decline at 12 years of age into question, with evidence found to support a later decline in plasticity as late as age 17 (Hartshorne, Tenenbaum, & Pinker, 2018). The evidence supporting the critical period hypothesis is still debatable, and may only apply to native-like speaking rather than to successful communication.

So, who is right? Actually, research evidence and our own experience suggests that language learning can occur at any point in life, and may even begin pre-birth (Singleton & Ryan, 2004). Furthermore, acquiring a native-like accent, something children are more proficient at than adults, should not be the defining feature of successful L2 learning. While acquiring a native-like accent is laudable, successful L2 learning is not limited to accent. Instead, L2 learners should focus on being able to communicate with other L2 users. Indeed, it is possible to become an L2 user at any age (Cook, 2005), as he discusses in [*Multicompetence and SLA*](#). Whether it is better for L2 learners to start early or late depends on the reason for which an L2 is learned. It appears that learners who favor an early start are correct if their purpose is to acquire native-like L2 abilities, but I argue that this is a limited goal compared to developing the ability to use the L2—which can be developed at any age.

However, whether or not learners can become successful L2 users is a moot point if they do not actually have the opportunity to use the L2. Given the preceding theoretical positions, are there any benefits for learners to learn an L2 even if they do not anticipate having to use it in their future lives?



Benefits of Bilingualism

Some students questioned whether an L2 was even worth learning, since they did not anticipate having to use the L2 in their current or future lives. Moreover, students who had answered the questions—*is learning an L2 good and when is it best to start?*—rarely think beyond whether they will actually have a use for the L2. Both sets of learners would be shocked to discover that there are substantial—and

substantiated—reasons to learn an L2 even if they do not anticipate a future that includes its use.

There are many potential benefits to competence in more than one language, as Cook discusses in [The Second Language \(L2\) User](#). Since linguistic competence implies the ability to use language appropriately, it is important to distinguish between the learning of two languages and the use of two languages. Many of the research findings on bilingual benefits focus on learning rather than using two or more languages, so some potential bilingual benefits may hinge on whether the languages are *used* or not. This point may help to explain some of the inconsistencies researchers have reported about the conceivable benefits of bilingualism. With this caveat in mind, I will describe potential bilingual benefits found to reside in cognitive behavior, brain structure growth, and neural activity.

Bilingualism and cognitive behavior

Researchers have found evidence that bilinguals tend to experience cognitive behavioral benefits including enhanced abilities in thinking—and that this can influence quality of life throughout one's years, as Mia Nacamulli describes in [the benefits of a bilingual brain](#). Specifically, bilingualism has been related to improved control of executive functions, which are the building blocks of thought, learning, and character. Executive functions, also known as executive control or cognitive control, have a wide range of practical influence: “Executive functions (EFs) make possible mentally playing with ideas; taking the time to think before acting; meeting novel, unanticipated challenges; resisting temptations; and staying focused” (Diamond, 2013, p. 135).

So, how could bilingualism build better control of executive function? Of the three core EFs—inhibition, working memory, and cognitive flexibility (Diamond, 2013)—bilingualism appears to be most closely related to inhibition, task switching, and conflict resolution, which are also implicated in cognitive flexibility (Costa, Hernandez, & Sebastian-Galles, 2016). Executive control is the ability to choose the focus of one's mental energy, and in the case of bilingualism, to selectively attend to one language while inhibiting or suppressing another language (Antoniou, 2019). Executive control is crucial because both languages are always active in a bilingual person's mind regardless of the language being used at any given moment, as evidenced by the influence of words in one language on available words in the other language (Kroll, Dussias, Bogulski, & Kroff, 2012; Kroll & Bialystok, 2013). Executive control improves with practice and proficiency, can be observed through brain activity, and changes the structure of the brain. While executive control enhances all related cognitive systems, it is especially influential with language. Bilingual communication exercises the ability to focus one's mental energy during communication in an L1 despite distracting L2 alternatives and vice versa, and thereby fosters executive control, an ability that grows with proficiency.

Evidence supporting enhanced executive control in bilinguals has been championed by Bialystok, as detailed in her invited lecture on [How bilingualism helps your](#)

[brain](#), the “Deep” video choice for this issue. Using a variety of behavioral measures across several research projects, she was able to show that bilinguals had better executive control than monolinguals. Bilinguals were able to ignore distractors and could react to visual signals faster than monolinguals. Since neural pathways are strengthened with use, her results have implications for more efficient neural activity, increased brain plasticity, and growth in some areas of the brain, implications borne out by other research (for example, Marian & Spivey, 2003).

Bilingualism, brain structure growth, and plasticity

Bilingualism has also been found to influence brain plasticity because the exercise of executive control to focus on linguistic functions of one language despite the competing linguistic functions of another language is associated with alterations in the structure and function of some areas of the brain. Anatomical and neural activity changes have been observed to occur with the experience of language training and use. Findings from four areas of research have been touched on. First, changes include increased grey matter density (concentration of neurons) and white matter integrity (connections between neurons), both of which are structural changes related to sustained and effortful activity accompanying language learning. Second, these structural and functional changes can be found for young children, young adults, and mature adults and are sensitive to the age of language acquisition. Third, these changes can occur quickly, even with short-term language learning. Fourth, changes vary with differing levels of L2 proficiency, different language characteristics, and distances between languages (Li, Legault, & Litcofsky, 2014). Changes in brain anatomy related to brain activation that accompanies language learning suggest that measurable and observable neurological evidence may support the claim that bilingualism is intrinsically beneficial.

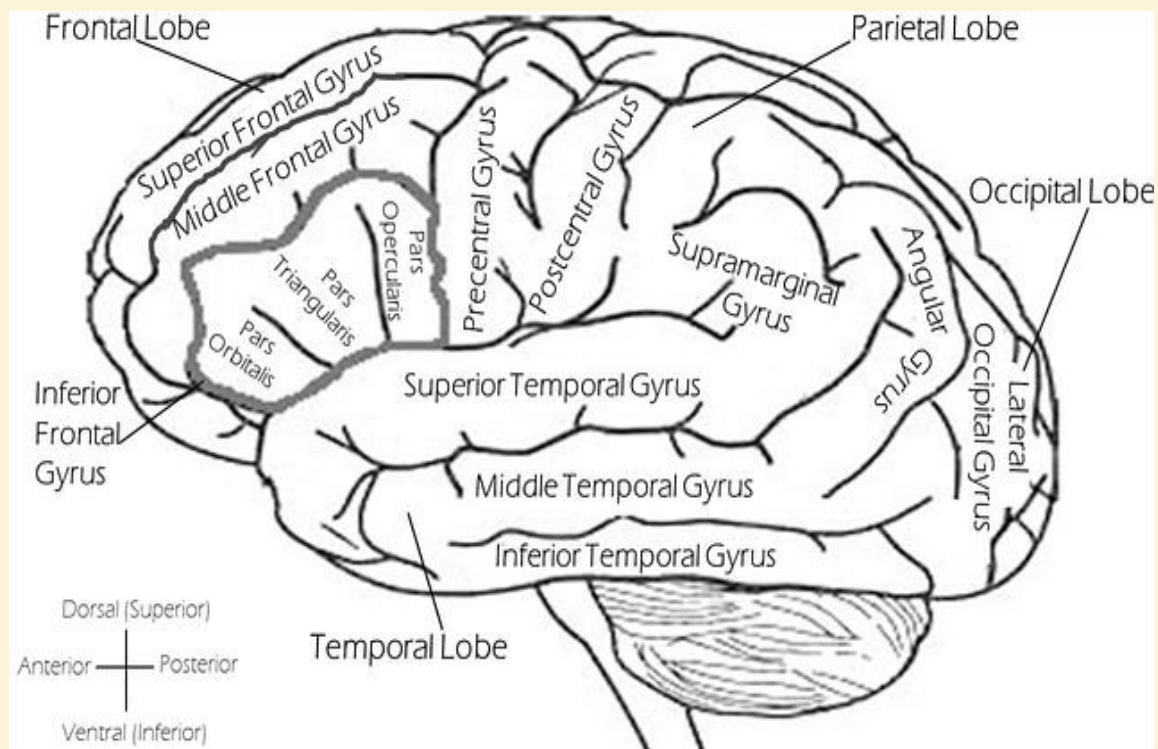
What evidence supports the claim that the use of more than one language changes the anatomy and function of the brain? Of the vast field of research reported in the literature, I refer to only one result as an example of results that have far-ranging repercussions. Researchers have used fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging, which measures brain activity by detecting changes in blood flow) to measure brain activity in older bilinguals. They found lower blood oxygenation level-dependent responses for bilinguals than for matched monolinguals. This finding suggests that information processing might be easier and more efficient for bilinguals than for monolinguals (Gold, Kim, Johnson, Kryscio, & Smith, 2013). The first research to describe the brain-preserving benefits older bilinguals might have



because of processing information more efficiently than monolinguals called these benefits [cognitive reserve](#), or the ability to withstand damage to the brain. Bilinguals' increased efficiency and cognitive reserve, compared to that of monolinguals, could strengthen their ability to think even when developing neurological decline.

Bilingualism, neural activity and decline, and cognitive reserve

Neurological areas (ex. Brain Anatomy Image below) observed to be related to language systems, such as the prefrontal cortex (Costa, Hernandez, & Sebastian-Galles, 2016), have been found to be associated with increased cognitive reserve (Abutalebi & Green, 2016). Cognitive reserve is important for delaying the onset and progression of symptoms of dementia, an important consideration that is briefly considered next.



Dr. Judith Kroll argues that [Bilingualism May Delay Dementia](#). It is debatable whether cognitive reserve prevents the progression of cognitive decline associated with neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's, but it appears to stave off the symptoms. Timothy Huzar describes the symptoms associated with dementia and Alzheimer's in [What are the early signs of dementia?:](#) difficulty understanding visual stimuli, weakening ability to write or draw pictures, loss of memory, limitations in forming new memories, confusion, an inability to solve problems, emotional instability, loss of impulse control, personality changes, and social withdrawal. These symptoms can be exacerbated by other health issues such as macular degeneration, cataracts, arthritis, and incessant tinnitus. The resulting confusion is illustrated in [the Virtual Dementia Tour®](#). Symptoms of cognitive impairment or Alzheimer's in bilinguals were delayed for between four (Bialystok, Craik, & Freedman, 2007), and 4.5 years (Alladi et al., 2013) compared to matched monolinguals. It is likely that cognitive reserve includes having a wider neural

network for bilinguals than for monolinguals, thus giving bilinguals more links to locate memories and exercise executive control than monolinguals (Antoniou, 2019).

In my opinion, an alternative explanation for the benefits of cognitive reserve and its relationship to executive control is that the patient can selectively focus despite the distractions associated with dementia, such as tinnitus. While neurological decline progresses for both bilinguals and monolinguals, bilinguals do not become



symptomatic as early as monolinguals. As Kroll observes in [Bilingualism May Delay Dementia](#), no drug has been found that can delay the onset of symptoms of dementia, and the additional four to five years are of immense value to patients, caregivers, medical personnel, and society at large.

From the preceding line of reasoning, we can see the potential for cognitive benefits of bilingualism that are practical, far-ranging, and support thinking ability. Whether or not the L2 is actually used in one's daily life, it is worth learning an L2 to expand one's world view and enhance one's human condition. Learners who question the usefulness of learning an L2 might be reassured that it is not a waste of time.

Conclusion

Does being bilingual make you smarter? No, according to a panel discussion on [Language and Learning](#) with Bialystok. Does being bilingual make you mentally more resilient? Yes, it appears so. Could this be of value to learners who are required to learn an L2 despite having little opportunity to use it in their local context? I think it could. Advantages include an expanded world view and cognitive benefits.

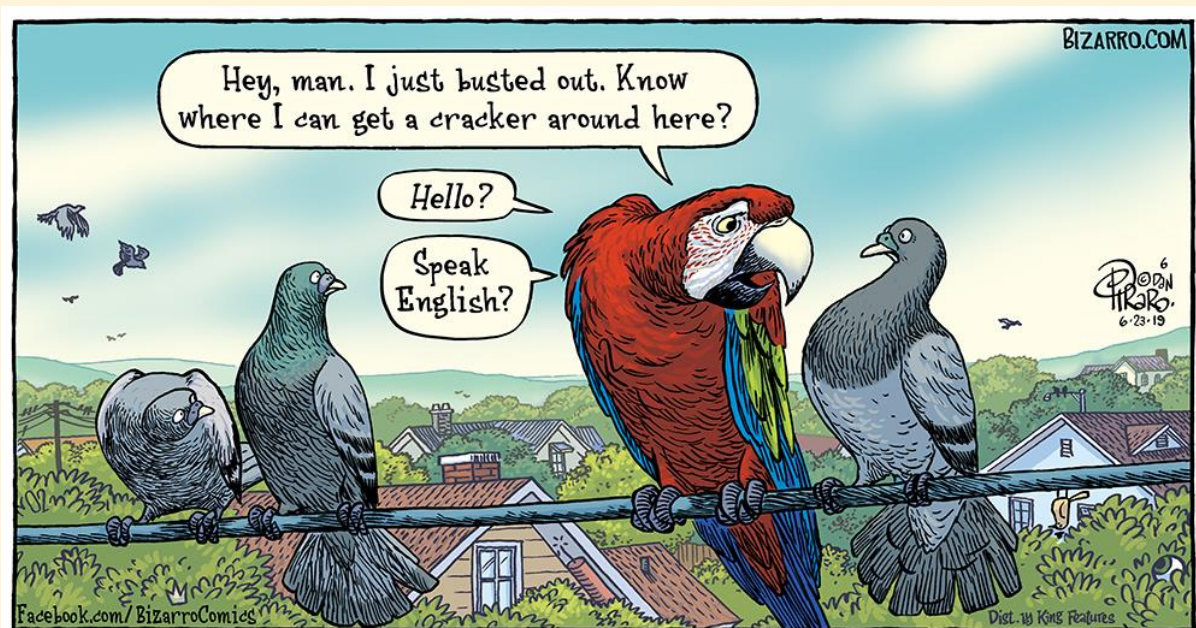
Whether L2 study occurs early or late, to a superficial or proficient level, bilingualism has value beyond its practical application in communicating with L2 speakers of other languages. As Marian [observed](#): "It's never too late to learn another language. The benefits can be seen even after just one semester of studying." Becoming bilingual is only a, "waste of time," if you do not know about the secret treasures it gives the brain.

Eleanor Carson has been teaching English in Japan for over 10 years. She recently obtained a PhD in Applied Linguistics at Hiroshima City University, and currently teaches EFL classes at Matsuyama University. Her research interests include bilingualism, medium of instruction, WTC, student autonomy, and motivation in EFL contexts. <eleanor_carson@hotmail.com>

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MYTH vs. FACT

Bilingual Language Development



MYTH

FACT

Speaking 2 or more languages to a child can "confuse" them, so it is better to only speak 1 language.

All children are capable of learning multiple languages, including children with developmental delays and learning disabilities.

It is better for families to only speak the language taught in school to their children, even if they do not speak the language well.

Families should speak the language they are most comfortable speaking, so children are given rich linguistic models and can interact best with other members of their community.

Young bilingual children are delayed in learning language compared to peers who only speak 1 language.

Bilingualism does NOT cause language delays, and has been shown to improve children's ability to learn new words, identify sounds, and problem-solve.

Bilingual children who mix languages ("code switch") are confused and sound uneducated.

Language mixing, also known as "code switching", is normal and grammatical. It serves social and communicative purposes, while also fostering cultural and linguistic awareness.

Bilingual children who stop speaking their first language have a language disorder or learning disability.

"Language loss" occurs during bilingual language acquisition when a child is exposed to a second language more consistently than their first language. It is not a sign of disorder or disability.

If you are concerned about the language, speech, or communication development of someone you know, contact a speech-language pathologist for a comprehensive assessment.

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Thanks to Kelly Ibanez of [Hola Blog](#) for permission to use this, and her credentials are now CCC-SLP. Congrats! See her message to us on p. 41)

Think Tank: Bilingualism

Michelle Ocriciano



The What and How of Translanguaging

Introduction

Imagine an Italian couple who moved to Japan after being offered a position there. The person offered the job speaks English at a high level but the partner does not. Let's focus on the partner's English level. The level is equivalent to a lower intermediate on the CEFR and this person has been living in Japan for two years and is also starting to learn Japanese formally. Now imagine the partner in an English class with other Japanese speakers: the teacher gives a complicated reading task followed by a discussion. During the discussion the Italian and the Japanese speakers resort to Japanese to make themselves understood and to try to explain how they felt about the text. The teacher is aware that there is an Italian speaker in the classroom and provides students with a glossary on the board with English, Japanese, and Italian. After reading and discussing, all students share their thoughts about the passage in English and Japanese and Italian whenever needed.

Keep on using your imagination and, this time, picture an EFL class in Thailand whose focus is on essay writing. But before actually writing, students have to read two different texts, one in Thai another in English and also watch a Spanish video subtitled in English. They take notes using Thai and English. The last step is writing the essay in English using their bilingual notes. Finally, they exchange their writings and comment on each other's writing in Thai or English as they please.

The above are examples of what Translanguaging might look like in a classroom. Translanguaging challenges the notion that students should be prevented from using their native language while studying a second one.



What is translanguaging?

In the academic realm, Translanguaging is not exactly a new concept. It is mainly based on François Grosjean's research (1982) which suggests that bilinguals are not, and do not function as, two monolinguals in one. The term itself first appeared in Wales around 1994 when Cen Williams and other colleagues were trying to find strategies for learners to use Welsh and English in a single lesson. They proposed the term *trawsieithu* which was later translated into English by Colin Baker as Translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2011).

Since then Translanguaging has developed and evolved. Ofelia Garcia, one of the major researchers in the field, defined translanguaging as: “the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential” (García, 2009, p. 140). In simpler terms, translanguaging is a process where bilingual/multilingual speakers use all of their languages to communicate. For example, when asking questions, providing answers, or participating in any other form of communication in life.

Not code switching



Code-switching can be roughly defined as the practice of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language occurring at specific points in a communicative event. It is usually governed by grammatical, as well as conversational sequencing, rules. It also has an extensive body of research as it has been thoroughly investigated by linguists and scholars for many years, and from a variety of perspectives. However, the term has acquired a rather negative connotation as it is often used to describe communicative events where the speaker is unable to use only one language to express their ideas because they lack knowledge of the given language. Code-switching can, thus, be seen, through a lens of inadequacy and inability as it has, “strong associations with language separation,” (Lewis, Jones, & Baker 2012).

Superficially, one could claim that Translanguaging is simply code-switching with a different name. In fact, this is often an assumption when teachers are first exposed to Translanguaging. The confusion might come from the fact that code-switching is a commonly used term among language professionals.

Translanguaging, however, comes from a completely different theoretical construct. It is different from code-switching as it is not only about the shift of language but also about the discursive practices—moving from topic to topic while interacting—developed over time for and by an individual. Translanguaging is seen without the language deficit lens, and, in this sense, individuals are empowered by their full linguistic repertoire and unafraid and unashamed of communicating. It allows learners to slip smoothly in and out of either L1 or L2 as best suits their learning needs, as opposed to having set times when a single language must be used.

Translanguaging pedagogy and the classroom

Translanguaging has been heavily criticised for being too theoretical. Aware of the criticisms and the divide between research and practice, García, Johnson, and Seltzer published *The Translanguaging Classroom* in 2016. With this book, the authors aimed at filling the gap between theory and practice by presenting and clearly defining concepts such as *Translanguaging corriente*, *emergent bilinguals*, and *translanguaging* itself.



For us practitioners, the definition of the translanguaging classroom sets the tone for how we should look at learners: “A Translanguaging classroom is any classroom in which students may deploy their full linguistic repertoires, and not just the particular language(s) that are officially used for instructional purposes in that space” (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2016). “*Translanguaging corriente* describes the language learning process as fluid and moving like a natural current between languages. This understanding shows that this particular pedagogy goes beyond content, activities, and techniques. It also includes who the students are, and the strengths they bring to the learning environment. Some of these strengths can only be brought into play in their native language, strengths an “English only” policy would close access to.

Regarding the concept of bilingualism, the authors call all language learners bilingual, regardless of where they are in their language learning progression, by using the term *emergent bilingual* in place of, for example, *Non-English Proficient*

(NEP). The authors' belief is that NEP and other such terms are deficit-based terms that cannot fully express learners' repertoires.

In addition to describing and defining *Translanguaging corriente* and emergent

“Non-English proficient” and other such terms are deficit-based.

bilinguals, the authors explicitly address the fact that translanguaging is not a specific set of activities; instead they quote Flores and Schissel (2014) who define Translanguaging, from a

sociolinguistic perspective, as fluid language practices of bilingual communities; and, from a pedagogical perspective, as an approach whereby teachers build bridges between these natural language practices and the language practices desired in formal school settings.

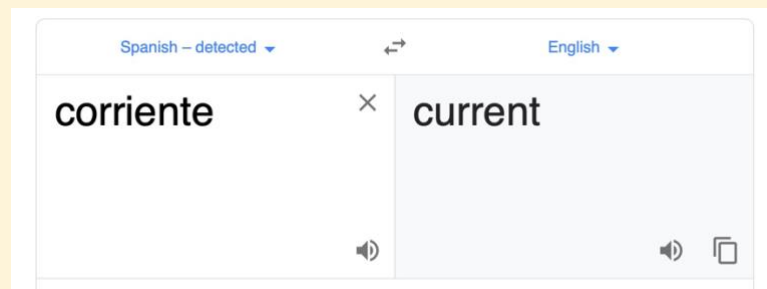
Embracing *Translanguaging corriente*, and the use of L1 / Home Language as one of its tools, is seen as a common and advantageous practice. In mostly monolingual countries, such as Japan, Thailand, Spain, and Brazil, English is often taught as a foreign language and students in those classes tend to share the same first language. Classrooms like these give us a much simpler context to see how Translanguaging practices can flourish. A good example of successful adoption of Translanguaging practices in an EFL context is provided by Rasman (2018). The author conducted a qualitative case study in an EFL context and learned that the use of L1 did not prevent the learning of the foreign language, but, instead, facilitated it. This showed the possibility of students' creating their own repertoires through scaffolding during learner-learner interaction. It is important to note that the use of the L1 or Home Language is seen from an empowerment point of view; students are emergent bilinguals and employ their full linguistic repertoire without feeling guilty about using the L1.



While in multilingual contexts it is unrealistic to imagine that a teacher will have knowledge of all the languages being used, it is certainly possible and realistic for teachers to build a welcoming and supportive environment. This can be achieved by

having books and reading resources in all languages, bilingual word walls, recorded stories in different languages from different cultures, and, certainly, showing and normalizing the use of different languages.

The kind of teacher and class preparation described above can be overwhelming and that is exactly where technology can be used effectively. Technology can play a key role in class preparation and teaching in general. For example, when used appropriately, electronic translators and applications can be powerful tools. Forget the concept that tools such as Google Translate are bad or even evil. If the translation is inaccurate, take advantage of that and use the inaccuracy as a teaching tool. Ask students for clarification, and why and how. This can be a great opportunity to learn about and teach language awareness, metalanguage, and register.



What about the brain?

For many years, researchers considered bilinguals to have two distinct and separate sets of language, almost as if they were twice monolingual, thus using language the same way as monolingual native speakers use it (Kachru, 1994). However, on-going and recent research in the areas of neuroscience has discovered that both languages are active when bilinguals listen to speech, read words in either language, and plan speech in each of the two languages (Kroll, Bobb, & Hoshino, 2014). Actually, more than just being active, both languages are potentially fighting for cognitive resources. In addition to both languages always being active, they also seem to influence each other. In other words, L1 influences L2 and vice-versa, so bilinguals process each of their languages differently and have different language profiles when compared to their monolingual counterparts (Kroll, Dussias, Bice, & Perrotti, 2015). In this sense, brain research can corroborate Translanguaging practices.

Practical suggestions

Translanguaging can sound rather abstract and be confused with lack of rigor on first contact with it. For this reason, I will share some suggestions that teachers can use to promote translanguaging in the classroom. The list is adapted from a presentation given by Kate Seltzer in 2015.



Reading

- Students read in the Second Language (SL) and discuss/analyse what they read in the Home Language (HL)
- Encourage students to read and research for research projects in both languages
- Supplement SL readings with HL language readings on the same topic/theme
- Assign reading partners that share a HL, for mutual assistance
- Students do independent reading in multiple languages

Listening

- Allow students to explain/share ideas using the HL and the SL (another student can translate if you don't speak that language)
- Have students interview one another using both the HL and the SL and then share what they learned in the SL
- Create a multilingual listening centre comprised of fiction and non-fiction texts in the classroom, narratives of community members, and books recorded by students (a favourite book or their own writing)

Writing

- Allow students to audio record ideas first using both languages, then transfer to writing
- Students write first in the HL and then translate that text into the Second Language
- Students pre-write in both languages, then publish in the Second Language
- Assign writing partners who share a HL, for mutual assistance

Participation

- Group students so they can use both languages in small groups, then present in the Second Language
- Assign newcomers a buddy to show them around school, answer questions, etc.
- Allow students to discuss the lesson/ideas with a partner in the HL and SL

Vocabulary suggestions

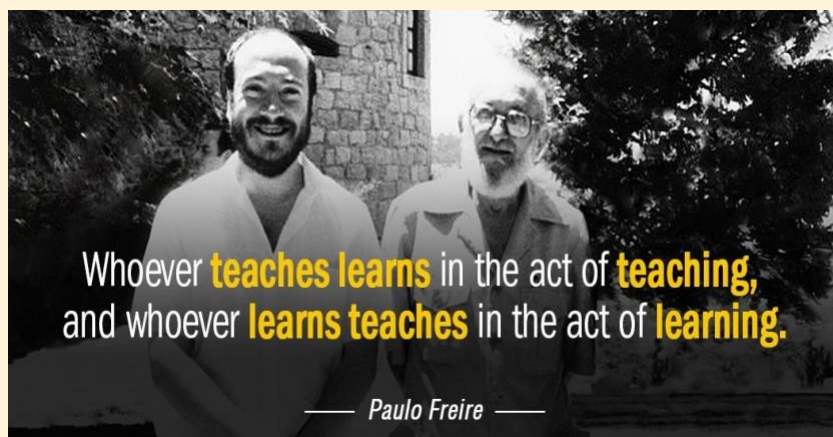
- Create cognate charts
- Create multilingual/bilingual word walls
- Utilize multilingual/bilingual graphic organizers
- Provide students with bilingual dictionaries and/or bilingual picture dictionaries

Reflection

The Translanguaging movement revisits Freire's ideas (1990) and reminds us of the need to directly address, honour, and build upon what students bring with them from their lives outside of school. In view of how

multicultural countries are becoming and how diverse students' backgrounds can be, by adopting translanguaging practices we can normalize multilingual use, speakers, and audiences. However, if we continue perpetuating a monolingual paradigm, we are enforcing target language dominance, which is likely to lead to the perception that the home language is sub-standard and the individuals who are part of the Home Language community are likely to have their identities fractured.

Reflect on your own practice, reconceptualise your praxis, challenge the monolingual perspective, and consider changing your English-only policy. Become a vehicle of social justice and empower learners with Translanguaging. Follow the flow of the *corriente*.



Michelle Ocriciano has been involved in the ELT world for over 20 years. She is currently the Academic Manager of Academia International in sunny Brisbane, Australia. Before that she acted as a teacher and teacher trainer at the University of New South Wales and the University of Queensland. She is a research enthusiast and is always eager to learn from her peers and share her insights. Her interests are varied and include all things linguistic, neuroscience, and leadership and she hopes that all her interests will somehow lead to a world with more social justice.

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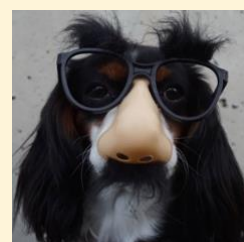
...and funny. Maybe the real battle is not between languages, but rather, between dialects of the same language. So, for Brits who lament how American English has perverted true English, or for Yanks who want to peeve your British colleagues, read Gyles Brandreth's:

38 Americanisms the British Can't Bloody Stand

When he wrote this, Gyles lived in New York (though the current administration might have evicted him), a hotbed of language innovation. As an American, I can somewhat sympathize with his rant, except for one point: Give up on "fortnightly." It deserves to be dead. Then too, some of the Americanisms are really [British](#).  And why is it that everyone seems to love [Australianisms](#)?

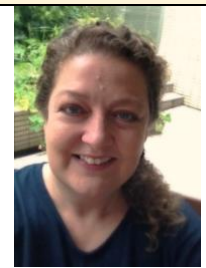
...to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are
equally the undertakings of pride...

Samuel Johnson, 1755



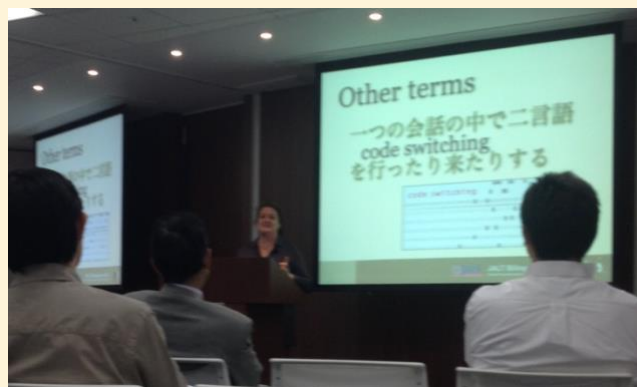
Think Tank: Bilingualism

Mary Nobuoka



In Defense of NNESTs

In recent decades, in many parts of the world, English has become the *lingua franca*. During this time, some regions have adapted English and mixed it with local words and phrases, creating variations that are referred to as “Englishes” (Graddol, 2006). Singlish (or Singapore English) is a famous example of this codeswitching and morphing that occurs in languages. Despite this open and adaptive approach to English language use, linguistic imperialism still exists in TESL and TEFL (Holliday, 2006; Phillipson, 2016)¹; in other words, English language teaching (ELT) still tends to rely on native speakers (NSs). In Japan, particularly, the native-speaker hegemony persists, perhaps to the detriment of the country’s English language acquisition. Thus, the mindset that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are the ultimate English-speaking models should be abandoned and the focus should be more on investing in, training, and utilizing non-native, bilingual English-speaking teachers (NNESTs).



In the late 2000s and early 20-teens, I facilitated a workshop for Japanese teachers of English, mostly from junior and senior high schools, as part the Ministry of Education’s mandatory training for the Teacher License Renewal Program. The focus of the course was pronunciation, but it also included various classroom activities

in speaking, listening, reading, and writing which teachers could take back to use in their classrooms. I always asked the participants if they considered themselves to be bilingual. I was surprised the first year that no one raised their hand. During this eight-hour seminar, I had interacted with these teachers and, in my opinion, almost

¹ Both Holliday (2006) and Phillipson (2016) write about linguistic imperialism and NSs’ role in TESL/TEFL, and liken the former to the concurrent societal challenges against racism and sexism. Both authors argue against using the, “native-non-native speaker distinction,” and labels such as, “native speaker” (NS), “non-native speaker” (NNS), “native English-speaking teacher” (NEST) and “non-native English-speaking teacher” (NNEST), which serve to fix the NS hegemony that still pervades English language education. At the risk of furthering the post-colonial ideology of NS “superiority,” I will use the labels above throughout this article for short-hand convenience.

all of them were bilingual. In subsequent years, maybe one or two teachers who had lived overseas raised their hand to say that they were bilingual. Each year, almost all the teachers did very well in the course. This experience piqued my interest in NNESTs' roles, both as Japanese teachers of English and as non-native speaking assistant language teachers (ALTs) in English teaching in Japan.

What does it mean to be “bilingual”? There are various definitions. The simple one is: someone who speaks two languages. Some people believe that to be a “true bilingual,” one has to have learned the two languages from birth. At the other end of the spectrum, there are passive bilinguals who understand two (or more) languages, but actively speak only one. The paths to bilingualism are varied: We often forget that adults can become bilingual—not just babies. One of the differences in second language acquisition between younger learners and adults is that children learn implicitly, needing more language input, but adults can utilize “explicit learning processes” to achieve “a high level of competence in a non-native language after childhood” (DeKeyser, 2000, p. 520). Indeed, Yow and Li (2015, p. 2), explain how the, “heterogenic nature of bilingualism,” has resulted in inconsistent conclusions in research on executive function comparisons between monolinguals and bilinguals, echoing Ellen Bialystok's contention, in the DEEP [video](#) attached to this Think Tank, that there is a spectrum between monolingualism and bilingualism. For this writing, I will use a broad definition: Bilingual speakers are people who can communicate in two languages. This communication doesn't have to be perfect; no one speaks any language perfectly all the time. The main point of communication is to be able to relay a message effectively. This is why I consider most of the Japanese teachers of English I have encountered to be bilingual.



Japanese primary and secondary educational institutions, both private and public, continue to insist on hiring native speakers for English-language classrooms, despite the evidence that has emerged over the past three decades that NSs are less relevant in international communication (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011; Graddol, 2006). Scholars in TESL and TEFL have questioned, and indeed sometimes denied, the need

for native-speaker (NS) instruction (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011). Graddol (2006, p. 114) asserts: “Native speakers were regarded as the gold standard; as final arbiters of quality and authority” in TEFL. Note the past tense: *were*. Atamturk, Atamturk, and Dimililer (2018) and He and Miller (2011) confirm previous research that language learners prefer qualified NNESTs, for various reasons, including NNESTs’ ability to anticipate difficulties and better aid students, though NESTs were sometimes viewed as having entertainment value.

Japan’s utilization of unqualified native speakers may be a reason why Japan’s English-speaking proficiency ranks the lowest in Asia. Indeed, Japanese students’ mean score is one of the lowest² on the TOEFL iBT® Speaking section among the Asian countries (Educational Testing Service, 2018). Within Japan, only slightly more than half of public high school Japanese teachers of English have reached the Ministry of Education’s goal of passing the Pre-1 stage or better of the *Eiken* exam (Kyodo, 2015).

only 16% of JET ALTs majored in education, and 21% have TESOL certification.

For the past few decades, native speaking assistant language teachers (ALTs) have been hired to teach in junior high and high schools, teamed up with Japanese teachers of English, and more recently in primary schools working solo or under the supervision

of homeroom teachers. ALTs working in Japan’s education system are recruited through private outsourcing companies (about 75%) or via the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme (the remaining 25%) (McCrostie, 2017). Yet few of these ALTs have teacher training prior to coming to Japan and they often have no experience in education (McCrostie, 2017). Indeed, in Yokoyama’s (2018) analysis of hiring practices in the JET Programme, only 16% of JET ALTs majored in education, and only 21% had TESOL certification. ALTs are only required to have a Bachelor’s degree to qualify for a working visa and do not need any background in education or language teaching experience (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011; “Eligibility,” 2015; McCrostie, 2017). Very few ALTs are bilingual nor are they qualified to teach.



Contrary to popular belief, the purpose of the JET Programme is not to provide

² There may be economic factors that skew these results in favor of economically disadvantaged test-takers; in other words, students in wealthier countries can afford to take these types of exam several times, so a larger number of lower proficiency students take the test, perhaps several times, compared with less wealthy countries, where students will wait until their proficiency is high enough to get a good score and only take the test once.

language teachers (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011). Its main goal is to promote intercultural exchange (“Introduction,” 2018; McCrostie, 2017; Yokoyama, 2018). The programme aims to give students and communities in Japan opportunities to interact with young adults from abroad; and, in theory, promote Japan’s image when the young adult ALTs return to their home countries (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011; Yokoyama, 2018). It is part of Japan’s internationalization strategy and soft power approach.

The Japanese government should invest in its NNESTs. According to Alexander McAulay, who has extensive experience developing and running study abroad programmes and is a professor in the Graduate School of International Social Sciences at Yokohama National University: “The money spent on JET could have been far more productively used developing an overseas training system that allowed junior high and high school teachers to spend a year abroad in teacher training” (personal correspondence, July 21, 2019). Indeed, a common complaint I hear among ALTs and parents is that “many” junior high and high school Japanese teachers of English do not have very high English-speaking proficiency. Though this complaint may be exaggerated (as mentioned above more than half of the Japanese teachers of English have passed Grade Pre-1 or Grade 1 of the Eiken exam), some Japanese teachers of English could certainly benefit from training overseas or with non-native speaking bilingual trainers. In addition to English-speaking proficiency, by training overseas, teachers could increase their intercultural communication skills.

Overall, professional, bilingual NNESTs are better role models for their students. In addition, Atamturk, Atamturk and Dimililer (2018) report that NNESTs anticipate their students’ needs and facilitate the learning process because they have also gone through the process of learning another language. This is a major advantage over monolingual NESTs. In addition, in real-life, NNSs are much more likely to be



communicating in English with other NNSs than with NSs (Graddol, 2006). More than three quarters of the worlds’ English speakers are NNSs. Students learning English as a Foreign Language need more exposure to NNSs’ English rather than relying on an NS model.

However, there are weak points that need to be address in the Japanese context. One complaint concerns the pronunciation of English by Japanese teachers of English –

especially the use of so-called “*katakana* English” in the classroom. Takeda (2002) points out that the use of *katakana* (a Japanese syllabary used to transliterate non-Japanese words, which forces the words into the usual consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel pattern characteristic of the Japanese language) to teach English by Japanese teachers of English is a burden for students and not only influences pronunciation but also slows their English reading skills. Tanaka concludes that phonics reading programmes from the junior high level would help to eliminate this problem. Now that English is an official subject in 5th and 6th grades, phonics programmes could be utilized in elementary school English classes for reading, pronunciation, and vocabulary building.

In an interview, Burri (2016) discussed his research on teacher trainees’ perceptions of learning and using pronunciation in the classroom. Using haptic techniques, which include an integrated and kinesthetic approach to pronunciation, Burri found that NNSs can use their, “strong declarative knowledge of the English sound system,” while, “NSs tend to lag behind a bit in this regard” (para 7). He goes on to say that team teaching by one NS and one NNS can be, “mutually beneficial” (para 7). In other words, NESTs can also learn about the pronunciation of their own language beyond their intuitive knowledge. With proper training, both NNESTs and NESTs can be valuable assets in the language-learning classroom (Atamturk, Atamturk, and Dimililer, 2018).

Also, an interesting aspect of English is that the way of pronouncing English words differs greatly among native speakers. One game I like to play with both teachers and students is to use the online [English speech accent archive](#) to figure out whether the speaker is native or not. Interestingly, several of the NS samples available through the archive show they make more mistakes when reading the simple text than the non-native speakers. This site can be used to introduce students to the amazing variety of the pronunciation of English.

Some might claim that NNESTs and EFL students may have difficulty understanding the pronunciation of non-native speakers. Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, and Balasubramanian (2002, p. 175) write that pronunciation-related problems with comprehension are not limited to NNSs: “Unfamiliar accents, both native and non-native, cause difficulty in comprehension for both native and non-native speakers.” It may take a few weeks to adapt an ear to a new accent, but exposure helps the listener to increase comprehension: “Familiarity with a certain foreign accent is what aids listening comprehension” (p. 175). One parent, Jenny, wrote to me about her child, who had a Filipino assistant language teacher in the local Japanese



elementary school. She explained that first her child thought the ALT's English was strange but she "now understands more about the different kinds of English used around the world." On having NNS ALTs Jenny continued: "I don't have a problem with non-native teachers—I think it's more important to have an experienced (and, preferably, qualified) teacher, rather than a human tape recorder."

Another complaint about NNESTs is that they make grammar mistakes. However, native speaking teachers also make mistakes when creating class materials and tests or proofreading them. Peter Collins, who has taught in Japan for over 20 years and worked in faculty development with ALTs to try to get them more involved in teaching, stated that when Japanese teachers of English asked "an ALT what the difference was between two grammar structures or why a multiple-choice test answer was wrong, the ALTs—all well-meaning, dedicated teachers—seldom had any idea" (Personal correspondence, July 31, 2019). Again, having qualified and/or properly trained NESTs would improve the quality of language teaching in Japan.



One of the reasons NS are not the best role models in the EFL classroom is their vast vocabulary. Some native speakers—including NESTs—may fail to adjust their teacher talk for the limited vocabulary of their students and see the NNS as "a defective communicator" (Takatsuka, 1999, p. 128). NSs tend to use idiomatic expressions that



hinder comprehension for language learners (Graddol, 2006). Worse, most NSs unconsciously use metaphors in everyday speech at an average rate of six to ten per minute (Geary, 2019). This type of speaking is beyond the range of even highly proficient language learners and even many bilingual speakers, and will greatly reduce language students' listening comprehension. Language teachers need to accommodate their students' language proficiency "It is a skill you are obliged to deploy in ethical intercultural communication" (McAulay, personal correspondence, July 21, 2019). Unfortunately, Japanese students tend to blame themselves when they do not understand NSs', NS ALTs' or NESTs' English, even though "communication is a collaborative endeavor" (Takatsuka, 1999).



While there is no single reason for Japan's relatively poor performance in English acquisition, one issue is Japan's insistence on using native English speakers, often monolinguals, as role models. Japan needs to reform its English education policies and embrace qualified, bilingual non-native speakers, whether Japanese or non-Japanese, rather than relying on inexperienced, unqualified, and expensive native speakers. NS competence is not needed in order to be bilingual. I also hope that qualified NS teachers in Japan will reflect on their own practices, help Japan overcome its binary native speaker/non-native speaker mindset and move beyond the English hegemony that still exists here. Perhaps in the near future Japanese people will create one of their own Englishes and increase the number of bilingual speakers here. We all need to *ganbaru*!

Mary Nobuoka has been teaching in Japan for 25 years and currently teaches at Keio University and Waseda University. She has facilitated teacher development workshops for junior high and high school Japanese teachers of English and also teaches English literacy for bilingual, elementary-school students. She was formerly the coordinator of the Bilingualism Special Interest Group of the Japan Association for Language Teaching.

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Plus: Paper Review

Pauline Bunce

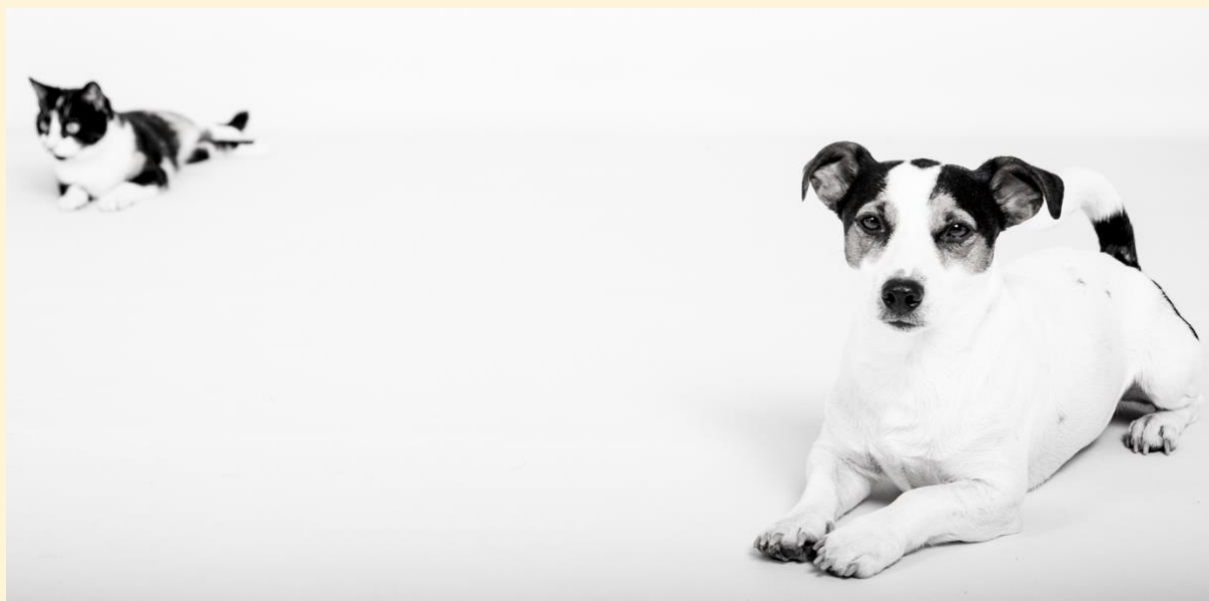


A Review of Ingrid Piller's "Monolingual Ways of Seeing Multilingualism"

Piller, I. (2016). Monolingual ways of seeing multilingualism. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 11(1), 25 – 33. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2x9isgO>

For many speakers of the world's major languages, the addition of a second or third language is often a deliberate choice. For speakers of more "minor" languages, multilingualism is a daily necessity. Therefore, by definition, is "bilingualism" something that seems to characterize the privileged, and is "multilingualism" something that is necessitated by the daily circumstances of the less privileged? A corpus of published research in this field would suggest so.

Following a detailed paper by Tony Liddicoat (2016) in the same publication, Ingrid Piller opens her article with his finding that only 7% of all the research references cited in his huge corpus on multilingualism research had been written in languages other than English. She observes that publishing in this field is, by and large, "a monolingual affair" (p. 25), and she goes on to explore what she sees as the reasons behind this linguistic imbalance.



Piller is a multilingual Australian sociolinguist, and her examination of monolingual ways of seeing multilingualism is quite a sobering read. Piller points out that so much that is written about multilingualism comes via an English monolingual lens (what Gogolin, 1997, called the *monolingual habitus*). Essentially, she argues that what we see echoes what we *expect* to see, based on our own starting points.

Piller elaborates three facets of what she calls “monolingual ways of seeing multilingualism.”

First, she calls out an apparently “generic and context-free multilingualism,” in which a daily proficiency in several languages is too often seen as a particular linguistic *condition*, rather than as a *norm* for the majority of people in the world. Furthermore, she disputes the notion of the “bilingual mind” because of the infinite variety of linguistic contexts and practices at work across the globe. These may include language status, speaker status, national histories, individual proficiencies, and institutional contexts (p. 26). By over-theorizing about multilingualism, such diversity is frequently erased and too often replaced by notions of “serial” or “parallel monolingualisms”—often involving English or other major world languages—and published in English.



Piller’s second criticism of “monolingual ways of seeing” is what she calls a focus on “the perpetual present”—an outlook that emanates from recent history and the modern era of ethnically and linguistically homogenous nation-states. As she puts it, this is “taking the ‘unmixed’ state as the norm against which multilingualism should be understood” (p. 28). But multilingualism is not novel—only a modern Eurocentric view has rendered it so. This has led to it being researched and theorized in new and ahistorical ways, “overlooking historical and contemporary research where multilingualism might have been the normal and unproblematic experience” (p. 30). Here, she attributes the coining of new terms such as *translanguaging*,

metrolingualism and *polylingualism* to a perceived need to describe these apparently new phenomena (p. 28).

“most research reports are “packaged” to be read with the nuances and assumptions inherent in that language.

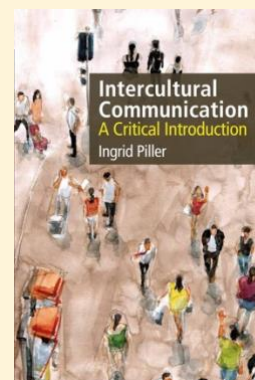
Piller’s third problem with “monolingual ways of seeing” is what she terms an English-language “research-product focus.” Such is the undeniable power and reach of academic research written in English, that most research reports are “packaged” to be read in that language, by readers of that language, via the

nuances and assumptions inherent in that language.

I found this paper to be really thought-provoking, both personally and professionally. I hesitate to call myself fully “bilingual”, even though I am communicatively competent in my second language (Malay). My Malaysian friends are mostly trilingual, with many knowing a fourth (or more) language. The ease with which they move between languages in this multilingual country is an unremarkable and absolutely normal part of daily life. This is not the case here in Anglocentric Australia, nor in many other English-dominant societies, where the use of “other languages” is openly remarked upon—both positively and negatively—as something out of the ordinary, and something worthy of research.

It is vitally important that we keep an open mind when it comes to overly definitive research reports in this field. There is no one bilingual person or pattern. I am certain that my bilingual brain will differ markedly from that of my trilingual Malaysian friends—as well as from those millions of multilingual individuals who hail from the world’s indigenous communities, who, out of necessity and social power dynamics, must operate in five or more languages on a daily basis. Daily, unremarkable multilingual living is a far cry from monolingual calls for various forms of “bilingual education,” and it is rather unfortunate that the two are often discussed together.

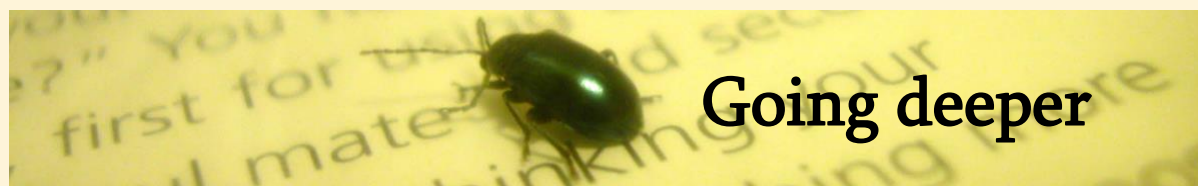
Ingrid Piller is an author and Professor of Applied Linguistics at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. She serves as editor-in-chief of the international sociolinguistics journal [*Multilingua*](#). Her sociolinguistics portal, [Language on the Move](#), is a vast resource on multilingualism, and is well worth a visit.



Pauline Bunce is an Australian teacher of English as an Additional Language to young adults. She has taught in Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Sri Lanka, and Hong Kong. For her doctoral thesis, *Alphabet Headaches: Hong Kong's English Literacy Challenge*, she researched the phonological awareness of 778 local Chinese secondary students. She has published and presented widely on the specific needs of biscriptal English language learners and her handbook, *According to the Script* (2016), has been widely used in Australia.

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Interestingly, we just discovered that an article we had already tagged for mention in this issue was written by none other than... Ingrid Piller! The article is on Dr. Van Tran’s research on how to raise bilingual children:

[Secrets of bilingual parenting success](#)





Plus: Future Issues

Think Tank Staff



Call for Contributions: Ideas & Articles

We need help! Here are some of the future issue topics we are thinking about. Would you, or anyone you know, like to write about any of these? Or is there another topic you'd like to recommend? Do you have any suggestions for lead-in, or just plain interesting, videos? How about writing a book review? [Contact us](#).

In regard to writing, keep in mind that what we want most is:

- Engaging writing, not dense academic
- Some information from brain sciences
- Expanding on or reacting to the intro video

Think Tanks for the rest of the year

Vocabulary (enough writers)	lead in video?
Cognitive Load	lead in?
Maslow's Contributions (room for one more writer, especially re brain)	lead in?
Jan 1 Special Issue: a (single) experience that changed my thinking	looking

Future Think Tanks – note the lead ins are still very tentative

Self-Efficacy (needs writers)	lead in?
Evidence-based Techniques (Interleaving, Hattie, etc)	lead in?
Stress	lead in?
Drama	looking
Embodiment	looking
Problems with Research	lead in?
Positive Psychology	lead in?
Predictive Processing	lead in?
Brain Waves	lead in?
Motivation	looking
Stories	lead in?
Study Habits, Self-control	lead in?
Movement	looking
Mindsets	looking
Social Brain	lead in?
Children	looking
Learning theories	looking
UDL	looking
Depression	lead in?
Plasticity	lead in?
Food and Gut	looking

A Message from our Co-producer:



- Risa Hiramatsu

The Bilingualism Special Interest Group (SIG) consists of about 200 JALT members and newsletter subscribers, many of whom are raising or educating multi-lingual children. Our goal is to further investigate bilingualism as it happens in Japan. We also encourage mutual help amid our followers via our bi-monthly newsletter, academic journal, and an energetic email list.

Parents in global marriages, people who converse in more than one language, and instructors of polyglot learners all exploit the applied and theoretical data accessible through our group.

The term “bilingual” implies numerous ideas to countless people. We define it as an umbrella expression to denote people and groups who utilize two (or more) languages frequently, and who thus have certain attachments to various cultures. The ways in which such people handle and use language is the focus of our investigations. We are also extremely focused on expanding opportunities for our children to learn languages.

Some of ongoing research themes include:

- Family rules regarding bilingualism
- Bilingual and bicultural identity
- Codeswitching and language blending
- Bilingual language learning

A Message from Kelly Ibanez (p.19 graphic):

My name is Kelly Ibanez, M.S., CCC-SLP, and I am a bilingual speech-language pathologist in Los Angeles, CA, USA. I created the "Myths vs. Facts: Bilingual Language Acquisition" infographic because I work with culturally and linguistically diverse populations. In my practice, both parents and professionals frequently ask questions about the impact of bilingualism on language development. Many people initially believe the myths and are surprised when I show them the facts.

I also created a Spanish version of the image because I serve Spanish-speaking families and have collaborated with numerous professionals who have translated it into other languages as well. My goal is for this infographic to be shared worldwide to spread the knowledge that bilingualism is helpful and not harmful when developing language. [Hola Blog.](#)

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