

Multilingual True or False

Corey Heller
Multilingual Living
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Introduction...



- Corey Heller
- Founder of Multilingual Living
- Raising children in German and English

Waar of Onwaar...

- A bilingual is someone who has equal mastery of both languages.

FALSE

What is a Bilingual?

Professor Grosjean's definition of a bilingual:

“Bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives.”

- Note:
 - The emphasis is on regular use, not fluency
 - This includes dialects
 - It applies to two or more languages (multilingual)

Corey's Comments:

The point here is that the term bilingual is not limited to only a certain group of people. Bilingualism is fluid and will change and develop over time.

If we tend to use more than one language in our daily lives (even if not each and every day) with general comfort, then we should feel confident saying that we are bilingual.

Waar of Onwaar...

- Raising children in more than one language confuses them.

FALSE

Corey's Comments:

There is absolutely no evidence that bilingualism confuses children (even if WE think that they are confused when they mix languages, etc.). It does not burden them or overwork their brains.

Waar of Onwaar...

- Bilingual children start speaking at the same ages as monolingual children.



TRUE

Corey's Comments:

Studies have shown over and over again that children who grow up with more than one language start speaking within the same age ranges as monolingual children.

Multilingual children do NOT have language delay more often than monolingual children. This is a myth. Bilingual children who are not speaking within the normal age range should be checked by a medical professional (start with a hearing test).

Waar of Onwaar...

- When it comes to second language learning, there is a “language window” which closes at a specific age.

FALSE

Corey's Comments:

The “language window” that we hear about applies only to “speech perception” (which means our ability to recognize different verbal sounds). It is believed that young children are primed for learning the sounds of a language.

There is a much greater likelihood that our children will have native accents in each language if they learn their languages before age 7. However, this is no guarantee and even adults have been able to learn a language with a native accent.

Waar of Onwaar...

- Adults learn languages faster than children.



Corey's Comments:

When it comes to learning the elements of language, adults are much faster. Adults are able to apply their understanding of language rules (grammar, syntax, etc.) to a new language.

The benefit to starting language learning is not so much the speed of learning as the emotional association with the language(s) that are learned when we are young. Plus, to gain fluency in a language, we must be exposed to it and use it over as long a period as possible.

Waar of Onwaar...

- Children with language disorders should only be exposed to one language at a time.

FALSE

Corey's Comments:

Language/speech disorders have nothing to do with the number of languages a child is exposed to. It has to do with underlying developmental issues that manifest via language(s).

Many speech-language therapists recommend that families switch to one language until the disorder has been resolved. However, this can have far-reaching impacts on the family. It is encouraged that the family find a bilingual speech-language therapist for a second opinion and/or treatment.

Waar of Onwaar...

- True bilinguals never mix or switch between languages.

FALSE

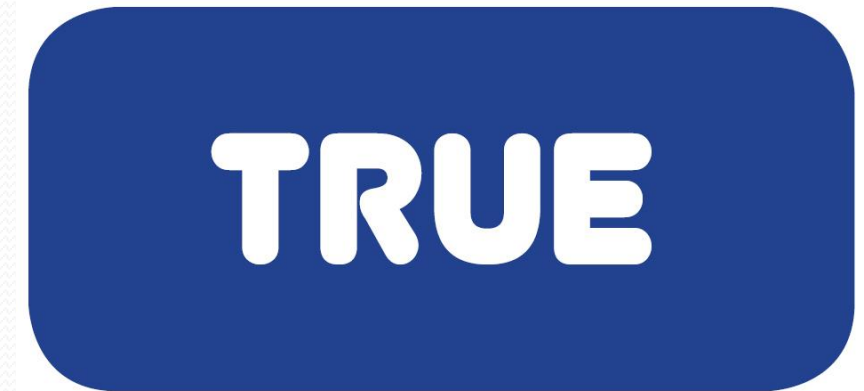
Corey's Comments:

When children are very young, they are testing out words in their languages and may very well mix languages without realizing it. Often this is because they have only learned a target word in one language or the other. However, this usually passes quickly as more and more vocabulary is learned in each language.

Studies show that language mixing is often a sign of mastery of more than one language and is seen as healthy manipulation of languages.

Waar of Onwaar...

- It is best to be exposed to languages when we are young.



Corey's Comments:

The main reasons we should be exposed to languages when we are young is because of the emotional and cognitive development which takes place over a long period of time.

Studies show that our brain “saves” languages in the same area when we learn them at the same time as children.

Language mastery and cognitive benefits come from many years of exposure to languages and our continual use of them. This means that it is important to start as early as possible and to continue.

Waar of Onwaar...

- The only way to raise bilingual children is with the One-Parent-One-Language (OPOL) method.

FALSE

Corey's Comments:

Although the OPOL and mL@H (minority language at home) methods are exceptional ways to raise children in more than one language, they are not the only ways. Families should not be discouraged from raising children bilingually if they can not implement OPOL or mL@H methods.

Some other methods are using the language on certain days, having a nanny use the language with children, using the language during specific times of the day. However, remember that the more consistent, quality language exposure your children receive, the better.

Waar of Onwaar...

- It is best to continue speaking a home language even if it is different from the school language.



TRUE

Corey's Comments:

It is important that families use language that they feel comfortable using with their children, even if these languages are different from the school language!

As children's brains grow and develop in complexity, so does their need for more complex concepts, structures and vocabulary. Once these concepts are learned, they can be transferred between languages (regardless of which language was used to teach it). Think of an iceberg with two peaks (languages) sticking out of the water. The bulk of the iceberg (concepts) is under the water and both peaks share and benefit from the same ice underneath.

Waar of Onwaar...

- Research shows that there are benefits to growing up bilingually.



Corey's Comments:

Read The Benefits of Multilingualism here:

<http://www.multilingualliving.com/2010/05/01/the-benefits-of-multilingualism/>

GET STARTED here:

<http://www.multilingualliving.com/getting-started/>

- Make sure you are on track by following the 5 steps to getting started with living multilingually. This is for ourselves as well as for raising children!

Benefits of Multilingualism...

- Better language proficiency in **both** languages
- Larger vocabulary in **both** languages
- Better problem-solvers
- Better listening abilities
- Clearer memories of past events
- Unique neural connections
- Better verbal skills
- Better spatial skills
- Can deal better with multiple tasks
- Better mental dexterity
- Enhanced metalinguistic understanding
- Learn additional languages easier
- Better manipulate and use language in different situations
- broader cultural understanding
- Not restricted to a single world view
- Overall, a decrease in racism, xenophobia and intolerance
- Intercultural
- Better school and job prospects
- Better communication skills overall = better jobs
- Tend to do better in school (mastery in languages)

Source: “The Benefits of Multilingualism” by Michał B. Paradowski

Cognitive benefits

- Professor Bialystok from York University, Toronto
 - "Being able to use two languages and never knowing which one you're going to use right now rewires your brain."
 - "The attentional executive system which is crucial for all higher thought (it's the most important cognitive piece in how we think) - that system seems to be enhanced."
 - "The longer people have spoken multiple languages, the greater the cognitive effects."
 - "There are even benefits when languages were taken up at later ages. We have not seen a cutoff."
 - "Bilingual children have on average a smaller vocabulary in each of their languages than monolingual children."

Source: news.discovery.com/human/bilingualism-language-brain-function.html

Corey's Comments:

During the talk I gave, someone pointed out the discrepancy between Prof. Paradowski's findings that bilingual children have a larger vocabulary in **both** languages, while Prof. Bialystok states that children tend to have **smaller** vocabulary in each language. I didn't answer this fully during the talk...

The reason for this discrepancy has primarily to do with the ages of the participants in the studies, how vocabulary was evaluated, etc.

Some studies have shown that young children tend to have smaller vocabulary in each language while older children and adults tend to have a greater vocabulary in both languages.

Much of this has to do with the benefit of transference between languages over time: we learn a word in one language for something and then use the translated word in the other language; we learn a concept in one language and apply it in the other language. This happens naturally and organically over time, not something that we have to focus on doing.

This points out the limits to research and how different approaches can reveal very different results. Thus, I always encourage families to approach research on bilingualism cautiously before basing their language decisions on it.

Key Points

- **Exposure**
 - At least 30-40% of the time for each language to achieve highest proficiency in language (multilinguals must be more creative)
- **Need**
 - There must be a need for your children to learn the language. If you don't see the need, they won't see the need!
- **Enjoyment**
 - Don't make it an effort and a task. Do not embarrass your children by scolding them for saying something wrong or having them show off their language skills.
- **Consistency (not rigidity)**
 - Come up with a plan, stick with it. Yet be willing to make changes as necessary.
- **Comfort**
 - Don't try to force yourself into speaking a language if you don't want to. Your children will notice!

Questions?

