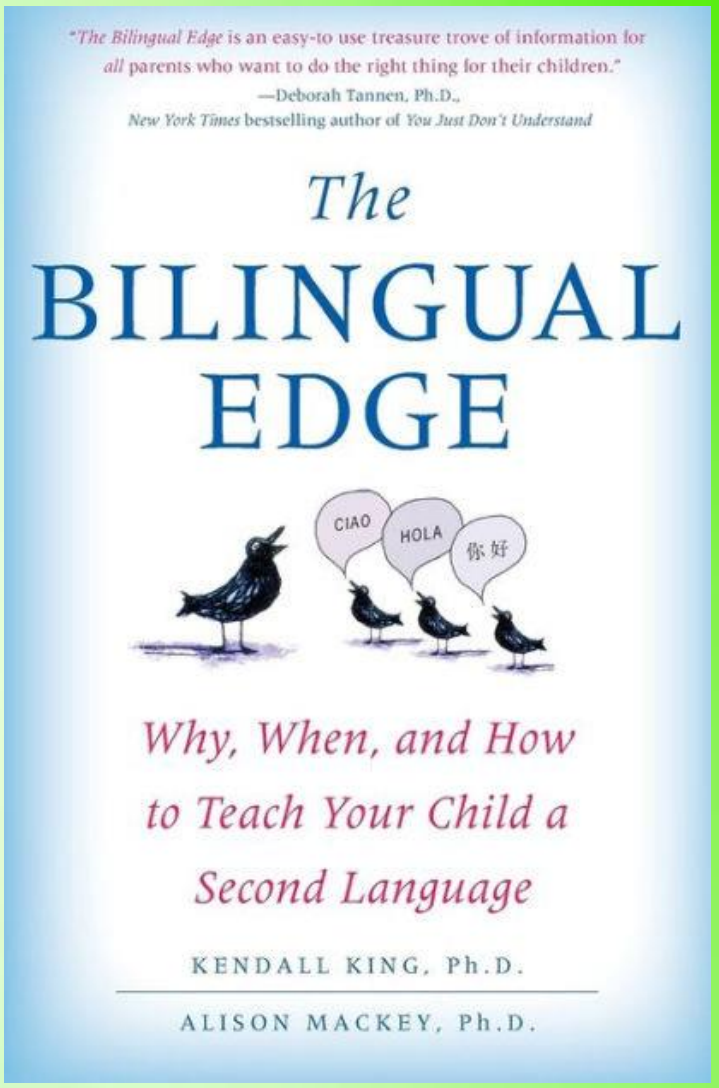
Bilingual Education / Learning Multiple Languages



The percentage of people who are fluent in two or more languages: 20% of Americans
66% of Europeans

There are real and measurable cognitive advantages to being bilingual.

- They are found in the areas of creative writing, flexible thinking, metalinguistic awareness (being able to decode different types of jokes, metaphors), cross-cultural understanding, preserving cultural identity for mixed families, building self-esteem and self-confidence and future career opportunities, etc.
  - An example of the type of creative thinking bilingual's have been assessed with:
    "How many ways could you use an empty water bottle?" On these sorts of tests, bilinguals tend to produce more answers and also more creative answers. For instance, for the water bottle question, most of us would come up with the obvious answer ("filling it with water"), but bilinguals are more likely to come up with other answers too, like "filling it with sand and making a paperweight." Overall, bilinguals outperform monolinguals on most tests like these, most of the time. Something about knowing more than one language seems to make children both more creative and what researchers describe as more mentally flexible."

To enjoy the advantages of bilingualism, proficiency in both languages is needed.

In an assessment of executive function tasks, bilingualists were both quicker to complete their task and more accurate in their completion.

Different languages are like different computer programs/platforms (example: mircosoft, apple)

What studies tell us

- Most children go through a period of language mixing. It's normal
- Babies are inherently talented in distinguishing subtle differences between similar sounds in foreign languages which enable them to learn any language they are exposed to.
  - (e.g. L and R sounds in Japanese or two separate T sounds in Indian)
- There does exist a "the critical period"; that is, children are better at learning when they're young, but this innate language learning ability does not disappear suddenly after hitting a certain age.
  - "Learning a language from a young age is advantageous because older children, adolescents, and adults have to deal with higher expectations and more sophisticated social situations while learning a second language." (page 57)
- First born children are significantly better at learning a second language compared with 2nd or 3rd born's.
  - It is mostly because first born's get more attention and also have more exposure to their parents' language whereas 2nd and 3rd children are likely to be exposed to the dominant local language more often.

- Additionally, gender is a factor in language learning. The study (Bauer, 2002) found that girls are significantly better than boys in terms of vocabulary and comprehension because girls have a longer attention span at earlier ages and their brains mature faster.
- Another factor that contributes to children's language learning is temperament or sensitivity.
  - Extravert and social kids interact more with other kids thus learn a language faster while introvert kids don't want to play with other kids and consequently learn a language in a slower pace.

- Aptitude (a child's genetic ability to learn a language) is also very important. Research shows that kids who are good in learning their first language are likely to be more adept in learning another language.
- How much language exposure is needed? Children need to be exposed to their 2nd language at least 20% of the time
  - In other words, even if parents talk to their children in the target language about one fifth of their waking time, the children can be proficient in the second language.

M y t h s

- Learning a 2nd language does NOT cause speech delays or cognitive problems
  - *Almost all of the myths about bilingualism have one thing in common: they are not based on scientific studies. There's no scientific study that says bilingual kids mix up languages or become late talkers.*
- Baby Sign language does NOT make babies smarter