

Speaking More Than One Language Could **Sharpen** Your Brain

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Skip the sudoku, try learning French

Speaking more than one language **does the brain some good**.

(1) A recent study found that bilingual speakers may actually process information more efficiently than single-language speakers. Researchers from Northwestern University, in Illinois, and the University of Houston used **brain imaging** to look at bilingual people's comprehension abilities. They found that people who speak more than one language are comparatively better at **filtering out** unnecessary words than monolinguals, whose brains showed that they had to work harder to complete the same mental tasks.

(2) The study, published in the journal *Brain and Language*, used **functional magnetic resonance imaging** (fMRI) to look at what's called **coactivation** and **inhibition** in the brain. Coactivation is the ability to have both languages simultaneously active in the brain, while inhibition is that ability to select a correct language while hearing more than one at a time. The researchers studied 17 Spanish-English bilinguals and 18 monolinguals, and had them **undergo** tests that **assessed** their brains' ability to eliminate irrelevant words.

(3) For example, in one task the participants heard the word *cloud* and were then immediately shown four pictures. One of the photos was of a cloud, and another was a similar-sounding word like *clown*. The goal was to watch how quickly the brain could make connections to the correct word. Bilinguals were **consistently** better at the task.

(4) The results create a bit of a **chicken-or-the-egg scenario**. Is a bilingual person better at such tasks because of their expertise in both languages, or are people with greater comprehension capacity better **equipped** to **master** multiple languages? It could be a mixture of the two. The researchers of the new study believe that being bilingual is a constant brain exercise. So instead of **tackling** a puzzle, why not **give a new language a shot**, if not **solely** for the brain challenge.

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The Secret to Learning a Foreign Language as an Adult

Oct. 2, 2014

CEO David Bailey describes how he taught himself French in only 17 days

Answer by [David Bailey](#), CEO of Spotnight, on [Quora](#).

- (5) I've learned several foreign languages as an adult. I was able to learn French to conversation fluency in 17 days using the following techniques. Note that I had previously learned Spanish to fluency so this was not my first foreign language.
- (6) In summer of 2005 I stayed with a French friend in a **tiny** village in the Beaujolais region of France. No one in the village spoke English and, since my friend knew I had an ambitious learning goal, she refused to speak to me in English as well.
- (7) I **set up a routine** where I did the same things every day.
- (8) In the mornings, I woke up and wrote out **longhand** the regular and irregular verb tables for 1.5-2 hours. I managed **to get through** an entire **pad of paper** in two weeks. I still believe that writing things out by hand is the best way to memorize things.
- (9) While I wrote, I would listen to Michel Thomas' language learning mp3s. On the CDs you listen as he teaches French to other English speakers. It's really helpful to hear other students make mistakes that you can learn from, just like a regular classroom environment. In two weeks I listened to the foundation, advanced and language building courses twice.
- (10) I would run for 45-60 minutes in the early afternoon in the French countryside listening to **catchy** French music. Music is a great way to learn the intonation of a language and **train** your facial muscles as you sing along.
- (11) I had lunch with my friend and her French friends every day. As they refused **to slow down** when speaking to me in French, it was learn or **starve**!
- (12) In the afternoon, if I wasn't playing **darts** or Boules with my French friends, I was reading "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" in French. Reading the children's books you read as a child is a great **hack** to learning new languages. Firstly, the language used is simple and secondly, knowing the story helps you to guess the meaning of new words and avoid using a dictionary. Surprisingly children's books are more entertaining in a foreign language.
- (13) I spent at least an hour writing basic **essays** about myself which I had my French friend check for errors. When you meet new people you inevitably get asked the same things: "Where are you from?", "What do you do?", "Do you like France?". By learning **ready-made** answers, you get to practice what you learned and **build up** your **confidence**.
- (14) Another good **tip** is to learn the **filler words**. These are the words and phrases people say all the time between sentences (*alors, en fait*, etc.) but have no real meaning, allowing you **to buy time** in a conversation and increase your confidence.
- (15) After 17 days I left the small town and went to Paris. I met a girl in a coffee shop and we started talking. After a few minutes, she asked how long I had lived in France. When I told her I had been learning French for 17 days, she **swore** that I had lived in France for at least a year.
- (16) Hopefully there are some useful tips you can use in your learning. Let me know and *bonne chance*!

Activities Part 1 Skip the sudoku, try learning French

1) Reading comprehension questions

- 1) What did a recent study find?
- 2) What did researchers use to look at people's comprehension abilities?
- 3) What are speakers of more than one language better at?
- 4) How do monolinguals' brain work with unnecessary words?
- 5) What are coactivation and inhibition?
- 6) How did the test for the study work?
- 7) Why do the results create a chicken-or-the-egg scenario?

2) Find verbs in the text which mean the same as:

	keys
1) evaluate, estimate, judge	
2) supply with equipment, provide with attributes	
3) ignore, refine	
4) become expert	
5) improve and refine skills	
6) omit, pass by, avoid	
7) try, undertake, embark on, devote oneself to	
8) experience, be subject to, go through	

3) Can you explain the following expressions in your own words?

a) to do something some good	
b) chicken-or-the-egg scenario	
c) to give something a shot	
d) similar-sounding	

4) Complete the table below. Then use some of the adjectives and adverbs to write a summary of the reading (Part 1)

adjective	adverb of manner
actual	
	efficiently
comparative	
consistent	
	solely
immediate	
necessary	
	simultaneously
quick	
great	
recent	
	hardly
correct	
	similarly

Activities Part 2 The secret to learning a foreign language as an adult

1) Reading comprehension questions

- 1) Why was it relatively easy for David Bailey to learn French?
- 2) Why did he choose to go to a small village to learn French?
- 3) Do you agree that writing things by hand helps us memorize better? Do you do this?
- 4) What two things did he do while listened to French? Why do you think he did so much listening?
- 5) Give examples of how he practiced the other language skills of speaking, writing and reading.

SKILLS	Speaking	Writing	Reading
Where was he?			
What did he do?			
Why was it important to do this?			

- 6) What are *filler words*? Can you give some examples of filler words in English? Do you use them?
- 7) David Bailey is an example of a proficient language learner. Is his advice useful for common linguistic mortals?
- 8) In your opinion, which is the best tip David gives in the article, and why is it useful?

2) Match the adjectives with their synonyms:

1. catchy	a) valuable, cooperative, advantageous, favourable
2. entertaining	b) small, microscopic, little
3. helpful	c) memorable, appealing, engaging, tuneful, singable
4. tiny	d) funny, amusing, enjoyable

3) Try to explain the following expressions in your own words:

a) to set up a routine	
b) to write out longhand	
c) learn or starve!	
d) a great hack to learning new languages	
e) ready-made answers	
f) build up your confidence	
g) to buy time in a conversation	

4) Enhance your vocabulary: starting from the first two initial letters, try to guess the words related to *learning a foreign language* used in the two texts:

ad	(adj.)
an	(n.)
bi	(adj.)
cl	(n.)
co	(n.)
co	(n.)
co	(n.)
di	(n.)
er	(n.)
es	(n.)
fl	(n.)
fo	(adj.)
fo	(n.)
in	(n.)
ir	(adj.)
le	(v.)
li	(v.)
me	(n.)
mi	(n.)
ph	(n.)
pr	(v.)
re	(v.)
se	(n.)
sp	(n.)
ta	(n.)
te	(v.)
wo	(n.)
wr	(v.)