Cognitive benefits of learning additional languages

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Research has shown that there are many benefits to learning a language in addition to a native language. First, knowledge of an additional language improves the learning skills and abilities important for learning subsequent languages (e.g., Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Bartolotti & Marian, 2012). Second, the learning of additional languages has also been shown to have positive effects on native language skills (e.g., Swain & Lapkin, 1982; Turnbull, Hart & Lapkin, 2000) as well as non-language domains including mathematics (e.g., Turnbull et al., 2000). Third, there is extensive research pointing to the cognitive advantages of being bi-/multilingual (see Bialystok, 2011 for an overview). For example, bilingual children and adults have been found to outperform their monolingual peers in terms of cognitive control when executing complex tasks (e.g., Yang, Yang & Lust, 2011; Bialystok, Poarch, Luo & Craik, 2014). In terms of this particular advantage, it should be noted that, while these benefits have been observed in many studies, concerns about a possible publication bias favouring studies with positive results over those with mixed or negative results have been expressed (de Bruijn, Treccani & Della Sala, 2014). Further evidence reported for the benefits of bilingualism suggests that it may delay the onset of cognitive loss in later adulthood including Alzheimer’s disease (e.g., Bialystok, Craik, Binns, Ossher & Freedman, 2013).

References


