

80 Amazing Benefits of Language Learning (Part 1)

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There are just a few things in this world which make me angry and sad at the same time. But the one that takes the cake is reading almost every month for the past few years that soon, oh so very soon, learning languages will become obsolete.

Sure, it is pointless. Why bother? The technology will solve the problem of interlingual communication. So better not waste your time. You'll be better-off watching re-runs of The Kardashians.

How many people have given up even before they started? Without even realizing that many, oh so many, years will pass before any translation software or magical devices will be able to do a half-decent job.

But is it really only about communication? Have you ever wondered what other benefits language learning has to offer?

The following list includes 80 benefits of language learning. Some obvious, some surprising. I've been hand-picking them for many months from different scientific sources.

The list is a work in progress. I'll keep on updating it every couple of months. Feel free to me if you spot somewhere some benefit which is not on the list.

It's also worth noting that there is a large body of research to confirm each of these benefits. Although, I usually quote results of just one or two studies to keep this list more concise.

Purpose Of The List

The main purpose of this list is to make you realize how beneficial language learning is. I hope that such knowledge will help to pull you through all language-learning plateaus.

What's more, I also hope that it will help you to inspire others to pursue language learning. Your children, spouse, parents. It's never too late.

Treat it as a language-learning manifesto. Print it, hang it on the wall. And every time you feel like giving up, hug your dictionary and stare at this list for a couple of minutes.

If you learn a foreign language...

1. Your Brain Will Grow

Johan Martensson's [research](#) shows that after three months of studying a foreign language, learners' brains grew in four places: the hippocampus, middle frontal gyrus, inferior frontal gyrus, and superior temporal gyrus (gyri are ridges on the cerebral cortex).

What happens when you learn languages for more than 3 months and you're serious about it?

The right hippocampus and the left superior temporal gyrus were structurally more malleable in interpreters acquiring higher proficiency in the foreign language. Interpreters struggling relatively more to master the language displayed larger gray matter increases in the middle frontal gyrus

References:

(Johan Mårtensson, Johan Eriksson, Nils Christian Bodammer, Magnus Lindgren, Mikael Johansson,

Lars Nyberg, Martin Lövdén (2012). "[Growth of language-related brain areas after foreign language learning](#)".)

2. You Will Have Better Memory

According to [research](#) conducted by Julia Morales of Spain's Granada University, children who learn a second language are able to recall memories better than monolinguals, or speakers of just one language.

When asked to complete memory-based tasks, Morales and her team found that those who had knowledge of multiple languages worked both faster and more accurately.

The young participants who spoke a second language had a clear advantage in working memory. Their brains worked faster, pulling information and identifying problems in a more logical fashion.

When your brain is put through its paces and forced to recall specific words in multiple languages, it develops strength in the areas responsible for storing and retrieving information.

References:

(Julia Morales, Alejandra Calvo, Ellen Bialystok (2013). "[Working memory development in monolingual and bilingual children](#)".)

3. You Will Have Better Listening Skills

Do you remember how hard listening was at the beginning of the language journey? Pure nightmare! And since the brain has to work really hard to distinguish between different types of sounds in different languages, being bilingual leads to improved listening skills ([Krizman et al., 2012](#)).

Further references:

Lapkin, et al 1990, Ratte 1968.

4. You Will Have Higher Verbal and Non-verbal Intelligence

In 1962, Peal and Lambert published a study where they found that people who are at least conversationally fluent in more than one language consistently beat monolinguals on tests of verbal and nonverbal intelligence.

Bilinguals showed significant advantage especially in non-verbal tests that required more mental flexibility.

References:

Peal E., Lambert M. (1962). "The relation of bilingualism to intelligence". *Psychological Monographs* 75(546): 1–23.

5. Your Attention Span Will Improve

Study from 2010 shows that bilinguals have stronger control over their attention and are more capable of limiting distractions.

When asked to concentrate on a task, the study's bilingual participants showed an increased ability to tune out distractions and concentrate on the given task.

They were also better equipped to interpret the work before them, eliminating unnecessary information and working on only what was essential.

References:

Ellen Bialystok, Fergus I. M. Craik (2010). "[Cognitive and Linguistic Processing in the Bilingual Mind](#)".

6. You Will Slow Down Cognitive Decline

Great news everyone! The recent evidence suggests a positive impact of bilingualism on cognition.

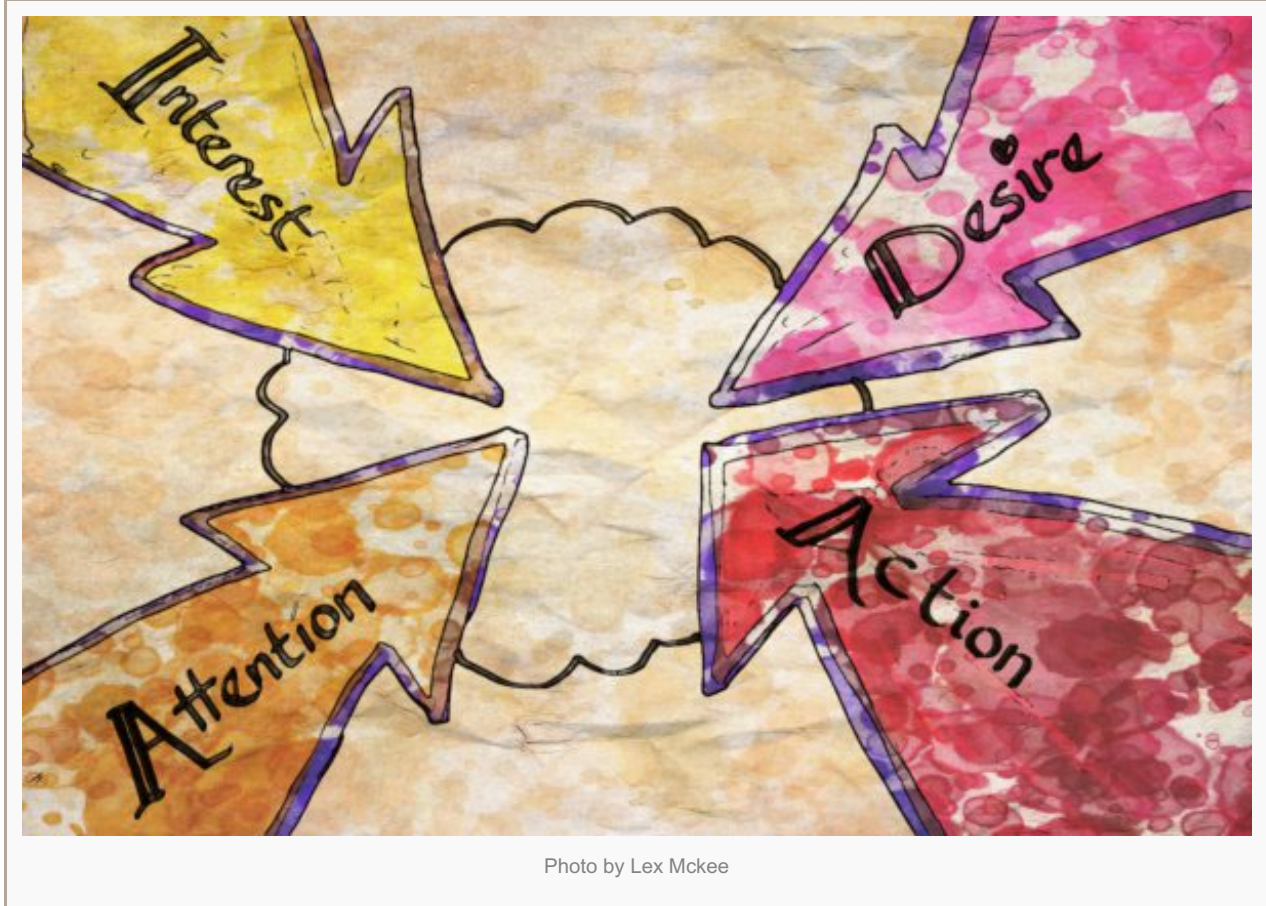
So what exactly does it mean?

The research found that individuals who speak two or more languages, regardless of their education level, gender or occupation, experience the onset of Alzheimer's, on average, 4 1/2 years later than monolingual subjects did.

What's more, even people who acquired the second language in adulthood can enjoy this benefit!

References:

Thomas H. Bak, Jack J. Nissan, Michael M. Allerhand, Ian J. Deary (2014). "[Does bilingualism](#)



[influence cognitive aging?](#)".

7. You Will Be Better At Multitasking

I'm not a fan of multitasking since it's harmful to your productivity.

However, according to [research](#) conducted by Brian Gold, learning a language increases brain flexibility, making it easy to switch tasks in just seconds. Study participants were better at adapting and were able to handle unexpected situations much better than monolinguals.

That's great. But the real question is – **why were they better?**

The plausible explanation is that when we learn a new language, we frequently jump between our familiar first language and the new one, making connections to help us retain what we're learning.

This linguistic workout activates different areas of our brain. The more we switch between languages, the more those brain zones become accustomed to working. Once they've become accustomed to this type of "workout," those same areas start helping to switch between tasks beyond language.

References:

Brian T. Gold, Chobok Kim, Nathan F. Johnson, Richard J. Kryscio and Charles D. Smith (2013). "[Lifelong Bilingualism Maintains Neural Efficiency for Cognitive Control in Aging](#)".

8. You Will Be More Creative

Learning a foreign language improves not only your ability to solve problems and to think more logically. It also can help you solve problems and increase creativity, according to Kathryn Bamford and Donald Mizokawa's [research](#).

Early language study forces you to reach for alternate words when you can't quite remember the original one you wanted to use and makes you experiment with new words and phrases.

It improves your skills in divergent thinking, which is the ability to identify multiple solutions to a single problem.

Language learners also show greater cognitive flexibility (Hakuta 1986) and are better at figural creativity (Landry 1973).

References:

Kathryn W. Bamford, Donald T. Mizokawa (2006). "[Additive-Bilingual \(Immersion\) Education: Cognitive and Language Development](#)".

9. You Will Improve Executive Functions

It sounds impressive, doesn't it?

But before we move on, let's clarify what executive functions are:

***Executive functions** (also known as cognitive control and supervisory attentional system) – is an umbrella term for the **management** (regulation, control) of **cognitive processes**, including **working memory, reasoning, task flexibility, and problem solving** as well as **planning and execution**. – [Wikipedia](#)*

The body of research has shown that bilingual individuals are better at such processes; suggesting an interaction between being bilingual and executive functions.

As Anne-Catherine Nicolay and Martine Poncelet, a pair of scientists from Belgian, discovered in their [research](#), learning a language **improves individuals' alertness, auditory attention, divided attention, and mental flexibility**. What's more the the more you immerse yourself in the new language, the more you hone your executive functions.

In another study, Bialystok gave study subjects a non-linguistic card-sorting task that required flexibility in problem solving, filtering irrelevant information, as well as recognizing the constancy of some variables in the face of changes in the rules.

Bilingual children significantly outperformed their monolingual peers in this task, suggesting **early development of inhibitory function** that aids solving problems that require the ability to selectively focus attention.

References:

– Bialystok E. (1999). "[Cognitive complexity and attentional control in the bilingual mind](#)". Child Development 70 (3): 636–644)

– Anne-Catherine Nicolay, Martine Poncelet (2012). "[Cognitive advantage in children enrolled in a second-language immersion elementary school program for three years](#)".

10. You Will Be Better At Problem Solving (Even At Maths!)

In one study, bilingual children were presented with the problems of both mathematical (arranging two sets of bottle caps to be equal according to instruction) and non-mathematical nature (a common household problem represented in pictures) and were asked to provide solutions.

They were rated on scales of creativity, flexibility and originality. The results confirmed that the bilingual children were more creative in their problem solving than their monolingual peers.

One explanation for this could be bilinguals' increased metalinguistic awareness, which creates a form of thinking that is more open and objective, resulting in increased awareness and flexibility.

References:

Mark Leikin (2012). [“The effect of bilingualism on creativity: Developmental and educational perspectives”](#).

11. Your Children Will Develop (Much) Faster



If you want to create a crazy brainiac, teaching your child another language is a way to go!

According to new research, babies exposed to two languages display better learning and memory skills compared to their monolingual peers.

The study was conducted in Singapore and was the result of the collaboration between scientists and hospitals. Altogether, the study included 114 6 month-old infants – about half of whom had been exposed to two languages from birth.

The study found that when repeatedly shown the same image, bilingual babies recognised familiar images quicker and paid more attention to novel images – demonstrating tendencies which have strong links to higher IQ later in life.

Amazingly, children seem to absorb (even) multiple languages effortlessly.

“The power to learn a language is so great in the young child that it doesn't seem to matter how many

languages you seem to throw their way....They can learn as many spoken languages as you can allow them to hear systematically and regularly at the same time. Children just have this capacity. Their brain is ripe to do this...there doesn't seem to be any detriment to....develop[ing] several languages at the same time" according to Dr. Susan Curtiss, UCLA Linguistics professor.

Past studies have shown that babies who rapidly get bored with a familiar image demonstrated higher cognition and language ability later on as children (Bialystok & Hakuta 1994;Fuchsen 1989).

A preference for novelty is also linked with higher IQs and better scores in vocabulary tests during pre-school and school-going years.

References:

Leher Singh, Charlene S. L. Fu, Aishah A. Rahman, Waseem B. Hameed, Shamini Sanmugam, Pratibha Agarwal, Binyan Jiang, Yap Seng Chong, Michael J. Meaney, Anne Rifkin-Graboi (2014).
"Back to Basics: A Bilingual Advantage in Infant Visual Habituation ".

12. Understanding Of Your Own Language Will Increase

You can never understand one language until you understand at least two.

– **Geoffrey Willans**

How many monolingual speakers know what adjectives or gerunds are? Not many. It's natural. They simply don't need such knowledge. However, learning a second language draws your attention to the abstract rules and structure of language, thus makes you better at your first language.

Research suggests that foreign language study "enhances children's understanding of how language itself works and their ability to manipulate language in the service of thinking and problem solving." (Cummins 1981)

13. You Will Read More Efficiently

The research shows a high positive correlation between foreign language study and improved reading scores for children of average and below average intelligence. (Garfinkel & Tabor 1991)

14. You Will Enhance Your Career Opportunities

It sounds like a cliché but let's say it out loud – your chances of employment in today's economy are much greater for you than for those who speak only one language.

Multilingual employees are able to communicate and interact within multiple communities. With the rise of technology which enables the global communication ,such an ability becomes more and more valuable.

What's more, knowledge of a foreign language conveys, among others, that you're a intelligent, disciplined and motivated person.

Even if being bilingual is not completely necessary in your field, being fluent in another language gives you a competitive edge over your monolingual competitors.

Of course, feeling intuitively that the above is true is one thing, but what about cold hard facts?

In a survey of 581 alumni of The American Graduate School of International Management in Glendale, Arizona, most graduated stated that they had gained a competitive advantage from their knowledge of foreign languages and other cultures.

They said that not only was language study often a decisive factor in hiring decisions and in enhancing their career paths, but it also provided personal fulfillment, mental discipline, and cultural enlightenment. (Grosse 2004)

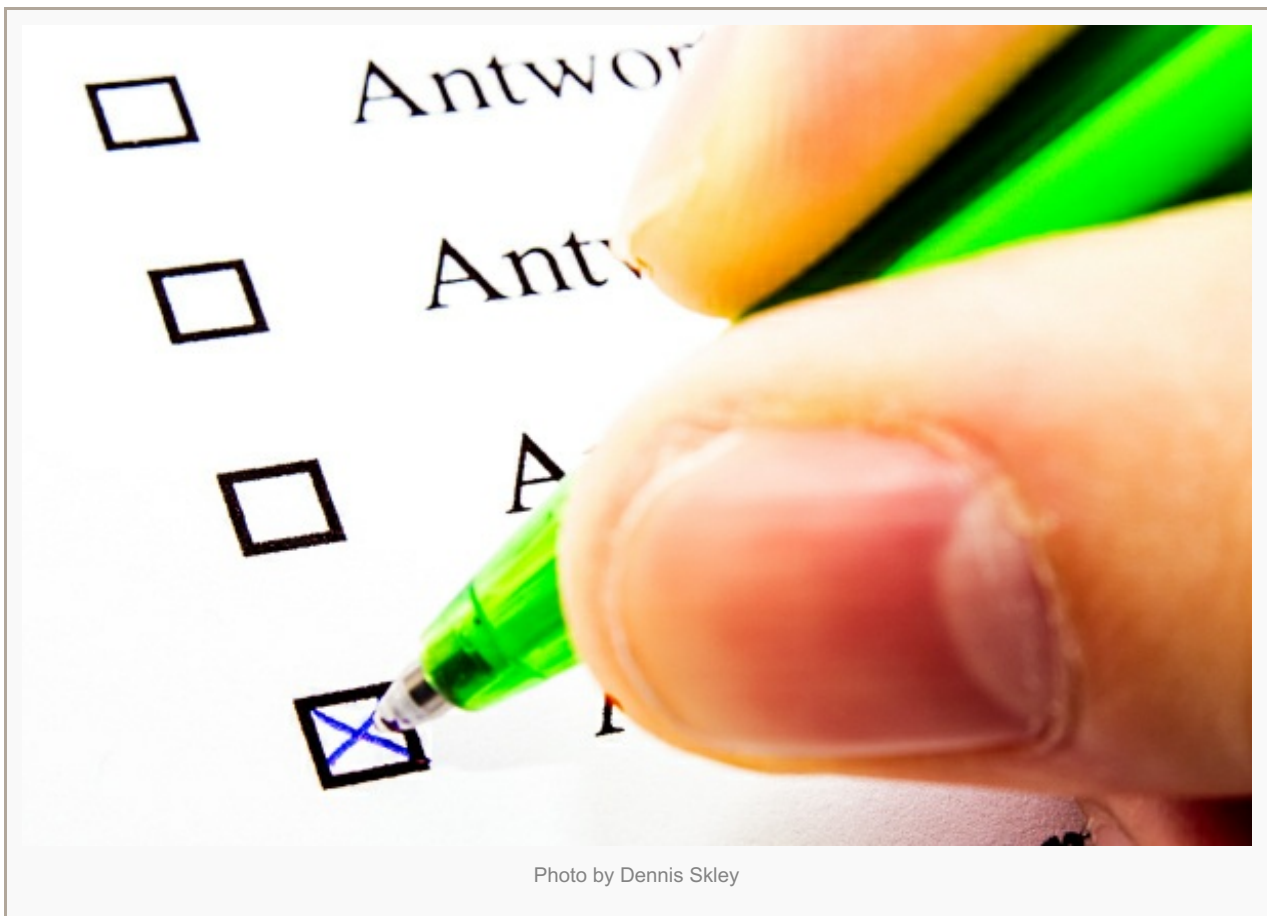
15. You Will Enhance Your Confidence and Sense of Achievement

Confidence always increases when a new skill is mastered. Learning a foreign language is no different. It boosts your self-confidence and makes you feel this nice, warm feeling inside.

Knowing a language also makes you more interesting and let's face it – who doesn't want to be more interesting?

Evidence from several studies study show language students to have a significantly higher self-concept than do non-language students. (Masciantonio 1977, Saunders 1998, Andrade, et al. 1989).

16. You Will Score Higher On Standardized Tests



Bilingual students consistently score higher on standardized tests in comparison with their monolingual peers, especially in the areas of math, reading and vocabulary.

How much better are their results?

Results from the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) show that students who completed at least four years of foreign-language study scored more than 100 points higher on each section of the SAT than monolingual students. (College Board 2004)

Even third-graders who had received 15 minutes of conversational French lessons daily for a year had statistically higher SAT scores than their peers who had not received French classes. (Lopata 1963)

17. You Will Think Faster

In a small study, bilingual people were about a half second faster than monolinguals (3.5 versus 4 seconds) at executing novel instructions such as “add 1 to x, divide y by 2, and sum the results.”

Andrea Stocco and Chantel S. Prat of the University of Washington who conducted the research say the findings are in line with previous studies showing that bilingual children show superior performance on non-linguistic tasks.

References:

Stocco, A., Yamasaki, B. L., Natalenko, R., & Prat, C. S. "Bilingual brain training: A neurobiological framework of how bilingual experience improves executive function." *International Journal of Bilingualism*.

18. You Will Have Better Job Security

Mastering a language is a skill which requires a lot of time, discipline and persistence. Many people start learning and give up half-way.

That's why employees who have knowledge of foreign language(s) are much harder to replace. Of course, the rarer and /or more difficult the language, the stronger your leverage.

19. You Will Earn More

It comes as no surprise that the knowledge of languages can add a little something to your salary. However, the amount you can get varies significantly from country to country.

So how does it look like for the citizens of the United States?

Albert Saiz, the MIT economist who calculated the [2% premium](#), found quite different premiums for different languages: just 1.5% for Spanish, 2.3% for French and 3.8% for German. This translates into big differences in the language account: your Spanish is worth \$51,000, but French, \$77,000, and German, \$128,000. Humans are famously bad at weighting the future against the present, but if you dangled even a post-dated \$128,000 cheque in front of the average 14-year-old, Goethe and Schiller would be hotter than Facebook. – (www.economist.com)

In UK, employees who know a foreign language earn an extra £3,000 a year – a total of £145,000 over their lifetime

Companies are prepared to pay workers earning the national average of £25,818 as much as 12% more if they speak or learn a foreign language. For higher earners, the figures are even more startling.

Those earning £45,000 could see a potential cash boost of 20%, amounting to an extra £9,000 a year or £423,000 over a lifetime. – (www.kwintessential.co.uk)

As you can see, knowing a foreign language can be certainly profitable. But please bear in mind that people who know 2 foreign languages earn much more and the reports typically don't take rare languages into consideration.

20. You Will Enjoy Increased Mobility

There are many reasons why people leave their homeland and move to other places. Some look for better life, other try to find political freedom, love or religious tolerance.

Whatever the reasons might be, knowing foreign languages significantly increases your mobility by removing language barriers and increasing the chances of employment.

What's more, a stay abroad can positively influence your employability even if you come back to your motherland.

*The risk of long-term unemployment after graduation was 50% lower for mobile students than for non-mobile students. Even five years after graduation, the unemployment rate of mobile students was still 23% lower. Also 50% fewer mobile students (2%) than non-mobile students (4%) needed more than 12 months to find their first job. – **The Erasmus Impact Study***

References:

[“The Erasmus Impact Study – Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions”](#) (2014)

21. How To Prioritize

*The Principle of Priority states (a) you must know the difference between what is urgent and what is important, and (b) you must do what's important first. – **Steven Pressfield***

Learning a foreign language is one of the most complicated skills out there which one can master. It's not your typical “to-do list” which usually consists of just a few, simple tasks. To arrive at your final destination (i.e. mastering a language) you need to learn how to prioritize effectively.

Every language learner faces dozens of decisions each day – what should I learn? When to do it? Should it be reading? If yes, what should I read? And so on.

The constant flood of problems you face every day, helps you to become an efficient learner who knows what is important and what is not.

22. You Will Make New Friends For Life

Arguably, this is one of the most phenomenal benefits of learning a new language. Your language skills tear down all communication barriers in the world. In the era of the internet you can find friends in every corner of the world. Africa, Asia, New Zealand are just a few clicks away.

23. Your Memory Retrieval Will Improve

Research at the intersection of cognitive science and education has shown that retrieval improves learning in significant ways. Each act of retrieval changes your knowledge, improving the ability to retrieve knowledge again in the future.

References:

Nunes, L. D., & Karpicke, J. D. (in press). “Retrieval-based learning: Research at the interface between cognitive science and education”.

24. You Will Become a Better Decision-maker

According to a [new study](#), multilingual speakers are more resistant to conditioning and framing techniques, making them less likely to be swayed by such language in advertisements or political campaign speeches.

It seems that foreign language speakers are more sensitive and observant when it comes to the words they hear and read.

References:

Albert Costa, Alice Foucart, Inbal Arnon, Melina Aparicid, Jose Apesteguia (2014). [“Piensa” twice: On the foreign language effect in decision making](#).

25. You Will Increase Pattern Recognition

According to new research, the ability to learn a second language may depend less on linguistic skills and more on the ability to recognize patterns.

In the said study, Frost and colleagues measured how well American students in an overseas program picked up on the structure of words and sounds in Hebrew. The students were tested once in the first semester and again in the second semester.

The results showed a high positive correlation between recognizing patterns in the shapes and learning another language.

“These new results suggest that learning a second language is determined to a large extent by an individual ability that is not at all linguistic,” says Ram Frost of Hebrew University in Jerusalem who conducted the study.

“It’s surprising that a short 15-minute test involving the perception of visual shapes could predict to such a large extent which of the students who came to study Hebrew would finish the year with a better grasp of the language,” says Frost.

The findings could have broader implications beyond language learning.



Photo by Sanja Gjenero

“This finding points to the possibility that a unified and universal principle of statistical learning can quantitatively explain a wide range of cognitive processes across domains, whether they are linguistic or non-linguistic,” concluded the researchers.

References:

Ram Frost (2012). [“A universal approach to modeling visual word recognition and reading: Not only possible, but also inevitable”](#).

26. You Will Find It Pleasant

Researchers from Spain and Germany found that the process of learning a language and acquiring a wider vocabulary has **the effect of stimulating the same part of the brain as having sex or eating chocolate**.

Language learning triggers a part of the brain known as the ventral striatum, a pleasure centre that is activated when people are involved in activities such as sex, drugs, gambling or eating sugary foods.

References:

Pablo Ripollés, Josep Marco-Pallarés, Ulrike Hielscher, Anna Mestres-Missé, Claus Tempelmann, Hans-Jochen Heinze, Antoni Rodríguez-Fornells, Toemme Noesselt. “The Role of Reward in Word Learning and Its Implications for Language Acquisition:.”

27. You Will Increase Your General Vocabulary

The results of the recent study showed that bilingualism is highly correlated with breadth of vocabulary knowledge and reading skill.

In other words, bilingual participants have larger size of vocabulary knowledge and they enjoy better word reading skill.

References:

Zohreh Kassaian, Saeedeh Esmae’li (2011). “The Effect of Bilinguality on L3 Breadth of Vocabulary Knowledge and Word Reading Skill”.

28. You’ll Enjoy Other Cultures Much Better



Photo by Steven L. Shepard, Presidio of Monterey Public Affairs.

That’s right. By learning a new languages you will be able to gain insights into a different culture, access and enjoy the different entertainment, arts and customs that have developed in different regions over the centuries.

You won't have to be forced anymore to listen to movies with mediocre dubbing. No more awkward mumbling while singing songs of your favorite Japanese band!

29. You Will Be A More Aware Spender

I must admit that I didn't expect that language learning can have such a side-effect. But hey! Would science lie?

Anyway, speakers of multiple languages have also been shown to be more self-aware spenders, perceiving "hypothetical" and "real" money (the perceived difference between money on a credit card and money in cold, hard cash) more similarly than monolinguals.

One of the implications of the study, according to its authors is that "people who routinely make decisions in a foreign language rather than their native tongue might be less biased in their savings, investment, and retirement decisions, as a result of reduced myopic loss aversion."

References:

Boaz Keysar, Sayuri L. Hayakawa and Sun Gyu An (2012). "[The Foreign-Language Effect : Thinking in a Foreign Tongue Reduces Decision Biases](#)".

30. You Will Increase Information Exchange and Flow Of Ideas

If you think English is enough to get all the information from your area of expertise, you just went full retard. Never go full retard.

Knowledge of languages improves international information exchange thus contributing to various improvements and developments at national, regional and local level.

Speaking other foreign languages enables you to tap into the vast ocean of information which was not previously available and to pass it on to others.

31. You Will Increase Your Global (political) Awareness & Understanding

While studying another language, you not only learn how to communicate in that language, you also get to know a lot about the country, the culture and the people. As you progress, you begin to better understand and sympathise with the people who speak the language.

Discovering their history, you experience their pain, share their victories. You begin to see the world through their eyes. And then the magic happens – you create a connection between your own culture and language to theirs and you develop deeper understanding of your own language and culture.

That often makes you more aware and appreciative of the unique qualities within your own language, people and culture.

32. You Will Learn Other Languages Faster

I know. Learning your first foreign language is always hard. You have no plan. You have no idea what you're doing and where you're going.

However, mastering one language teaches you the mechanics and structure behind any language (ok, maybe except [Basque](#)). That makes learning another language much easier!

33. It Will Be Easier To A Spouse

Loneliness sucks. But thanks to your awesome language skills you might be able to drastically increase your options pool.

You will gain an instant access to millions of new people who might be your potential partner.

Even ordinary holidays might turn into a love story!

34. You Will Learn Consistency and Persistence

Achieving conversational skills in a language takes anywhere from 4-12 months. If you aim at native-like fluency it might take much longer.

Language learning journey is fraught with obstacles. Overcoming these adversities is what boosts your confidence and builds character. Every victory, no matter how small, makes you better equipped to handle future challenges and build consistency and persistence.

35. You Will Improve Chances of College Acceptance, Achievement and Attainment



The study conducted in 2011 found that students who were in rigorous programs in high school—that included three years of foreign language study—were more likely to get better grades in college and less likely to drop out. (Horn & Kojaku 2001)

Another study showed that high school seniors with two or more years of foreign language study showed significantly improved performance on achievement tests in English when compared with non-foreign language students. (Bastian 1980)

36. You Will Improve Basic Skills Development

A study of 13,200 third and fifth graders in Louisiana public schools showed that, regardless of race, gender or academic level, children taking foreign language classes did better on the English section of the Louisiana Basic Skills Test than those who did not. (Dumas 1999)

37. It Will Benefit Academic Progress In Other Subjects

According to the [2007 report](#) by the National Council of State Supervisors For Language:

- Strong evidence shows that time spent on foreign language study strongly reinforces the core subject areas of reading, English language literacy, social studies and math.
- Foreign language learners consistently outperform control groups in core subject areas on standardized tests, often significantly. (Armstrong & Rogers 1997; Saunders 1998; Masciantonio 1977; Rafferty 1986; Andrade 1989; Kretschmer & Kretschmer 1989)
- One study found students scored significantly higher in math and language arts after one semester of foreign language study 90 minutes per week. (Armstrong 1997)
- Students who started kindergarten in the first Kansas City foreign language magnet schools in 1988 had surpassed national averages in all subjects by the time they reached fifth grade. These foreign language students performed especially well in mathematics. (Eaton 1994)
- Foreign language students within an urban magnet program scored well above anticipated national norms in both reading and mathematics and higher than the average of all magnet 2 school participants, despite the fact that they represent a broad cross-section of the local community. (Andrade 1989)
- Mastering the vocabulary of a second language enhances student comprehension and abilities in reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects. (Saville-Troike 1984)
- Bilingualism fosters the development of verbal and spatial abilities. (Diaz 1983)
- Students learning a second language in elementary school surpassed those who were not in English reading and language arts tests. (Mavrogenes 1979).

38. You Will Outperform Others On IQ Tests

Bilinguals outperform similar monolingual persons on both verbal and nonverbal tests of intelligence, which raises the question of whether ability in more than one language enables individuals to achieve greater intellectual flexibility (Bruck, Lambert, and Tucker, 1974; Hakuta, 1986; Weatherford, 1986).

39. You Will Improve Your Communication Skills and Adaptability

Constant struggles with expressing your thoughts in the early stages of language learning force you to change your approach to expressing yourself. You adapt and simplify your thoughts in order to facilitate communication. The amazing side-effect of this process is that you become a more effective communicator!

40. You Will Learn How To Manage Time Effectively

Most of us have a job, study, family and other stuff to take care of. That's why learning a language requires some serious time management skills.

Students of foreign languages become experts at using time effectively. After all, how many other people listen to language podcasts on their way to work or at the gym?