



The benefits of a bilingual brain

Updated 10 October 2015, 12:37 AEDT

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If you know more than one language start celebrating - being bilingual is good for your brain whilst learning the language of your forebears has benefits for both mind and soul.

Bilingualism and multilingualism has been shown to have emotional and cognitive benefits (<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/allinthemind/your-fabulous-bilingual-brain/2997632>) . Research shows that knowing more than one language delays

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Alzheimer's (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0010945211001043>) and dementia onset (<http://www.neurology.org/content/75/19/1726>) , and improves mental function more generally. But there might well be other significant mental health benefits, which are currently being explored by researchers. And anecdotally, some people claim learning a language helped them manage their depression (<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jan/13/learning-language-depression-anxiety>) and see beyond their immediate world.



WHY KNOWING MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE IS GOOD FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

- It delays Alzheimer's and dementia onset
- It slows down brain ageing
- It improves mental function
- Cultural & spiritual wellbeing

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The bilingual brain (ABC)

In Australia around 5 million people speak a language other than English at

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home. The most popular languages spoken include Mandarin (1.6%), Italian (1.4%), Arabic (1.3%), Cantonese (1.2%), Greek (1.2%) and Vietnamese (1.1%) (2011 census data (<http://profile.id.com.au/australia/language>)). Having access to these languages allow for participation in family and community life, which is important to a sense of well-being.



Multilingual mural (Flickr CC: Liz Henry)

Long before migration occurred from the 18th century onwards, there were more than 330 Aboriginal languages in Australia. Currently only 13 are still being actively maintained. The work of Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann, Australia's only Chair of Endangered Languages at the University of Adelaide, is concerned with understanding the significant relationship between linguistic continuity, and social

and personal well-being (<https://www.adelaide.edu.au/news/news79582.html>) .

"A study in British Columbia, Canada, has demonstrated a correlation between a lack of conversational skills in the native Aboriginal language and youth suicide rates – in communities whose language was subject to linguicide (language killing), youth suicide was frequent," says Professor Zuckermann.

The loss of a culture's language can therefore have deeply negative impacts on mental health but the reclamation of language, which is reviving and maintaining dying or dead languages, may conversely have many positive impacts. Since 2011, Professor Zuckerman has been working closely with the Barngarla communities of Eyre Peninsula to resurrect their traditional language.

“ I have noticed, qualitatively, that language reclamation is often empowering for those involved. It strengthens one's soul and validates one's pride, dignity and sense of cultural heritage. ”

"So far there has been no systematic quantitative study of the impact of language revival (rather than loss) on wellbeing, mental health and suicide ideation. This is partly because language reclamation is still rare and in its infancy," Professor Zuckermann says.

"However, I plan to also conduct quantitative research ... so that we can improve our approaches to reviving languages, and thoroughly and systematically evaluate its impact on individuals and communities."

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