

# 培养双语儿童的益处、挑战及成功策略

人文亚洲

Leher Singh

培养孩子说两种语言能够让小小年纪就受益匪浅。会说双语的人能够更擅长同时处理多项任务，更有效地过滤冗余信息，更快地获取新资讯，以及更灵活地待人接物和解决问题。即便在晚年，会说双语的老年人的大脑之老化过程也更为健康，这表明双语可以成为老化大脑的保存剂。

新加坡国立大学婴幼儿语言中心研究学习双语的儿童，试图更好地理解双语主义如何影响儿童的早期发展。我们最新的研究发现，和只学中文的儿童相比，同时学习英语和中文的儿童，掌握了更多中文发音声调的知识。这些优势在婴儿只有12或13个月大（刚开始说第一个单词汇）的时候即已出现。我们还发现，在2岁宝宝当中，中英双语宝宝和中文单语宝宝对中文词汇的识别能力同等。这个发现和之前的研究一样，显示了学习双语并不会限制儿童对其中一门语言的掌握程度。最后，我们还发现，18个月大的双语婴儿在学习其它新语言时有一定的优势，即使这些新语言和婴儿的双语几乎没有什么关联。

在一项新近的研究中，我们教中英双语宝宝和英语单语宝宝一些他（她）们从未听过的恩德贝莱语（一种南非语言）的词汇。经过数分钟的训练，只有双语宝宝能够学会恩德贝莱词汇。这个发现表明，学习双语能够培养儿童拥有更大的语言灵活性，帮助他们学习更多的语言。

虽然双语主义能够让孩子获得语言学习和认知上的益处，培养一个双语小孩却不是一件容易的事情。下面我们列出了一些双语儿童家长常问的问题，并基于双语主义的研究结果提供一些答案。

第一个问题，是不是最好等到小孩掌握了一门语言之后再教第二门语言？小孩会觉得困惑混乱吗？有很多研究显示，人类的大脑可以充分地同时学习两门语言，小孩最好能够早点

开始语言学习。学习双语的儿童并不比只学一门语言的儿童更容易感到困惑。比方说，只学英语的幼儿也很容易混淆“he”和“she”。同样地，学习双语的幼儿有时会犯互混的错误，比如使用其中一种语言的时候，借用另一种语言的词汇（举例来说，pass me the 包）。不过，这些错误会逐渐得到自动更正，而非语言滞后或者混淆的表现。

第二个问题，双语主义会引起语言滞后吗？不会。双语主义并不会导致儿童的语言或其它发展障碍。研究表明，刚开始，双语儿童在各门语言中的进步要比单语儿童慢，因为双语儿童对单一语言的接触平均比单语要少。举例来说，2岁的马汀只学习英语，而2岁的约翰同时学习英语和中文。约翰的英语词汇量很有可能比马汀少。这是因为约翰的词汇库包含了中文和英文，但这并不表示约翰的语言学习滞后了。如果词汇量的计算包含两门语言，和马汀相比，约翰的词汇量很有可能一样大，甚至更大。我们不应该去比较马汀和约翰的英语，而应该关心他们各自的表现，是否在正常范围内。如果实在要进行比较，我们应当也考虑儿童学习的所有语言。总之，我们无需担心儿童在单门语言上的早期差异，这只是双语学习过程中的一个阶段。

最后一个问题，要学习两门语言，父母一方只和孩子说一种语言是必要的吗？虽然父母各用一门语言的策略很流行，并没有多少研究支持这一策略的优势。大型研究发现，和父母均说双语，家里说一种语言学校说另一种语言这两种情况相比，父母各用一门语言的家庭并没有显著优势。父母真正应该考量的是如何让孩子在双语上得到同等、相互平衡的语言接触。如果父母和孩子同等地相处和互动，父母各用一门语言不失为一种好策略。其它可供考虑的策略包括：在家使用一种语言，在学校使用另一种语言；每个星期的不同天里交替使用语言。

想知道如何帮助自己的孩子变成双语通的父母，可以考虑采取下面一些基于研究发现的

建议。

首先，双语学习要趁早。在0到3岁之间学习双语的儿童通常被称为“摇篮”双语通。和先学一门语言后学第二门语言的孩子相比，摇篮双语通更有可能在两门语言上都达到母语水平。虽然后来者掌握两门语言是可能的，但效果在很大程度上取决于孩子语言学习的天分和动力。

其次，努力一以贯之。孩子受益于持续的双语环境，比起有一阵没一阵接触第二语言的儿童，每天都处在双语环境中的儿童，在两门语言上的表现都更优异。

第三，保持耐心，持之以恒。使用两种语言的孩子可以称之为“积极的双语通”，而能听懂两门语言却只说一门语言的孩子，则可称之为“消极接受的双语通”。两者相比，“积极的双语通”对两门语言的掌握会更佳。然而，孩子喜欢说一种语言而拒绝另一种的情况很典型。孩子常常会表现出对某一门语言的偏好，这一偏好通常是因为一起玩耍的小伙伴所说的语言。家长该如何培养孩子对两门语言的兴趣？方法之一是制造经常可使用两种语言的环境，换句话说，家长要努力为孩子营造双语世界。

第四，努力确保孩子觉得每门语言都同样有趣。如果孩子只从朋友、家人、伙伴那里学习一门语言，而从课本里学习另一门语言，他们很难同等地看待和使用这两门语言。让孩子欣赏到每门语言在日常生活中的意义和作用，双语主义是一种家庭的承诺。和只跟一个人说一种语言的孩子相比，听不同人讲两种语言的孩子语言表现会更佳，家庭和社区的双语环境是能够实现双语主义的管道。

（Leher Singh副教授任职于新加坡国立大学心理学系及婴幼儿语言中心；翻译：胡姝博士，国大亚洲研究院/家庭与人口研究中心研究员）

（本系列是国大与家庭人口研究中心提供的研究摘要，由不同专家学者执笔，每月第一个星期天刊登）

## Raising Bilingual Children: advantages, challenges and strategies for success.

Raising children to speak two languages can endow a child with several advantages from a very early age. Babies, children and adults who speak two languages are better able to multi-task, to filter out distracting information when doing a task, to learn new information, and to think more flexibly about situations, people and problems. Even in their twilight years, elderly adults who speak two languages demonstrate healthier aging in the brain, suggesting that bilingualism can act as a ‘preservative’ for the aging brain.

Studies at the NUS Infant and Child Language Centre focus on how children’s development changes on account of learning two languages. Our focus is on developing a better understanding of how bilingualism influences early child development. Our recent research findings demonstrate, for example, that children who are raised to speak English and Mandarin can show better knowledge of Mandarin tones in comparison to children learning Mandarin alone. These advantages were evident as early as 12 to 13 months, right when children begin to produce their first word. Secondly, bilingual English-Mandarin and monolingual Mandarin toddlers at 2 years of age show similar abilities to quickly recognize vocabulary items in Mandarin. This adds to past research showing that learning two languages does not limit how well a child will learn one language. Finally, bilingual infants at 18 months may be better positioned to learn new languages, even if they bear little

relation to a child's native languages. In a recent study, we taught bilingual English-Mandarin babies and English monolingual babies words in a South African language, Ndebele, which they had never heard. However, within a few minutes of training, bilingual infants were able to learn words in far-off Ndebele whereas monolingual toddlers were not. This suggests that learning two languages may endow children with greater linguistic flexibility and open their systems up to learning additional languages.

Even though bilingualism presents children with language learning and cognitive advantages, raising a bilingual child is not always easy. Here are some common questions raised by parents of bilingual children and some answers provided by research studies on bilingualism.

Firstly, is it better to wait until children have learned one language to add a second? Will children get confused? There is a lot of evidence to suggest that early exposure is best. The newborn infant is not a monolingual at birth and the human brain is just as good at learning two languages as it is at learning one. Children do not get confused on account of learning two languages any more than they get confused by learning one. For example, it is very common for monolingual English learning toddlers to confuse 'he' and 'she' even if they are just learning English. Likewise, bilingual toddlers sometimes show 'intrusion' errors, where they borrow from one language when using the other (e.g. pass me the *bao*'). However, these errors usually self correct over time and do not signify a language delay or confusion.

Secondly, does bilingualism cause a language delay? No, bilingualism does not predispose a child to speech or language or any other developmental delays. Research suggests that growth in each language will initially be slower in bilingual children as bilingual children hear less of each language. For example, if 2 year-old Ben is only learning English and 2 year-old John is learning English and Mandarin, it is highly possible that John will have fewer words in English than Ben as a toddler. This is because John's vocabulary is distributed over two languages. This does not mean that John has a language delay. However, if vocabulary is calculated in both languages, research suggests that John's vocabulary size is likely to be equal to or greater than that of Ben. This does mean that we should resist comparing 2-year-old Ben and John in English and instead focus on whether both children fall within the normal range. If at all, comparisons should be made factoring in vocabulary in all of a child's languages. Early differences in single language vocabulary should not cause alarm; they are a part of the early bilingual journey.

Lastly, to learn two languages, do children need to hear one language from each parent to avoid becoming confused? Although the one-parent/one-language (OPOL) strategy is popular, there is little research to promote this as advantageous. Large scale research studies reveal no advantage associated with OPOL families over families where both parents speak both languages, and families where one language is spoken at home and the other at school. What matters more is that children receive equal and balanced exposure to both languages. OPOL can be a good strategy to equalize exposure to each language if both parents engage equally with their children. Other strategies include using one language exclusively at home and one at school, or alternating languages by days of the week.

Parents often wonder how they can help their children to become bilingual. Here are some research-based suggestions to promote childhood bilingualism. First, start early. Children who learn two languages between birth and 3 years of age are called 'crib' bilinguals. Crib bilinguals are more likely to learn both languages to native levels than those who learn one language and add a second later in childhood. While late acquisition of two languages is possible, this is heavily influenced by a child's propensity for language learning and motivation.

Secondly, try and be consistent. Children benefit from sustained bilingual exposure, not a 'crash course' one month before the grandparents visit. Children who hear daily exposure to both languages fare better with bilingualism than those with intermittent concentrated exposure to a second language.

Third, be patient and persevere. Children often demonstrate a preference for one language, and this preference is usually for the language of the peer environment. It is important for children to continue to speak in both languages: 'active bilinguals' do better in acquiring both languages than 'receptive bilinguals' who understand both languages, but only speak in one. However, it is very typical for children to prefer one language and even to refuse to speak in a second language, placing the onus on parents to enliven the child's interest in both languages. It is helpful to create situations where both languages are useful and relevant for the child (e.g. through valued family bonds, friendship groups, language clubs), such that he/she speaks both languages on a regular basis. In other words, try to build a bilingual world for your child.

Fourth, try to ensure each language is equally engaging. Children who learn one language exclusively from friends, family and peers and the other exclusively from textbooks are unlikely to be equally engaged in each language. It is important for children to appreciate the relevance of each language in their lives, such that both languages are 'living languages' in their world. Bilingualism is best viewed as a family commitment. Children who hear both languages spoken by different people do better than children who, for example, only speak a mother tongue with one person. Family and community engagement in both languages can promote bilingualism.

A/P Leher Singh is from Department of Psychology, NUS and the NUS Infant and Child Language Centre, <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/babytalk>

Dr Hu Shu, Research Fellow at CFPR/ARI, NUS translated the article from English to Mandarin