**Start**

Good morning, everyone. I am glad to see you all here now. My name is Alekseev Vasiliy. Today I am going to tell you something about the process of language acquisition in childhood. Has anyone of you ever thought of whether there is a simpler and more efficient way to master a foreign language, than to spend hours per week for many years attending classes at school and university? If a child is able to learn a native language, maybe it is also possible for them to acquire a foreign one by the way as well.

In my speech I am going to cover several points. The first part is about some details connected with the process of acquisition a language itself. Then goes explanation of what can be done to make a child succeed in learning a foreign language. And the last point is about overall benefits that can be derived from the enterprise of early language learning.

The presentation will take about 10 minutes. I will be glad to try to answer your questions at the end of it.

Nowadays there is a trend to make shows with gifted children. And before we start, I want to remind you one of the most well-known samples of multilingual children. It’s Bella Devyatkina. Maybe you saw her on the TV. At the age of 4 she could speak 7 languages.

**Maturation of the Language System**

So, let’s start.

The maturation of language circuits during a child's early years may be a driving force underlying the course of language acquisition. Before birth, virtually all the neurons are formed, and they migrate into their proper locations in the brain.

But brain weight, thickness of gray and white matter continue to increase rapidly in the year after birth and then throughout childhood.

Synapses peak in number between 1 and 2 years at which point children have 50% more synapses than adults. Metabolic activity in the brain reaches adult levels by 9 to 10 months, and soon exceeds it, peaking around the age of 4. Synapses start to wither from the age of 2 through the rest of childhood and into adolescence, when the brain's metabolic rate falls back to adult levels. These changes may be responsible for the decline in the ability to learn a language over the lifespan.

**The Course of Language Acquisition**

Language acquisition begins with the acquisition of a language's sound patterns. The main linguistic accomplishments during the first year of life are control of the speech musculature and sensitivity to the phonetic distinctions used in the parents' language. Interestingly, babies achieve these feats before they can produce or understand words, so their learning cannot depend on correlating sound with meaning. They must be sorting the sounds directly.

While interacting with live human speakers, the child can be more of a mind reader, guessing what the speaker might have meant. That is, before children have learned syntax, they know the meaning of many words, and they might be able to make good guesses as to what their parents are saying based on their knowledge of how the referents of these words typically act (for example, people tend to eat apples, but not vice-versa).

Here you can see a table with brief descriptions of main stages that comprise the process of language acquisition. Look at the first row. It shows children’s first words, which are similar all over the planet.

Soon vocabulary growth increases. The child begins to learn words at a rate of one every two waking hours, and will keep learning that **rate or faster**.

Now, look at the second row. There are a bit more complex phrases than in the previous one. It also can be seen that the words in the phrases are in the correct order.

Talking about the third row, between 2 and 3 years children's language **blooms** into fluent grammatical conversation very rapidly. The researchers who study it haven’t even worked out the exact sequence yet. The number of syntactic types increases exponentially, doubling every month, reaching thousands before the third birthday.

Children acquire whatever rules their language throws at them. It is safe to say that almost all parts of a language are acquired before the child turns four.

**What Should Be Done**

Children most definitely do need to hear an existing language to learn that language. They learn whichever language they are exposed to.

Moreover, it is not enough to just hear the speech, on the TV for example. Communication is also important.

Children do need some kind of linguistic input to acquire a language. There were cases in history when abandoned children somehow survived in forests. The outcome was that the children, when found, were mute. Whatever innate grammatical abilities there are, they are too schematic to generate concrete speech, words and grammatical constructions on their own.

Possible ways to provide a conversation with a child are parents (if they know a foreign language), private teachers or special schools. For example, there is one called Moreton First in England. When children join the preschool class at the age of three, they are exposed to four languages: English, French, Spanish and Chinese. It may seem incredible to us, but as the child’s brain is still growing and developing rapidly, multiple languages can be assimilated just as a single one.

Children learn while playing. That’s important. Making language exposure meaningful for children is a key to getting them excited and involved in learning it. Bombarding children with hours of vocabulary will have less impact than introducing them to a few words but within a rich cultural context. It is essential to get children excited about language and culture through pictures, dance, songs.

**Overall Benefits**

It is undoubtedly that learning additional languages improves some mind-brain skills.

Teaching children words from another language actually helps them appreciate and understand the workings of languages in general.

It has already been established that children who learn a language when they are very young have a much better chance of not having a foreign accent when speaking another language.

Bilingualism can delay the onset of Alzheimer’s symptoms. One Canadian science team has found that those who spoke two or more languages consistently over many years experienced a delay in the onset of their symptoms by as much as five or six years.

Bilinguals are better at multitasking. In one experiment monolinguals and bilinguals were put into a driving simulator. Through headphones, they were given extra tasks to do — as if they were driving and talking on cellphones. As a result, everybody’s driving got worse. But the bilinguals’ driving didn’t drop as much.

**Finish**

In the end, I want to say that learning language as early as possible is definitely wholesome, but here we are all finished. We can’t already take any advantage of it. But I do hope that if anyone of you find yourself having children in the future, you will remember something from this presentation to help the child. Because when you are young, you don’t realize what opportunities you possess.