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### **Bilingualism**

Learning your first language as a child is quite a challenge. As a child, your brain is easily malleable as you start to pick up your first words. You eventually go into phrases and sentences. Now imagine doing all of this with another entirely different language. By the time you reach adulthood, you can speak multiple languages; this is what is known as being bilingual. Countless studies have shown that learning at least one more language can give you tons of benefits, including faster cognitive development in the frontal cortex, soft skills, problem-solving abilities, and a handful of benefits in the workplace. Each of these advantages will be examined after my personal story of growing up bilingual.

Around the time I was able to talk, my parents began working longer hours at their jobs, which led my grandparents to raise me for a few years. My grandparents, not knowing English at all, began to teach me the only language they knew, Romanian. For the next few years, Romanian was all I knew. Only about six years later, I began to learn English. It was nearly impossible to rewire my brain to believe that the adjective was supposed to go before the noun or that there were no accent marks in the English language. It felt strange for quite some while,

By the time I was in elementary school, all of my teachers were fascinated that I understood another language other than English. For years I have been told that knowing and understanding another language gives tons of advantages. At the time when I was told these

things, I did not understand the meaning behind them. Alongside these advantages, there was always a flurry of questions, most stemming from sheer curiosity. There were many instances when I was asked by my peers to translate a sentence or to tell them how a word was pronounced. At times it felt like a nuisance, but the fascination was enjoyed. Some of these benefits include being able to communicate better, be a better problem solver, and have people staring at you when you speak your language. Once I got older and started to understand what these things meant.

Learning another language impacts nearly every aspect of your life. When an individual learns another language, the brain begins to “rewire” itself into thinking in different ways; the brain’s frontal cortex, which is commonly referred to as the “control panel of our personality,” begins to develop slightly quicker. At this point, the brain starts to think in two different languages and manages to filter out unnecessary information. Because of this ability to think in two different languages rapidly, for any bilingual, it is seemingly easy to swap between languages. This swapping also allows the user to be able to swap between tasks just as fast. This stimulates brain activity that slows down the decline of “the ability to adapt to unfamiliar or unexpected circumstances and related executive functions” (Targeted News Service). Although this awareness does not immediately impact the bilingual, it has been shown that older bilinguals perform cognitive flexibility tasks significantly more efficient and faster than their monolingual peers. This leads to the belief that “life-long bilingualism” may exert its most substantial benefits in the aging of the frontal cortex of the brain. The longer you can keep this segment of your brain functioning at full capacity, the better you will overall function as an individual.

With the development of the frontal cortex, you can also polish your soft skills, especially in terms of communication. Research shows that “bilingual children are more likely to be empathetic and better communicators.”(Warner). In most cases, bilinguals speak both of their known languages to themselves as the “little voice in their heads.” Because of this “little voice,” speech is subliminally translated in both languages(i.e., English and Romanian in my case). In most cases, my English speech is translated into Romanian. This concept happens in the minds of most bilinguals almost entirely subliminally, and it continues to develop the frontal cortex.

In addition to cognitive awareness and communication, studies have shown that young children who are exposed to two or more languages can broaden their view of the world. In most cases, children who are bilingual in the United States have a family that is speaking another language aside from English, hence allowing their child/children to learn the language of their heritage and English. Doing this creates a stronger bond with the child/children with their heritage. “Speaking the family’s language gives the child a sense of identity and belonging” (Linguistic Society of America). In most cases, your knowledge in another language can let you perform anything from routine transactions at a supermarket to asking for directions or talking in the household with their family. While learning about the past of your second language, you tend to pick up on the various ways people who speak that language tend to act and think. Most monolinguals believe that the way they think is synonymous with how everyone else thinks since they have insufficient exposure to any language/culture aside from their own, a closed-mind. On the contrary, a bilingual has more than enough exposure to have a different angle on the situation. In a practical sense, my Romanian sense says that your family is absolute and that they are the best people to go to for any situation. In contrast, my English/American sense says that

relationships are built over time and that a friend can be as close as a family member. Although they are not always contrasting, they do differ.

Bilingualism is a situation that only produces advantages; you immediately know two languages well enough to communicate with anyone else in those respective languages. For starters, knowing two languages “rewires” your brain into filtering out more nonsensical information than a monolingual. This “rewiring” happens because you are now taught to use another language. Because of this second language, your frontal cortex develops faster and better than monolinguals; it also operates at full power for a longer time, making it better as the frontal cortex ages. Understanding another language also allows you to develop your soft skills, especially communication. Your brain subliminally translates your speech in one language into the other language you know, letting you know what to say regardless of the language. Naturally, it is not perfect. In some cases, the brain creates a hybrid language, and speech can come out as “Bună dimineața profesor, how are you?” (Good morning professor, how are you?). Alongside these, studies have shown that since you understand another language, you have also been exposed to that respective culture, giving you another world-view onto the one you have already. This allows any bilingual to be more empathetic since their view of the world is twice as much as monolinguals. Even after that, it has been shown that bilinguals earn more than monolinguals in the workplace. So brush up on that second language, it will help you in the long run as it has for nearly 60% of the planet’s population.

## **Bibliography**

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## **Reflection**

This writing process, as I expected, was a struggle to meet the word count. At around 1000 words, everything was already finished and thoroughly explained to my level of expertise. It felt reminiscent since I was able to dig up some memories of the past when I first started to learn Romanian and English as my daily languages. Finding various articles to support what I had to say was not as easy as I anticipated due to what was in my mind. The research itself felt like more of a hassle than previously expected.

In contrast, it felt alleviating to be able to find very relatable information. As I was writing the paper, I mainly confirmed many thoughts that I already had. Before starting this paper, I already knew various benefits that being bilingual had to offer. Even though writing the document was not the easiest, it did not feel as challenging as previous papers.