

Growing up in a bilingual home has lasting benefits

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New research has found that growing up in a bilingual home can provide unexpected cognitive benefits later in life.

The study, published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, demonstrates for the first time that adults who acquired their [second language](#) as a [young child](#) (early bilinguals) are quicker at shifting attention and quicker at detecting visual changes compared to adults who learnt their second [language](#) later in life (late bilinguals).

Led by Dr. Dean D'Souza of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), the research saw 127 adults take part in two separate experiments. The first involved watching pictures on a screen, with one picture gradually changing and the other remaining the same. Early bilinguals noticed these changes much faster than late bilinguals.

The second experiment found that early bilinguals were better at controlling their attention. Specifically, they were quicker at disengaging attention from one picture in order to shift their focus to another.

Dr. D'Souza and colleagues had previously found that [infants](#) raised in [bilingual](#) homes adapt to their more varied and unpredictable language environment by shifting their visual attention faster and more frequently. The findings of this new study suggest that these adaptations acquired as bilingual infants continue into adulthood.

Dr. D'Souza, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said: "This study is an exciting extension of our previous research, which suggested that infants raised in bilingual homes adapt to their more complex language environments by switching attention faster and more frequently.

"This adaptation may help them to take advantage of multiple sources of visual information, such as mouth movements, [facial expressions](#), and subtle gestures, ultimately helping them to learn multiple languages.

"The findings from our new research with bilingual adults suggest that some of these adaptations, including being quicker at shifting attention, are maintained into adulthood."

More information: *Scientific Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-021-81545-5](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-81545-5)

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