

LISTENING UNIT 8

The language learning brain

Interview

You are going to listen to excerpts from an interview with neuroscientist Judit Werner. She is talking about language acquisition, particularly in young children.



How much do you know about language learning? How true do you think each statement is?

- 1 Young children should wait until they have learnt one language well before learning a _____ one because it slows down the learning process.
- 2 Languages are _____ on only one side of the brain.
- 3 Languages occupy _____ in your brain. The more languages you learn, the more that is taken up.
- 4 Learning a language is good for your cognitive _____ (how well your brain works).
- 5 Only children can learn to speak a second language _____.
- 6 Learning another language is better than physical exercise at keeping your brain cognitively fit and _____.

1. Complete the statements in the quiz above with the words in the box.

fluently function healthy processed second space

2. Listen to five extracts from the interview with Judit Werner. Match the questions asked (A–E) to the responses given in the extracts.

Extract 1 _____ Extract 3 _____ Extract 5 _____
Extract 2 _____ Extract 4 _____

A And what are some of the cognitive benefits of learning languages?
B Now, it's not just children that benefit from learning a second language, is it?
C So what do we know about the neuroscience of language? For example, is it true that we use the left side of our brain to speak and listen?
D So, tell me about your first publication. It was quite controversial, wasn't it?
E What about bilingual people? Is there, say, an English speaking part of the brain and a Chinese part?

Look at the statements in the quiz in exercise 1. Listen again and decide if each statement is true, partly true or false.

1 TRUE / PARTLY TRUE / FALSE
2 TRUE / PARTLY TRUE / FALSE
3 TRUE / PARTLY TRUE / FALSE
4 TRUE / PARTLY TRUE / FALSE
5 TRUE / PARTLY TRUE / FALSE
6 TRUE / PARTLY TRUE / FALSE

3. Complete the summaries of each extract with the sentences A–E.

A However, speaking and understanding a language is an extremely complex process that relies on various regions in both hemispheres.
B People with Alzheimer's disease usually show fewer signs of the illness if they are bilingual.
C Some research counted all the words children knew in one language and found bilingual children knew fewer words.
D They get lots of practice at this when they speak one language then another.
E You use less of your brain for the language that you speak best.

Extract 1

In the past people discouraged bilingualism in young children because they thought it slowed their learning. But Judit's research showed that bilingual children have certain advantages.

Extract 2

In 95% of people who write with their right hand, most of the areas of the brain you need to communicate with language are on the left side of the brain. _____

Extract 3

Many of the same areas of the brain are active when bilingual people speak both languages. _____

Extract 4

Bilingual people may be better at quickly moving their attention from task to task. _____ It is believed that switching between languages gives the parts of the brain responsible for making decisions lots of practice.

Extract 5

It's never too late to learn a language. It is possible for adults to achieve high levels of ability in a second language. It's good for you, too. _____ Learning a language is better at keeping your brain healthy than socialising and playing games, but isn't as good as physical exercise.