Early Language Experience

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**1) Do you think it’s important that children should learn a second language in their early schooling years? Why or why not? Do you think it would have been meaningful for you as a child? And if you did learn more than one language early in life, how has that helped you today?**

**2) Because many of the newcomers to the U.S. are adults and since there is a need/motivation for people to learn English, in order to empower them, describe in detail, three (3) motivating factors that you think people might have that encourages them to learn English.**

Children should learn a second language in their early schooling. While there is an ongoing debate about the critical period of learning languages, it is generally agreed that it is easier to learn a second language before the critical age of 7[[1]](#footnote-1). However, a recent MIT study[[2]](#footnote-2) showed that learning at birth or by 10 does not make much difference. Scientists could not determine exactly why children learn languages like native speakers, but they noticed a decline after that age. Nevertheless, it is known that a child’s brain is highly receptive to language, much like a sponge, as it absorbs native-like pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary more easily than adults.

Learning English at a young age has been extremely meaningful for me. I grew more proficient, but I would not call it native-like. The reason could be that there was insufficient practice within an immersive setting. I learned French as a third language from the age of 12 up until 21. I personally found that it was not as easy as English. Since I had not been taught proper pronunciation, I struggled a little with speaking. I thought I completely forgot French because I had not used it in years. I was surprised when I found that I understood some newspapers and basic sentences despite abandoning French over 20 years ago. The positive results of learning another language at a young age were clear. Cognitively, I was better at problem-solving, and my attention span improved. I learned more languages as an adult, like Italian and Japanese. All these different learning experiences shaped who I am today and helped me gain perspective as a teacher and be aware of the struggles and inhibitions of ESL learners. Not all students learn at the same pace. Tailoring instruction to each student's needs and learning style is important.

There are several motivating factors for students to learn a new language. As John McWhorter mentions in his video[[3]](#footnote-3), learning a new language is fun. Japanese, for example, has a completely different word order. The verb always comes at the end of the sentence. The subject pronouns are not commonly used, especially “I” is not always necessary, which, in my opinion, emphasizes the importance of community before the individual. My experience with Japanese changed the way I think and organize my thoughts. Moreover, it has been proven that it is healthy to learn new languages as it delays the onset of dementia and makes the learner acquire the skill of multitasking. It is also a way to connect with people and culture. As I learned more Japanese, I could understand more about their traditions. Despite my beginning level of Japanese, the Japanese people were delighted whenever I spoke their language, which was another way to connect with the locals. It fostered empathy and appreciation. The same is true for English. Along with all the abovementioned factors, a highly motivating reason for learning English is that it is the lingua franca, so learning it can get you anywhere. Finally, learning a new language has become easy as technology has made it accessible anytime, anywhere, and sometimes free.

References

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1. Roxanne Pomerantz [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [MIT](https://news.mit.edu/2018/cognitive-scientists-define-critical-period-learning-language-0501) News [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John McWhorter [↑](#footnote-ref-3)