

Are bilingual kids more open-minded?

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There are clear benefits to raising a bilingual child. But could there be some things learning a second language doesn't produce, such as a more open-minded youngster?

New research from Concordia University shows that, like [monolingual children](#), [bilingual children](#) prefer to interact with those who speak their [mother tongue](#) with a native [accent](#) rather than with peers with a foreign accent.

The study, published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology* and co-authored by psychology professors Krista Byers-Heinlein and Diane Poulin-Dubois, expands on earlier research showing that children who speak one language prefer to interact with those who share their native accent.

Byers-Heinlein and Poulin-Dubois initially thought that bilingual children would prove more open-minded than their unilingual peers. The results, however, show that they too prefer exchanges with "accent-free" speakers.

As part of the study, 44 Montreal-area children between the ages of five and six were shown two [faces](#) on a computer screen. Audio recordings were played for each face; one read a phrase in the child's native accent, while another read the same phrase in a foreign accent. Researchers deliberately chose a foreign accent that was unfamiliar to any of the children and varied associations between faces and voices.

Child participants were asked to point to the faces they would prefer to have as a friend. Most chose faces that corresponded with their native accent.

So why are bilingual children biased against foreign accents? According to Byers-Heinlein, this may be related to children's preference for familiarity.

"Kids tend to prefer to interact with people who are like them, and might perceive an accent as the mark of an outsider," she says.

This study has implications for parents. Since children lack the self-awareness to remind themselves that accent is a superficial measure of character, parents should be more direct in teaching their kids about accents.

"We show biases early on, so it might be necessary to educate all kids, regardless of their linguistic background, about what an accent is and how it doesn't reflect anything about people other than the fact that they are not speaking their native language," says Byers-Heinlein.

Provided by Concordia University

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