

Benefits of being bilingual

Topic

Benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism and a few myths

Aims

- To raise awareness of the benefits of speaking more than one language
- To enable students to recognise and use impersonal report structures
- To provide students with practice in making predictions and reading to confirm them

Age/level

Adults/older teens B2 and up

Time

45–60 minutes

Materials

Student worksheet (3 pages)

Introduction

This lesson was devised to celebrate International Mother Language Day on 21 February. This day exists to promote awareness of linguistic diversity and multilingualism. The lesson looks at the benefits of being bilingual or multilingual, and a few myths, hoping to encourage students to value the languages they speak.

The lesson begins with a few statements about bilingualism. The students decide if these are true or false and then read a text to check their ideas. Having discussed the topic of the text, the students move on to look at impersonal report structures. These are very common in essays, articles and more academic-type writing, and it is useful for students at this level to be aware of them and to be able to produce them accurately.

After some practice with these structures, the lesson ends with a more light-hearted and personalised practice activity.

Procedure

1 Lead-in (2–3 minutes)

Ask students to briefly talk to a partner about how many languages they speak. (It will be at least two, including English.) Feed back as a class – does anyone speak more than two? What about their parents? What does it mean to speak a language? How good do you have to be to consider yourself bilingual or multilingual?

2 Prediction/ pre-reading (5–7 minutes)	<p>Ask students in pairs or small groups to discuss the five statements in exercise 1. They should not read the text at this point but use their own knowledge or intuition. Elicit a few ideas, but do not confirm answers at this stage.</p>
3 Reading (10 minutes)	<p>Students read the text to confirm or deny their predictions. Let students check in pairs, then discuss as a class.</p> <p>Key:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 <i>False – initially they may mix the two languages up, but this is temporary.</i> 2 <i>True – even in non-related subjects such as maths.</i> 3 <i>False – they are not less likely to develop it, but they will probably develop it around five years later than they otherwise might.</i> 4 <i>False – adult brains continue to develop, and while adults may never have such a ‘good’ accent, they have other skills that children don’t have.</i> 5 <i>True – it’s like developing a muscle. (In fact, as connections are formed within the brain we do actually develop bigger brains in that area.)</i>
4 Follow-up (5 minutes)	<p>Ask students to discuss the questions in exercise 3 in pairs. Feed back briefly as a class.</p>
5 Language focus (10–15 minutes)	<p>Ask students to find phrases in the text which have the same meaning as the phrases in exercise 4. Elicit how the phrases are different grammatically. (They use a passive construction.)</p> <p>Key:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 <i>It is estimated that more than half the world’s population is bilingual</i> 2 <i>Learning two or more languages simultaneously was believed to cause confusion</i> 3 <i>Children who speak more than one language have been shown to score more highly in achievement tests at school</i> 4 <i>It has been found that bilinguals, on average, will tend to develop Alzheimer’s disease five years later than monolingual speakers</i> 5 <i>Recent research has shown that we continue to develop new connections in the brain throughout our lives</i> <p>Tell the students that this is a type of passive construction called an impersonal report structure. It is used (there’s another one!) a lot in more formal writing, especially essays, articles, and so on, when we want to say what people generally believe or what people have claimed, etc.</p> <p>Ask the students to read the grammar explanation and then label sentences 1–5 that they found in the text either A or B, according to which type they are.</p> <p>Key:</p> <p>1 A 2 B 3 B 4 A 5 B</p> <p><u>Make sure that students are aware that the passive part of the sentence could be in any tense, e.g. ‘will be’, ‘has been’, etc.</u></p>

6 Practice (10 minutes)	<p>If your students are not familiar with the format of the question type (it's a typical Cambridge First (FCE) type question), you could do the first question as an example. Then ask them to work individually to rewrite the sentences using the structures from exercise 5. Check as a class.</p> <p>Key:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 <i>Living in the country is said to be the best way to learn a foreign language.</i>2 <i>It used to be thought that adults couldn't lose the accent from their first language.</i>3 <i>It is estimated that over 1,500 different languages are spoken in India.</i>4 <i>Only 20 per cent of Americans are estimated to speak a second language.</i>5 <i>A hundred years ago, talking to a baby in two languages was considered to be a bad thing.</i> <p>For extra practice, you could ask students to rewrite each sentence using the alternative structure, e.g. sentence 1 would become: 'It is said that living in the country is the best way to learn a foreign language.'</p>
7 Freer practice (10 minutes)	<p>Ask students to write their own sentences using impersonal report structures. Some of these should be true and some false. They can be about any topic. Give an example if necessary, e.g. 'It is estimated that 50 per cent of the world's population will be vegan in the next 20 years' (not true, though veganism is growing fast). Students then read the sentences to a partner, or others in a small group, and try and guess if they are true or false. Elicit a few examples from the class.</p>

Contributed by

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