



Myths and misunderstandings about early bilingualism

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It is estimated that more children around the world grow up learning two, or more, languages than one. Despite the prevalence of early bilingualism, scientific studies of young dual language learners began to flourish only in the late 1980s. Many parents, educators and other professionals still frequently express concern that raising or educating children bilingually will jeopardize children's development. These fears often reflect a number of persistent myths or misunderstanding about the consequences of early bilingualism. This presentation will review research evidence concerning some common myths about early bilingualism in family and educational contexts. Specifically, the following myths will be addressed: the infant brain is fundamentally monolingual and, thus, early dual language acquisition can result in delays and even deficits in language development; child bilingual code-mixing is a sign of confusion; dual language learning is not appropriate for children with specific language impairment or other learning challenges; and young school-age children are linguistic sponges and require limited formal instruction in a second language to master it.