

## Do bilingual babies actually have more brain power? | The Hot Word | Hot & Trending Words Daily Blog at Dictionary.com



A recent study led by Janet Werker, a psychologist at Vancouver's University of British Columbia, suggests that children who learn two languages at once may have increased **cognitive** abilities such as enhanced visual and auditory sensitivity. While Werker does not believe that a person must grow up in a bilingual environment to gain such advantages, **the study** suggests that it can't hurt.

Werker studied both bilingual and **monolingual** infants over their first eight months of development, comparing their perceptual abilities. One of the unique findings was that bilingual children seemed to be able to "change the rules" involved with language learning — essentially using the sensory skills needed for both languages in a variety of mental situations.

The findings run counter to the theory that suggests bilingualism may actually lead to language confusion. **Benjamin Lee Whorf**, the American linguist, once said, "Language shapes the way we think, and determines what we think about." Whorf's linguistic studies led to the principles of the Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity – a belief that speakers of different languages learn, think, and act differently depending on the language they speak and write. From Whorf's findings, one may conclude that a child who engages in **code-switching** – the use of two or more languages in everyday interactions – will develop language confusion. Scholars postulate that language confusion thus equals confusion with simple cognitive processing. Werker points out that there is no strong evidence of this – in fact bilingualism is common throughout the world and only in North America does it seem to be an issue.

Werker's findings lend credence to the theory that babies are just as able to learn two languages from birth as they are one. In addition, babies who grow up in a bilingual environment are learning to pay attention to perceptual cues pertaining to two distinguishing languages, potentially increasing how much time they spend processing the world around them.

Have you had any experience that supports or contests this study? Has speaking more than one language boosted your ability to navigate through the world, or has it ever caused you trouble? Share your thoughts, below.