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How Bilingualism Affects the Way We Think

Some of the main characteristics of modern society are globalization and internationalization, leading to the active interaction of individuals from different countries. As a result, more and more people all over the world are bilingual, which means they can use two languages proficiently. This phenomenon is actively studied, because it adds a new dimension to the discussion on the abilities of the human brain. Research displays that bilingualism positively affects human cognitive abilities, as it allows individuals to change focus faster, process more information in an instant, and in general makes our thinking process more effective and productive.

First of all, language and speaking as an action have always been recognized as having a significant impact on the human brain in general, and cognitive abilities in particular. To be more precise, research has displayed that the function of language is both the result of an individual's cognition and a factor that is involved in the process of the mind's work. What is more, according to Perlovsky and Sakai, "information is exchanged between language and each of perception, memory, and consciousness in both directions." As follows, it is clear that language affects human cognition, and this influence is even greater when a person uses two or more languages.

From this fact, one can assume that there is also a connection between cognitive abilities and the bilingualism of an individual, and this relation is carefully examined. Notably, such an engaging and promising topic has been addressed by numerous researchers in the field, and one of the most complex modern studies was conducted by Marian and Shook. The authors point out the significant impact of bilingualism on human cognition and highlight a number of both positive and negative outcomes. They start with discussing the factor that enables the influence of bilingualism on the individual's brain; it appears when a bilingual person speaks while he or she uses one language, the second language remains active in the person's mind. The need to keep and process two languages at the same time leads to certain changes in thinking and even the brain's transformation.

Talking about the negative aspects of bilingualism's impact on human cognition, a significant level of distraction is always present due to the person's need to always keep both or more languages in mind. As a result, a bilingual person's reaction to specific stimuli, such as when one needs to name certain objects, is likely to be noticeably slower. In addition, researchers point out the fact that the constant activation of more than one languages' vocabulary in a person's mind that appears as a result of the words' similarity may cause notable complications in an individual's speaking and operating of languages in other ways (Marian and Shook).

On the other hand, scientists observe more positive impacts of bilingualism on an individual's cognition and thinking process than negative ones. The first meaningful change in human cognition that researchers highlight resulting from bilingualism is the increased ability to control one's usage of languages and the level of perception of each known language. This skill is developed due to the fact that a person should constantly keep a balance between the languages he or she knows and switch between them quickly. In addition, such people commonly

have better cognitive control in general, as they can switch their focus on certain factors or aspects of objects faster. This can be observed in situations when a person has to define objects by color, and after the distinguishing factor is rapidly changed to a shape; a bilingual individual has fewer difficulties managing this change. In addition, it should be noted that the ability to control one's language and cognition also positively affects a person's control skills in general. What is more, bilingualism brings a higher level of attention that is gained due to the already discussed need to control one's language and to distinguish between different languages. A bilingual person attentively listens to others' speaking in order to correctly define certain words and not to get confused with languages and, as a result, develops a better skill for attention.

All things considered, the impact of bilingualism on human cognition is evident because the mechanism of using a language comes from a person's brain and, at the same time, significantly affects its cognitive functions. Researchers in the field display both positive and negative impacts of bilingualism on one's thinking and point out the fact that there are many more beneficial factors than negative ones, including better control skills, reaction time, and attention.

Works Cited

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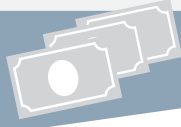
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