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Best to learn a new language before age of 10 – 4th May, 2018

Level 4

A study suggests that it is best to start learning a language before the age of ten. Researchers said the ability to learn grammar well is present up until the age of 18. This is the limit of the "critical period" when language-learning ability starts to decline. A researcher said children quite easily become bilingual because, "that's when you're best at learning languages". He said it's difficult to become truly bilingual later in life.

The research was based on 670,000 online grammar quizzes. The tests had grammar rules designed to confuse non-native speakers. These helped to measure the language ability of people who started learning a language at different ages. One researcher suggested older people might be too busy to learn a language because they leave home, go to university or start work. All of these affect language-learning ability.

Level 5

New research suggests that to achieve native-like proficiency in a new language, people should start learning before the age of ten. Researchers said children up to the age of 18 remain skilled at learning grammar. Unfortunately, those who want to pick up a new language beyond their late teens are past the "critical period" when language-learning ability starts to decline. A researcher said: "As far as a child is concerned, it's quite easy to become bilingual....That's when you're best at learning languages. It's not really something that you can make up later."

The research was based on the results of 670,000 people taking a 10-minute online grammar quiz. Researchers measured the grammatical ability of people who started learning a language at different points in their life. The test had grammar rules that were likely to confuse non-native speakers. These measured a person's proficiency. Another researcher suggested older people might be too busy to learn a language. He said after 17 or 18, people leave home, go to university or start work. All of these could affect how well someone learns a language.

Level 6

New research from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) suggests that if people want to achieve native-like proficiency in a new language, they should start learning that language before the age of ten. The researchers added that children up to the age of 17 or 18 remain adept at learning grammar. There is bad news for those who want to pick up a new language beyond their late teens. The researchers say this is past the "critical period" when language-learning ability starts to decline. Researcher Joshua Hartshorne said: "As far as a child is concerned, it's quite easy to become bilingual....That's when you're best at learning languages. It's not really something that you can make up later."

The research was based on an analysis of results from a 10-minute online grammar quiz. Over 670,000 language learners of all ages participated in the test. Researchers measured the grammatical ability of people who started learning a language at different points in their life. Professor Hartshorne focused on grammar rules that were most likely to confuse a non-native speaker as a gauge of that person's proficiency. MIT researcher Josh Tenenbaum suggested people simply might be too busy to learn a language later in life. He said: "After 17 or 18, you leave home, you work full time, or you become a specialized university student. All of these might impact your learning rate for any language."