



# Growing up Bi/Multilingual CODE SWITCHERS UNITE!

In our big, diverse world, lots of people grow up speaking more than one language. While some places, like parts of the English-speaking world, mostly use just one language, in other spots, like countries in Europe or Africa, speaking multiple languages is totally normal.

For example, someone from Cameroon might speak local languages, such as Limbum and Sari, as well as Ewondo, a common language, and either English or French, which are the official ones. They might even use a mix of English and French!



**To stay bilingual, speakers need chances to practice their languages, and that's where parents come in. Being bilingual isn't something you're born with; it's something you learn, so it's up to parents to make sure their children get opportunities to practice.**

**S**ome have reported the decline in use of French in some regions of the world, but French is an important language in West Africa. A study by the investment bank Natixis predicts that French will likely become the world's most widely spoken language by 2050, due to the demographic growth prospects in Africa, immigration and globalization. Canadians, learning French in school now, will benefit in the future.

Canada is changing, and immigration is our future. Think about families in your neighbourhood where the parents speak different languages or where the family's language is different from what most people around them speak. These kids growing up in multilingual households are actually pretty amazing! Even when they're really young, bi/multilingual kids can understand and know who to speak to in each language and can switch between the languages quite naturally.

Some parents worry that learning two languages might be too much for a child, but learning to talk is more like learning to walk—it comes pretty naturally. And research shows that the brain can handle more than one language just fine.

**... all the benefits surface no matter what languages you speak. It's the mix that matters, not which languages they are!**

These bilingual kids are not just good at talking - research tells us that they're also great at understanding how language works. For example, they're better than kids who only speak one language at spotting mistakes in sentences. An example cited is they'll know right away if someone says, "apples grewed on trees", doesn't sound right, but "apples grow on noses" does sound right, even though it's nonsensical!

Another worry that surfaces among parents is if their child mixes languages in the same sentence. We are here to say, it's totally normal! It's called code-switching, and it's not just random - it follows rules! Bilingual folks use it for all sorts of reasons, like finding the right word or for privacy or for fitting in with their friends.

These bilingual kids also develop awesome thinking skills. Because they're used to switching between languages, they're really good at seeing things from different points of view, figuring out what's important, and ignoring stuff that doesn't matter. These skills aren't just for language; they can help with all sorts of life's challenges.

Now, parents might wonder, what if one of the languages isn't all that popular or useful in a Canadian context? Like, who's speaking Flemish or Cornish on the streets of Calgary these days? Well, here's the thing: all the benefits surface no matter what languages you speak. It's the mix that matters, not which languages they are!

Long story short, there are awesome perks of being bilingual, it opens up a whole new world of possibilities! To stay bilingual, speakers need chances to practice their languages, and that's where parents come in. Being bilingual isn't something you're born with; it's something you learn, so it's up to parents to make sure their children get opportunities to practice. ■