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Multilingual are more creative: Sharjah study

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DUBAI // An ability to speak more than one language can equip people with better problem-solving skills and greater creativity, according to a new study.

Research carried out by Anatoliy Kharkhurin, a researcher and psychology professor at the American University of Sharjah, shows bilinguals and polyglots perceive the world around them in a different way than people who speak only their mother tongue.

"Apparently the mastery or the practice of more than one language changes the cognition structures of the brain, which means that the way we think changes as a function of new language acquisition," Mr Kharkhurin said. "What my research found is that [multilinguals] show a broader scope of approach to different problems. They are better in interpreting a situation from different perspectives.

"For example, when faced with the same situation or same object which is presented in a different name [linguistically], multilinguals have a greater sense of flexibility and tolerance toward ambiguous situations."

Multilinguals are able to look at the same problem, but from a different point of view, because of the multicultural exposure they come across through the new language they acquire. Therefore, they are more likely to be open when it comes resolving a situation when faced with a difficulty, the research showed.

Dr Kharkhurin said there were two types of creative thought processes that occur in the brain. The first is "divergent thinking", which consists of producing and processing a large number of solutions. The second, "convergent thinking", involves extracting the creative solution out of the many possibilities presented in divergent thinking.



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Katicia Danish, the corporate training co-ordinator at the Eton institute, a language learning centre in Dubai, said: "Our brain is a massive muscle. As they say, if you don't use it you'll lose it."

"Sometimes when I look at things now, I look at it from a Chinese perspective as such," said Mrs Danish, who also speaks Mandarin Chinese.

Vinod Nair, a 23-year-old Indian businessman, is familiar with eight languages and is currently learning Japanese to deal with his clients.

"Learning Japanese has just opened up a whole new door in front of me," he said. "You get to know more about the country and the people, and would never find yourself in a difficult position if you happen to visit that place."

"I am in a multinational culture, so it's important to communicate in different languages," said Ismail Saeed, a 28-year-old Emirati mechanical engineer who is learning Spanish.

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