

It's never too late to learn a new language

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

What is easy and what is difficult when learning a new language? Put these in order from 1 (easiest) to 6 (most difficult).

- | | |
|----------|----------------------------------|
| 1. _____ | a. learning vocabulary |
| 2. _____ | b. pronunciation |
| 3. _____ | c. using the correct grammar |
| 4. _____ | d. understanding what people say |
| 5. _____ | e. reading texts |
| 6. _____ | f. having a conversation |

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers will help you.

bilingual

community centre

benefit

dementia

care home

1. A _____ is a place for people who are unable to look after themselves. (para 1)
2. _____ is a serious illness affecting someone's brain and memory in which they gradually stop being able to think or behave in a normal way. (para 1)
3. A _____ is an advantage you get from a situation. (para 2)
4. A _____ is a building used for meetings, social events and other activities. (para 3)
5. If someone is _____, they can speak two languages very, very well. (para 4)

monolingual

fluency

wellbeing

task

mother tongue

6. A _____ person can only speak one language. (para 4)
7. _____ is the ability to express yourself in a clear and confident way. (para 5)
8. A _____ is something that you have to do, often something that is difficult. (para 5)
9. Your _____ is the main language that you learn as a child. (para 5)
10. _____ is a feeling of being happy, healthy and safe. (para 6)

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. Which four languages are offered in courses provided at care homes in Scotland?
2. When was Lingo Flamingo started?
3. How many teachers does Lingo Flamingo employ?
4. How many people has Lingo Flamingo worked with so far?
5. What is Thomas Bak's job?
6. Why is language learning better for the brain than doing a sudoku puzzle?

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The care-home residents proving it's never too late to learn a new language

Emma Sheppard

25 July, 2018

- 1 When an advertisement for French classes appeared in Dundonald House Care Home, Mari Dougan was surprised her parents wanted to go. Dougan's mum, Patricia, has lived at the home for two years and has had dementia for nine years. She has lost most of her speech. But the course was something she and her husband could do together and the whole family has noticed a change in her.
- 2 "I think Dad decided he'd take Mum just for her benefit," says Dougan. "But he loved it just as much as she did. After they did the French course, they did Italian. Mum knows she's there and she sometimes answers with a word or two – that's amazing. She's much more active since she started the classes."
- 3 Courses in French, Italian, German and Spanish last for ten weeks for an hour a week. The classes are the idea of Robbie Norval, who started Lingo Flamingo in 2015 to give lessons to older adults. Lingo Flamingo employs 35 teachers who work in care homes and community centres in Scotland. So far, it has worked with more than 800 people.
- 4 Working with Thomas Bak, a psychologist from Edinburgh University, has been important. Bak's research into dementia over 20 years has found that people who are bilingual get dementia up to four years later than those who are monolingual.
- 5 Even for people who aren't bilingual, learning a language in later life has benefits, Bak says. He has found improvements in attention, fluency and memory among older adults. He believes it is never too late to learn a language. "In fact, it becomes more important with age," he says. He adds that what is really good about language learning is the variety of tasks you have to do. "You have to learn to tell the difference between different sounds. You have to learn new ideas that might be very different from your mother tongue. You have to learn grammar and how to use words in a conversation," he says. Bak says doing a sudoku puzzle is not as useful – it is like going to the gym and spending all your time on a single machine.
- 6 "We've also found learning a language really increases wellbeing and self-confidence," Norval says. "If an adult with dementia can learn a couple of words, they think to themselves, 'I can learn new things.' They don't fear dementia as much. They realize they're not forgetting everything, which is a really important message."
- 7 In Aberdeen, Sarah Duff, service manager at the Dementia Resource Centre, is organizing a party, with a flamenco guitarist, for people who have finished their first Spanish course. At first, she was worried that the teacher wouldn't be able to teach all different levels of dementia but says everyone has really enjoyed the classes.
- 8 "It's been such a great group," she says. "It's included people who didn't come to other things. When you've got dementia, it's good to learn a new language and make your brain work harder but it's also good to make new friends and have fun."
- 9 Dougan says that the joy of the class for her parents has been that they don't think about the dementia. "Everyone is in the same position. Nobody is any better at speaking the language than anybody else, whether you have dementia or not. For that period of time, the dementia is not there."

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First published in *The Guardian*, 25/07/18

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4 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Research has shown that bilingual people ... | a. ... your brain work harder. |
| 2. According to Thomas Bak, learning a language is ... | b. ... they realize that they can learn new things and are not forgetting everything. |
| 3. Learning a new language makes ... | c. ... get dementia later than monolingual people. |
| 4. Mari Dougan's mother has ... | d. ... involves doing a variety of tasks. |
| 5. If someone with dementia can learn a few words, ... | e. ... become more active since she started learning languages. |
| 6. Learning a language ... | f. ... better for your brain than doing sudoku puzzles. |

5 Chunks

Rearrange the words to make phrases from the text.

- hour for week an a
- eight more people than hundred
- four up later years to
- too it late never is
- period time for that of
- mother from very tongue your different

6 Prepositions

Complete the phrases from the text using these prepositions.

in at for of on with

- an advertisement _____ language classes
- courses _____ French
- _____ a machine at the gym
- an adult _____ dementia
- better _____ speaking the language
- a couple _____ words

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7 Word stress

Put these words from the text into two groups according to their stress.

important
benefit

memory
confidence

attention
dementia

bilingual
fluency

A o o o	B o o o

8 Discussion

- Is teaching a foreign language to old people in care homes a good idea? Why? Why not?