It's never too late to learn a new language

Level 2 • Upper 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 grammatical structures correctly
4. __________________________ d. understanding what people say
5. __________________________ e. reading texts
6. __________________________ f. holding a conversation

2 Key words

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

- bilingual
- dementia
- diagnosis
- monolingual
- animated
- benefit
- brainchild
- isolated
- irrelevant
- 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. If you are __________________, you are lively or active. (para 2)
5. A __________________ is a clever idea that someone thinks of and develops. (para 3)
6. If someone is __________________, they can speak two languages extremely well. (para 5)
7. A __________________ person can only speak one language. (para 5)
8. If you feel __________________, you feel alone and unhappy. (para 9)
9. A __________________ is a statement about what disease someone has, based on an examination. (para 11)
10. If something is __________________, it is not important to what you are discussing or doing. (para 12)

3 Find the information

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

1. When was Lingo Flamingo started?
2. Which four languages are offered in courses provided at care homes in Scotland?
3. Which other three languages are mentioned in the text?
4. In which Scottish city will a language hub open in 2018?
5. What is Thomas Bak’s profession?
6. How many teachers does Lingo Flamingo employ?
It's never too late to learn a new language

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

Emma Sheppard
25 July, 2018

1 When a notice appeared advertising French classes in Dunordon House Care Home, Mari Dougan was surprised her parents were interested in going. Dougan’s mum, Patricia, has lived at the home for two years and has had dementia for the past nine. She has lost most of her speech. Despite this, the course was something she and her husband, Eric, 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. It became the highlight of their week. Mum knows she’s there, she’s joining in and she picks up the pen and answers back a word or two – that’s amazing. She’s much more animated since she’s been going to the classes.”

3 The language classes are the brainchild 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 across Scotland. So far, it has worked with more than 800 people.

4 Courses in French, Italian, German and Spanish run for ten weeks for an hour a week. Norval says running the courses has not always been easy.

5 “When you tell people you teach language learning in care homes, they say, ‘Why on earth would you do that?’ Thankfully, that opinion is changing.”

6 Working with Thomas Bak, a psychologist from Edinburgh University, has been key to building credibility. Bak’s research into dementia over 20 years has found that people who are bilingual develop the condition up to four years later than those who are monolingual. “If your brain is better interconnected, better trained, you might still get dementia but you’ll cope with it a bit longer,” he says.

7 Bak 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 particularly valuable about language learning is the variety of tasks involved. “You have to learn to distinguish different sounds. You have to learn new concepts that might be very different from your mother tongue. You have to learn grammar and how to use words in a conversation,” he says. In contrast, according to Bak, doing a sudoku puzzle is like going to the gym and spending all your time on a single machine.

8 “We’ve also found language learning really increases wellbeing and self-confidence,” Norval says. “If an adult with dementia can learn a couple of words, they think to themselves, ‘Actually, I can learn new things.’ They don’t fear Alzheimer’s as much. They realize they’re not forgetting everything, which is a really important message as well.”

9 Norval has recently introduced a volunteer programme to bring together linguists with people with dementia who revert to their mother tongue (such as Urdu, Punjabi or Polish) and may be feeling isolated in a care home. He is also opening a language centre in Glasgow in 2018 – he will use the money from paying participants to fund courses in care homes.

10 In Aberdeen, Sarah Duff, service manager at the Dementia Resource Centre, is organizing a graduation party, with a flamenco guitarist, for participants finishing their first Spanish course. At first, she was concerned that the teacher wouldn’t be able to successfully teach people with all different levels of dementia but she says everyone has really enjoyed the classes since they started in January.

11 “It’s been such a great group,” she says. “It’s brought in people who didn’t attend other things. When you’ve got a diagnosis like dementia, it’s good to learn a new language and stimulate the brain but it’s also good to feel you belong and make new friends and have fun.”

12 Dougan says that the joy of the class for her parents has been that the dementia becomes almost irrelevant. “Everyone is on a level playing-field. 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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## Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. Research has shown that bilingual people develop dementia later than monolingual people.
2. Learning a language can help memory.
3. Older people cannot learn a new language.
4. Doing Sudoku puzzles is better for your brain than learning a language.
5. Learning a new language means doing a variety of tasks.
6. Teachers from Lingo Flamingo teach Urdu, Punjabi and Polish.

## Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *do an activity with people who are already doing it* (para 2)
2. a noun meaning *the qualities that someone or something has that makes people believe or trust them* (para 5)
3. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *deal successfully with a difficult situation* (para 5)
4. a noun meaning *an effect or an influence* (para 6)
5. a verb meaning *recognize the difference between things* (para 7)
6. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *return to a previous state or way of behaving* (para 9)
7. an adjective meaning *worried about something* (para 10)
8. a three-word noun phrase meaning *a situation that is fair or the same for all the people involved* (para 12)

## Two-word expressions

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left-hand column</th>
<th>Right-hand column</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. mother</td>
<td>a. home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. self-</td>
<td>b. centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. care</td>
<td>c. confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. verbal</td>
<td>d. party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. community</td>
<td>e. tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. graduation</td>
<td>f. fluency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7 Word-building

Complete the table using words from the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>diagnose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>remember</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

• It's never too late to learn a language.
• Learning a language opens a door to the world.
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KEY

2 Key words
1. care home
2. dementia
3. benefit
4. animated
5. brainchild
6. bilingual
7. monolingual
8. isolated
9. diagnosis
10. irrelevant

5 Find the word
1. join in
2. credibility
3. cope with
4. impact
5. distinguish
6. revert to
7. concerned
8. level playing-field

3 Find the information
1. 2015
2. French, Italian, German, Spanish
3. Urdu, Punjabi, Polish
4. Glasgow
5. psychologist
6. 35

4 Comprehension check
1. T
2. T
3. F
4. F
5. T
6. F

6 Two-word expressions
1. e
2. c
3. a
4. f
5. b
6. d

7 Word-building
1. improvement
2. concentration
3. participant
4. speech
5. diagnosis
6. memory