



# BRIDGING RESEARCH AND SOCIETY: PERSPECTIVES, CHALLENGES AND MUTUAL BENEFITS



**Antonella Sorace**  
**ECSPM Symposium, 19 March 2026**



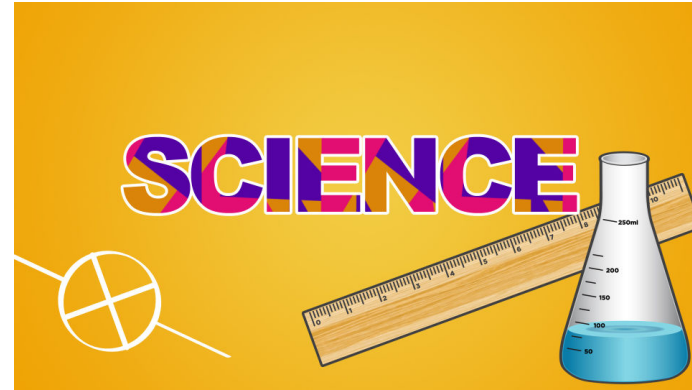
# Bi/multilingualism over the lifespan



# Challenges

- Multilingualism is the norm worldwide, but there are still many prejudices and misconceptions – many old, some new

# Old and new myths



## Confusion



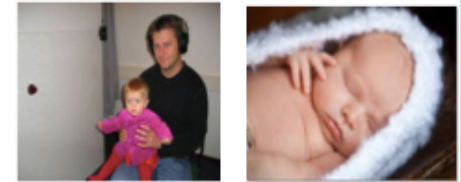
## Problems at school



## 'Useful' and 'not useful' languages



## Early separation of the two languages



## Spontaneous understanding of how language works and better language learning skills



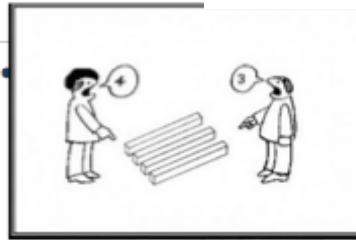
## Competence and creativity in language mixing



34



## Earlier awareness of other people's perspectives



## Better control of attention and ability to handle conflicting information (cognitive control)



## Brain plasticity even in older learners



## Cognitive reserve in ageing



# What does research show?

- Knowing more than languages can give a range of linguistic and cognitive benefits over the lifespan that can enhance future perspectives and everyday life
- These benefits are not automatic: they depend on positive attitudes and effective responses to challenges

# It doesn't matter *which* languages

- It's the fact of having more than one language that matters, regardless of modality.
- **THERE ARE NO 'MORE USEFUL' OR 'LESS USEFUL' LANGUAGES FROM THIS POINT OF VIEW!**



# New myths

**BILINGUAL CHILDREN ARE  
GENIUSES!**



**BILINGUALS DON'T GET  
ALZHEIMER'S!**



# Are these effects automatic?

These benefits are not always found in all bilinguals because the type of **bilingual experience** plays a role: language distance, patterns of use, exposure to variation, attitudes, individual differences....

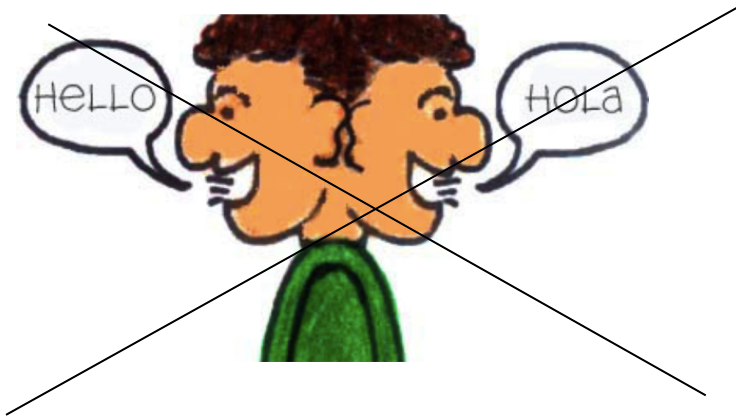


Less  
Bilingual



More  
bilingual

# “Bilingual” → NOT the sum of two monolinguals



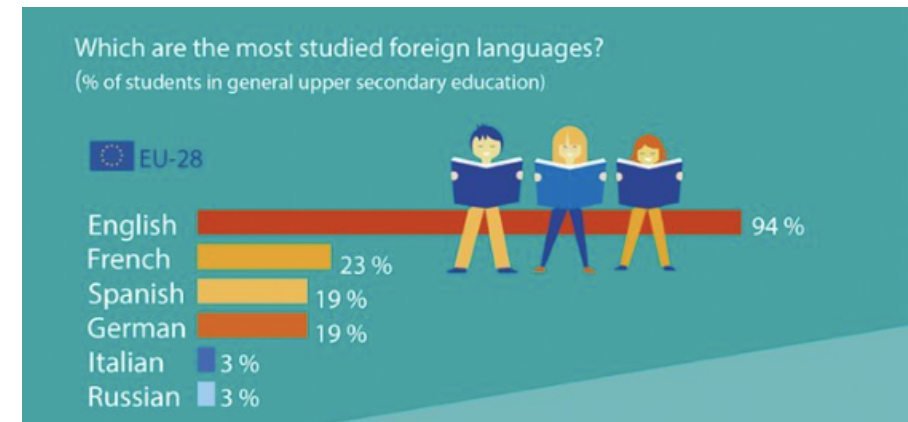
However, many educational and diagnostic tests are still based on monolingual norms

- Risk of over/under-diagnosis: some typical delays and mistakes in bilingual children may look like speech impairments but in most cases are not.

# Challenges in an English-dominant world

Out of the world's approximately [7.5 billion](#) inhabitants, 1.5 billion speak English (20% of the Earth's population)

About [360 million](#) people speak English as their first language.



English is by far the [most commonly studied](#) foreign language in the world, followed by French at a distant second.

# “Privileged monolingualism” in the Anglosphere

- The UK had the worst language skills of all countries in the EU.
- Lack of language skills **costs the UK economy £48 billion a year (2014 estimate).**



Brexit Briefing **Brexit** [+ Add to myFT](#)

## Putting up Brexit language barriers

Monolingual Britons are disadvantaged if they cannot communicate effectively abroad

# Linguistic diversity disappearing

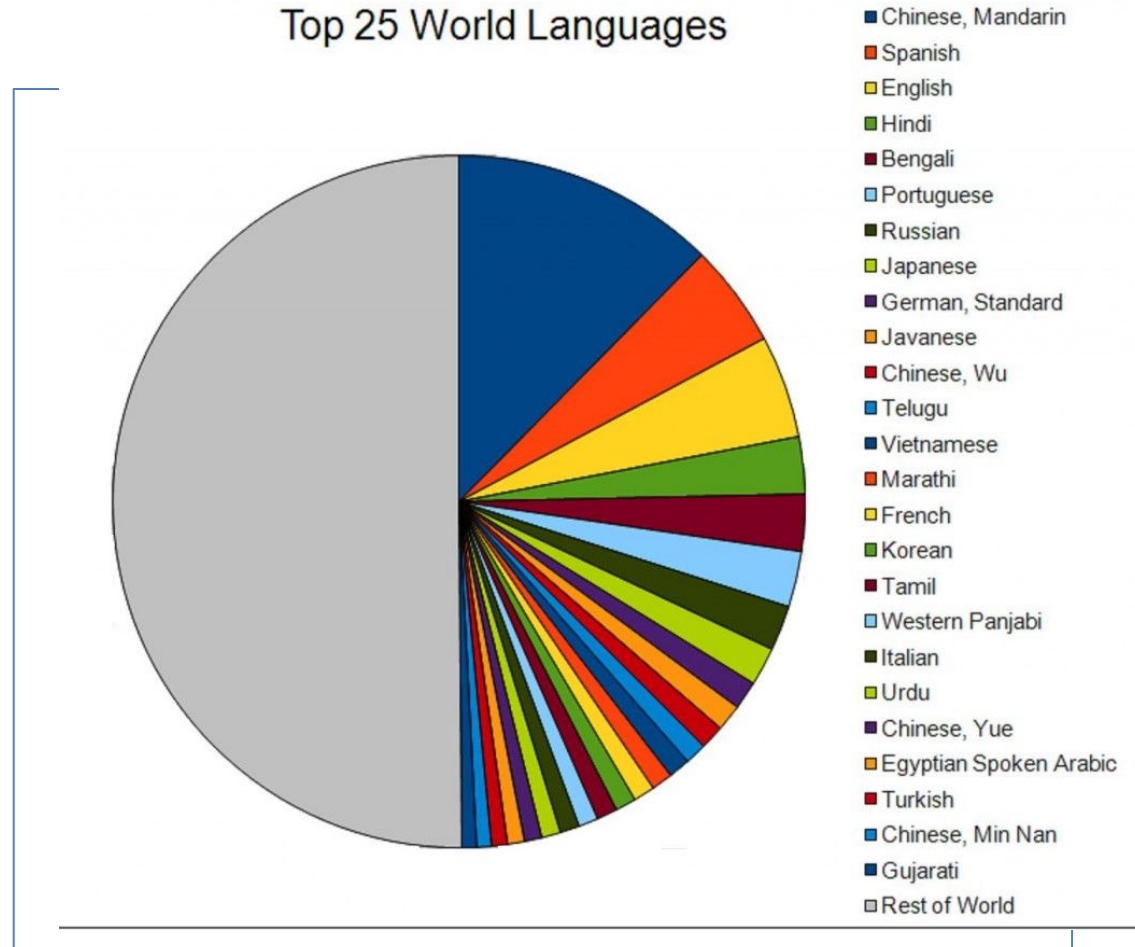
**Roughly 6,000 to 7,000 languages spoken worldwide**

**• 25 languages account for more than half of the world's populations**

**• The vast majority of languages are minority languages in every country in which they are spoken.**

**• By the end of this century, half of the world's languages will have disappeared (UNESCO estimate)**

Top 25 World Languages



# Research: up to now

28 May 2025:

## GESDA Anticipation Workshop - Language and Communication



# Research: up to now



Bilingualism research has been/ still is too fractioned, for example:

- BFLA, SLA.... (No 'critical period')
- L1 attrition, L2 learning... (they can be related in a positive way)
- Linguistic vs. cognitive vs. neuro vs. social factors
- Monolingual speaker as the point of reference

ACADEMIC WARS!

# Moving ahead: next 5-10 years



Interdisciplinarity seen as necessary

Understanding gradience and gradient effects of bilingualism: the heterogeneity of the bilingual experience

Multifactorial approaches to understand the variable results (and null results)

# Looking ahead: next 25 years



Stop monolingualism as the point of reference

Avoid both negative perception of multilingualism and over-positive perception

Understanding language changes due to AI

Learning from public engagement

# Connecting research and society

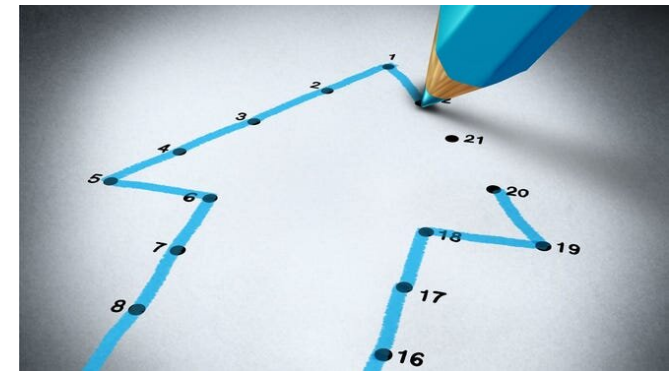
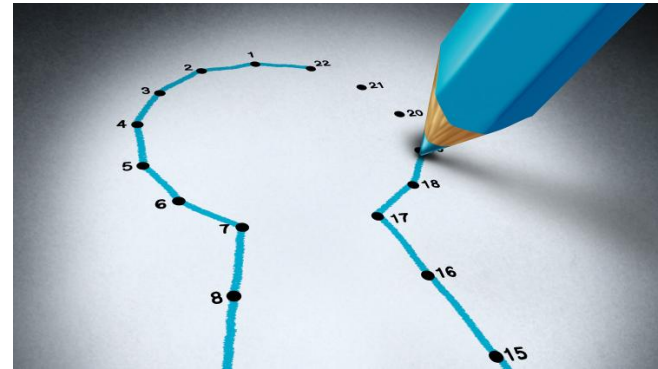
- Learning to communicate to people outside academia:
  - Simplifying complexity (often not easy to accept for researchers)
  - Adapting contents and styles to very different audiences
  - Learning to find the best possible solutions, taking into account priorities and constraints and understanding the need to 'compromise'

# Joining the (many) dots

... among different subfields of research  
on language, language learning, and  
bilingualism, and different  
populations

... between research and society

**MORE INFORMATION =  
BETTER DECISIONS**



# *Bilingualism Matters*

Founded in 2008

Seminars and training for families, educators, health professionals, policy makers, international companies and institutions; increasingly also children and younger people



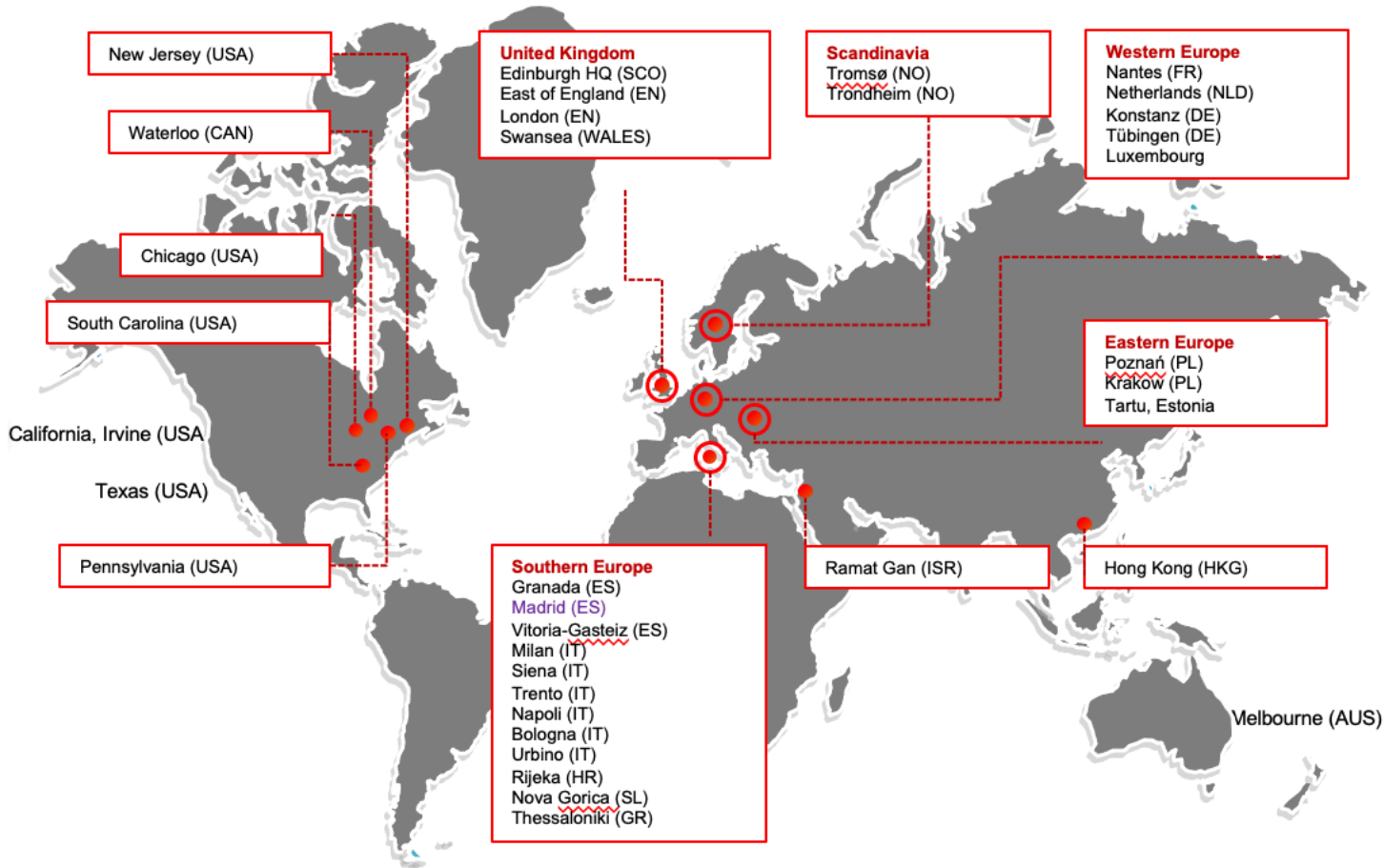
Public engagement, policy advice, media attention

Research commissioned by stakeholders

Wide network of international branches, which became a non-profit organisation

Division of labour with BM@Edinburgh

# International network



35 partners:

- 25 in the UK and Europe
- 6 in the US
- 1 in Canada
- 1 in the Middle East
- 1 in China
- 1 in Australia

# Most recent BM partner (17 September 2025)

Launch of



## BILINGUALISM MATTERS @ EL PASO

 **Wednesday, September 17<sup>th</sup>**  
 **5:30–7:00 pm**  
 **Centennial Museum, UTEP**



### What to Expect

- ✓ Meet others passionate about bilingualism
- ✓ Share ideas and experiences
- ✓ Learn about opportunities for collaboration

### Program Highlights

- **Welcome Remarks**
  - BM @ El Paso Directors
  - Dr. John Wiebe, Provost, UTEP
- **Special Guests (live from Edinburgh, Scotland)**
  - Dr. Antonella Sorace, Founder & President of Bilingualism Matters
  - Dr. Katarzyna Przybycien, CEO & Co-Founder of Bilingualism Matters
- **Local Voices**
  - Ms. Veronica Reyes – El Paso Independent School District
  - Ms. Deana White – La Nube STEAM Discovery Center
  - Ms. Rita Monsivais – La Fe Preparatory
  - Ms. Sandra Arlette Morales – Local Entrepreneur
  - Dr. Anita Hernández & Dr. José Montelongo – New Mexico State University

<https://www.bilingualism-matters.org>

For more information, please contact Dr. Ana Schwartz (aischwartz@utep.edu) or Dr. Annie Tremblay (actremblay@utep.edu).

# BM collective events

## ANNUAL events

- BM Symposium  
(2018, 2019, 2020, 2021,  
2022, 2023, 2025, 2026)



## All year round

- Workshops & events  
(both in person and online)

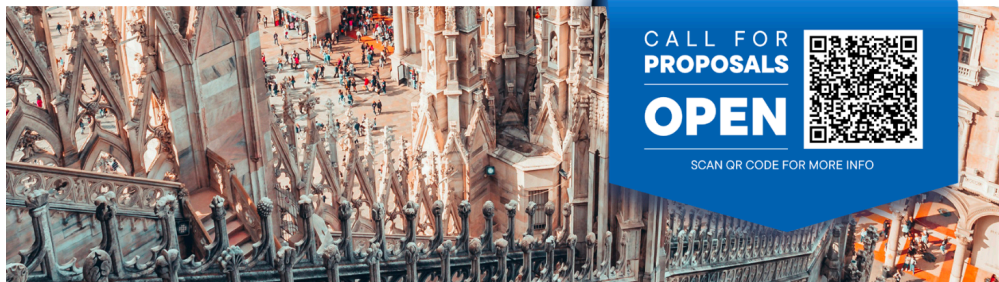


# Bilingualism Matters Symposium: Milan, 27-29 April 2026



## Bilingualism Matters Symposium (BM2026) 2026

APRIL 28-30 | VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE  
MILAN, ITALY | In person presentations only



CALL FOR  
PROPOSALS

OPEN



SCAN QR CODE FOR MORE INFO



28 - 30 April | MILAN | ITALY

**BMS**  
BILINGUALISM  
MATTERS SYMPOSIUM

— 2026 —

REGISTER  
NOW

**Bilingualism Matters Symposium (BMS) is an annual interdisciplinary conference that celebrates and explores every aspect of bi-multilingualism. BMS themes include the cognitive, linguistic, educational, policy, social, and attitudinal aspects of bilingual language learning, teaching, processing, and use across the lifespan in a variety of contexts.**

**BMS brings together scholars and practitioners, and features academic research as well as classroom studies, community projects, examples of practice, and reports based on lived experience.**

# From research to the community, and back again



# More insightful cross-disciplinary research



The experience of public engagement gives

- a better understanding of the contexts of research questions and more research insights
- a better ability to communicate across disciplinary boundaries

# Funded research projects



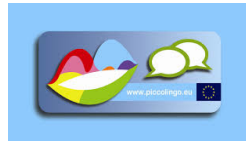
European Commission



Canada



REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA  
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES



Erasmus+



# Bilingualism Matter community: students

New students' community

Student-led projects

Training

Students' initiatives

Much Language Such Talk Home Episodes Glossary About us Contact

Episodes

<b>S2 E12: Language and Emotions – Prof. Jean-Marc Dewaele</b> <small>18th May 2021</small>	<b>S2 E11: Language and Gender- Joe Pearce</b> <small>11th Apr 2021</small>
<b>S2 E10: Language and Health – Dr. Thomas Bak</b> <small>14th Mar 2021</small>	<b>S2 E9: Language &amp; Art – Marion Geoffray &amp; Dobrochna Futro</b> <small>14th Mar 2021</small>
<b>Special Release: Love Languages</b> <small>14th Mar 2021</small>	<b>S2 E8: ConLangs – David J. Peterson and Jessie Sams</b> <small>16th Mar 2021</small>
<b>S2 E7: Language as a Human Right – Fernand de Varennes</b> <small>13rd Mar 2021</small>	<b>S2 E6: Minoritized Languages – Guillem Belmar Viernes</b> <small>16th Mar 2021</small>
<b>S2 E5: Language in Everyday Life – Dr. Isabelle Barth</b> <small>11th Mar 2021</small>	<b>S2 E4: Child Bilingualism – Dr. Sharon Unsworth</b> <small>11th Mar 2021</small>
<b>S2 E3: Linguistics and Language Learning – Prof. Ludovica Serratrice</b> <small>14th Mar 2021</small>	<b>S2 E2: Language and Cognition – Prof. Ellen Bialystok</b> <small>11th Mar 2021</small>
<b>S2 E1: Forensic Linguistics – Dr. Nicci MacLeod</b> <small>11th Mar 2021</small>	<b>S1 E17: World Refugee Day – Debora Kayembe</b> <small>17th Jan 2021</small>
<b>S1 E16: Languages for All – Thomas Chaurin</b> <small>10th Jan 2021</small>	<b>S1 E15: Multilingual Families – Dr. Ute Limacher-Riebold &amp; Korina Topalidou</b> <small>20th May 2020</small>
<b>S1 E14: Spanish Language – Dr. Carlos Soler Montes</b> <small>25th Apr 2021</small>	<b>S1 E13: Bilingualism &amp; Autism – Dr. Bérengère Digard &amp; Sonny Hallett</b> <small>7th Apr 2021</small>



MUCH LANGUAGE  
SUCH TALK



# Student training and experience

- Students and visitors volunteer to assist with particular BM activities or projects.
- Training and opportunities to talk to the general public and engage in community projects.
- This experience is increasingly valued by employers.



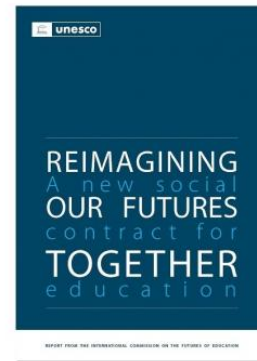
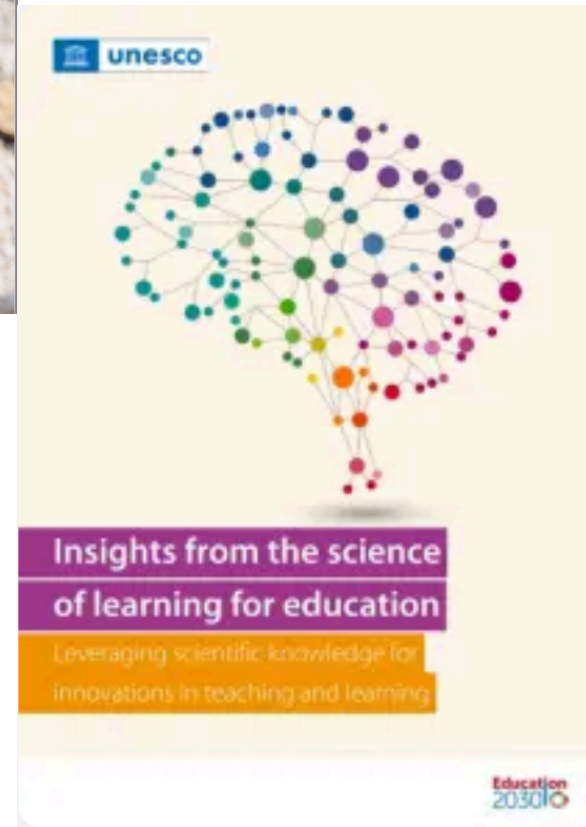
# Partnerships and collaborations in the UK



# Wider partnerships and collaborations

## Futures of Education

LEARNING TO BECOME



LANGUAGES AND MULTILINGUALISM IN

THE FUTURES OF EDUCATION

An International Perspective

# Wider partnerships and collaborations



CoNGO ♦ Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations ♦ Conférence des ONG ayant des Relations Consultatives avec les Nations Unies ♦ مؤتمر المنظمات غير الحكومية ذات العلاقة الاستشارية مع الأمم المتحدة ♦ Конференция неправительственных организаций, имеющих консультативный статус при Организации Объединенных Наций ♦ Conferencia de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales en Relación Consultiva con las Naciones Unidas ♦ 与联合国协商关系的非政府组织会议

DEFINING THE PRESENT  
SHAPING THE FUTURE



# Books



## Book Release: Myths and Facts about Multilingualism

*Drawing on groundbreaking research from the EU's MultiMind project, this enlightening volume debunks common misconceptions surrounding multilingualism and illuminates its profound impact on our mind, brain, and society. With contributions from top researchers across 14 countries, the book expertly bridges linguistics, neuroscience, psychology, and more, offering insights not only into the cognitive and neural benefits of multilingualism but also its pivotal role in education, health, and therapeutic settings.*

Edited by Julie Franck, Federico Faloppa, and Theodoros Marinis.

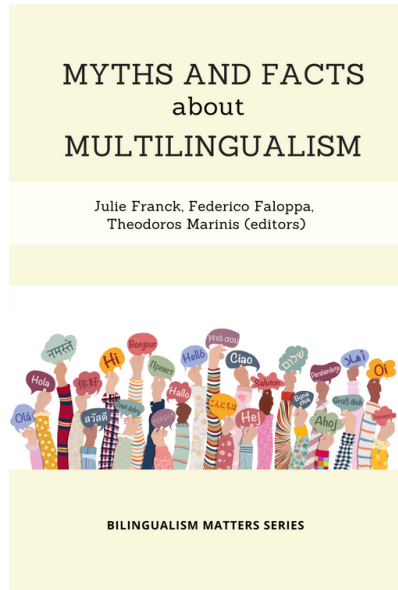
Publication date :  
January 1, 2024

Language: English

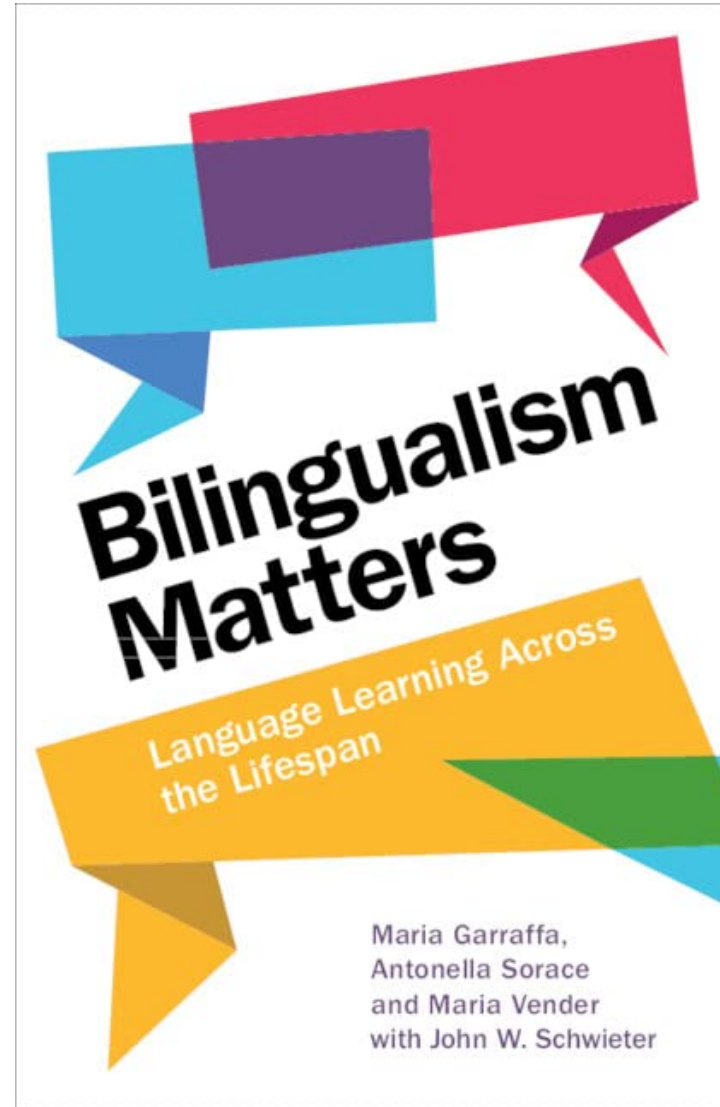
ISBN: 978-1-63607-484-9

Retail Price:  
US \$24.99

Pre-order with **BM24**  
coupon code for 20%  
discount



Presented by



# Back to challenges...

- Which research? Whose research?
- Learning to communicate clearly and to identify the main messages
- Universities tend to attach great importance to 'impact' but on a competitive, rather than collaborative, basis
- Understanding the practices of policy making and their constraints

# Back to challenges...

- Connecting and coordinating actions (within countries, across countries)
- Integrating different kinds of research expertise and public engagement experiences
- Exercising a political (non-partisan) role
- Learning from each other!



# THANK YOU!



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