

# First study reveals bilingualism not a problem for children with Down's syndrome

June 29 2021

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

In the first study of its kind in the UK, researchers examined language in Welsh-English bilingual children with Down syndrome and found no evidence of additional difficulties compared to monolinguals.

Findings dispel the myth that exposure to two languages may cause

problems for children with Down syndrome.

The publication is part of early career researcher Dr. Rebecca Ward's work in the Department of Linguistics at Bangor University. Rebecca says:

"It is really exciting to be able to share these positive research findings. Hopefully this can lead to a move towards a more inclusive approach when it comes to bilingualism, and will affirm families' decisions to pursue bilingualism even if faced with hesitancy from others."

The study, published in the *Journal of Communication Disorders*, is the first group study in the UK to investigate bilingualism in children with Down syndrome, and one of very few studies internationally.

Dr. Eirini Sanoudaki, Senior Lecturer in Linguistics, who led the project, explained:

"It is a privilege to pioneer this field of research, and to make a real impact in people's lives. Families and [health professionals](#) were previously unsure due to absence of evidence about bilingualism. I have been receiving messages from Wales and across the world asking for advice; these positive results will provide some of the certainty needed."

Researchers compared a group of bilingual [children](#) with Down syndrome to a group of English monolinguals, and found comparable performance in English, as well as considerable skills in Welsh.

One family who was involved in the project were Amanda and her son Morgan. Amanda said: "When Morgan was born his brother had just commenced Meithrin (Welsh [language](#) nursery). We hoped the brothers could attend school together, but weren't sure if this was the right path for Morgan especially as English is our home language. Local

professionals cautioned against it, feeling it would be too confusing for him and hinder his progress. We contacted organizations specializing in Down's syndrome for additional opinions. The conclusion they drew was to give it a try, as there didn't seem to be evidence out there to support this. This is what we did and Morgan has coped very well with both languages. Having this research evidences how we feel it's gone, and will help families having to make a similar decision in future."

The Down's Syndrome Association was partner and collaborator in this project. Julian Hallett, services development manager, says:

"Every child or adult should be supported to express themselves in a way that reflects their culture, family life and community. We are seeing many more examples of individuals with Down's syndrome living life bilingually and it is great to have this research to more fully describe peoples' experiences.!"

The collaboration is continuing, with a new project led by Dr. Sanoudaki exploring bilingual development in [autistic children](#) with and without Down [syndrome](#).

**More information:** Rebecca Ward et al, Language profiles of Welsh-English bilingual children with Down syndrome, *Journal of Communication Disorders* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jcomdis.2021.106126](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcomdis.2021.106126)  
[www.bangor.ac.uk/news/%C2%A0www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0021992421000496](http://www.bangor.ac.uk/news/%C2%A0www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0021992421000496)

Provided by Bangor University

Citation: First study reveals bilingualism not a problem for children with Down's syndrome (2021, June 29) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-06-reveals->

[bilingualism-problem-children-syndrome.html](#)

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.