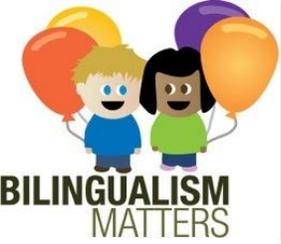


# MULTILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: MYTHS, FACTS, AND CHALLENGES

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# Overview



- What does it mean to be ‘bilingual’?
- Brief tour of misconceptions and research
- Some studies on language learning and bilingualism in schools

# Misconceptions on bilingualism

**Confusion**



**Developmental delays**



**Problems at school**

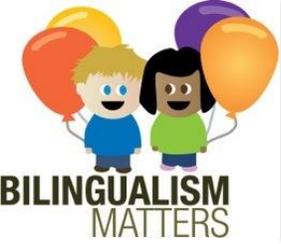


**'Useful' and 'useless' languages**

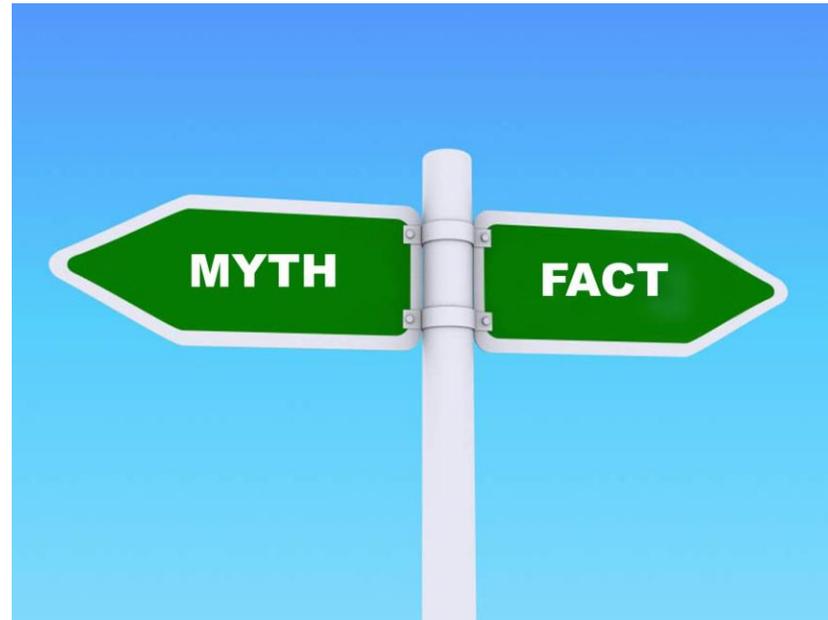


English  
Spanish  
Chinese

Gaelic  
Sardinian  
Polish  
Urdu



# Five-minute tour of research



# What research shows

- Early perceptual separation of the two languages
- Similar stages and milestones in bilingual and monolingual language development



# What research shows

## Bilingual children ‘notice’ how language works

### WORDS



### SOUNDS



### SENTENCES

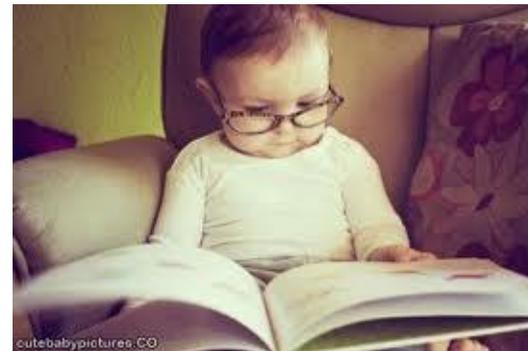
Easier to learn other languages; potential better understanding of the structure of the majority language.



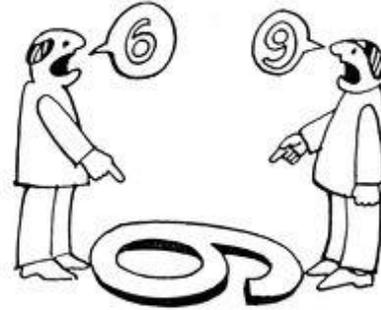
Competence and creativity in language mixing



- Good metalinguistic abilities
- Transfer of aspects of early literacy from one language to the other (when a sufficient vocabulary is learned)



- Better awareness of other people's perspectives
- Better selective attention and ability to handle conflicting information
- Better cognitive flexibility in task switching



PURPLE YELLOW RED  
BLACK RED GREEN  
RED YELLOW ORANGE  
BLUE PURPLE BLACK  
RED GREEN ORANGE

**TaskSwitcher**





# Reasoning and problem solving



Benefits for some types of logical and mathematical reasoning...

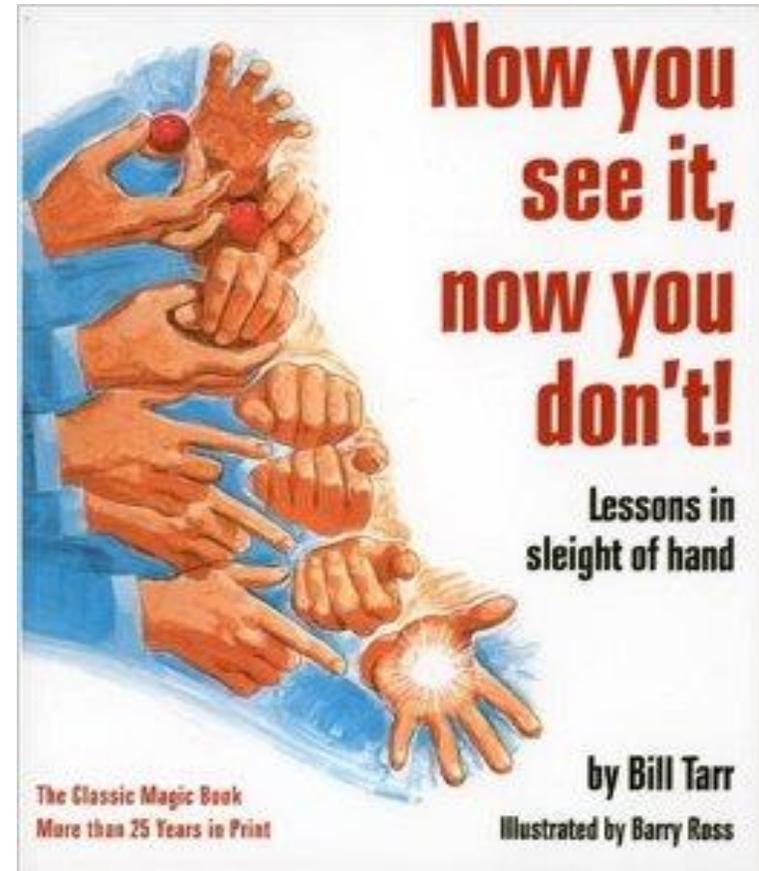


... and problem-solving abilities



# Bilingualism = automatic benefits?

- “Now you see it, now you don’t” (but no studies report a disadvantage of bilingualism).
- Bilingualism comes in many shapes and colours





# Children need input in both languages



- Bilingual children need to **hear enough of both languages.**

LANGUAGE A



LANGUAGE B

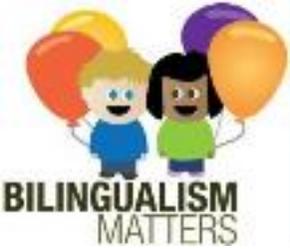


# Variety of speakers



Hearing the language from different speakers is important to learn what is possible and what is impossible in the language.





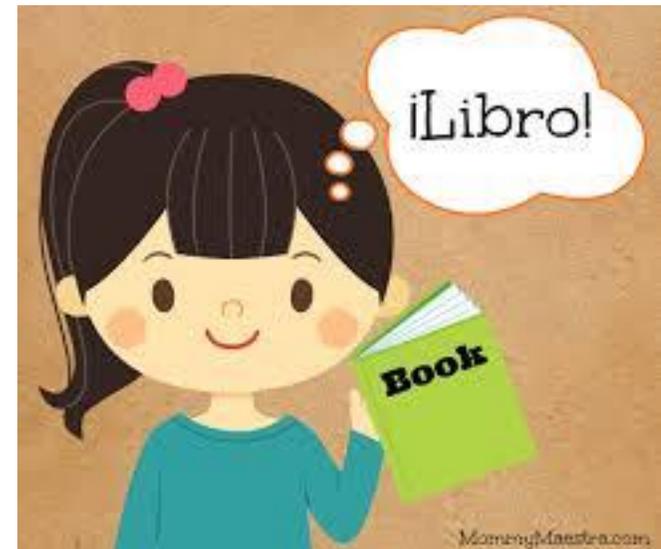
# Social and family attitudes



- both languages and both cultures are valued by the family and the community.



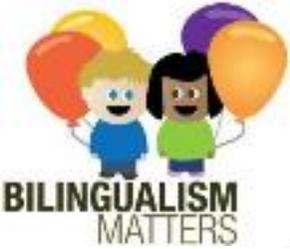
- Bilingual children have two vocabularies: all other things being equal, the **size of vocabulary in each language is smaller** than in monolinguals, especially in the first few years and in the weaker language.



# Important to know that...

- Children who have a home language different from the community language may go through a 'silent period' in which they produce very little.
- Some types of SLI and child L2 learning may look similar, but their developmental paths over time are different.





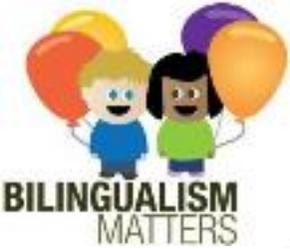
# Language learning at school



- Language Learning in Scotland: 1+2 plan



**The Scottish  
Government**



# Language learning at school: realistic expectations

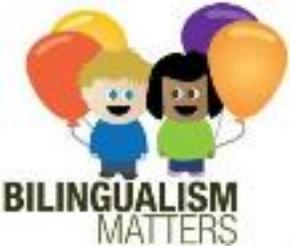


- One hour a week (or less): what can be achieved at different ages?
- Monolingual and bilingual children: do they learn differently?



- Testing stage 1: P1 children from monolingual homes.
- Testing stage 2 : P3 children from bilingual and monolingual homes

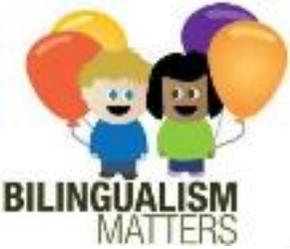




# Pilot studies



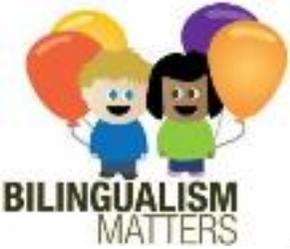
- We train volunteer students who are native speakers of Mandarin, Spanish and French to work with the teacher in P1 classes.
- We act as a point of reference for questions on child language learning during the project.
- We do research on the outcome of the project



# Early Chinese Learning Project



- Testing at stage 1:
  - School A: 25 weekly sessions of 1hr 30 hours. Cumulative input = 37.5 hours; More native tutor-led activities.
  - School B: 26 weekly sessions of 45 minutes. Cumulative input = 19.5 hours
  - School C: 25 weekly sessions of about 1hr 45mins. Cumulative input = 43.75 hours; more teacher-led activities.
  - School Y: no input



# Early Chinese Learning Project



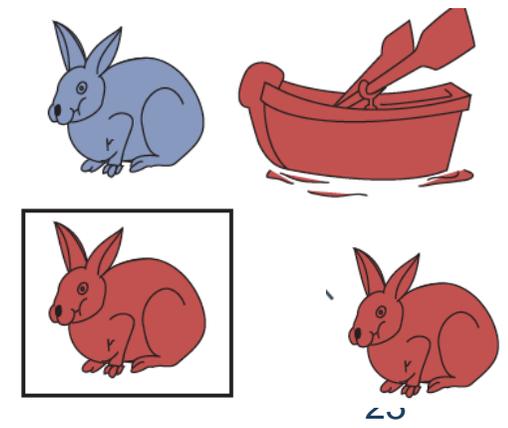
- What were the outcomes of the learning experience?
  - How much Chinese have children learned?
  - Did exposure to Chinese have any effects on English?
  - Were there any effects of the learning experience outside language?

- Chinese language ability:
  - Lexical tones
  - some written Chinese characters.
- Metalinguistic awareness:
  - Better awareness in the mother tongue
- Executive functions:
  - Effects of Mandarin input on children's attentional skills

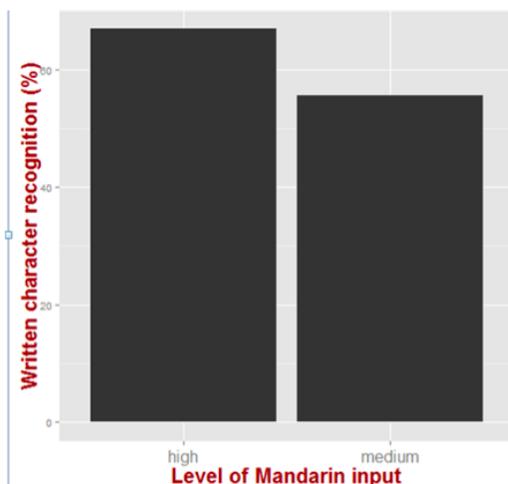
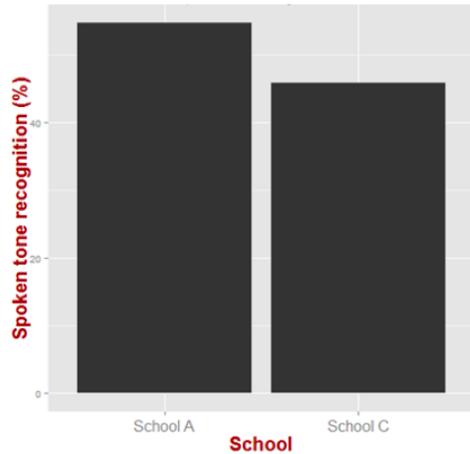
Target sound	Sound in sentence
ma1	ma3
shi2	ir
hao3	hao3



Figure 1: example trial in character recognition task



- Better performance is achieved by School A compared to the others:



(a) More hours of input,  
and

(b) More exposure to  
native speaker-led  
input.

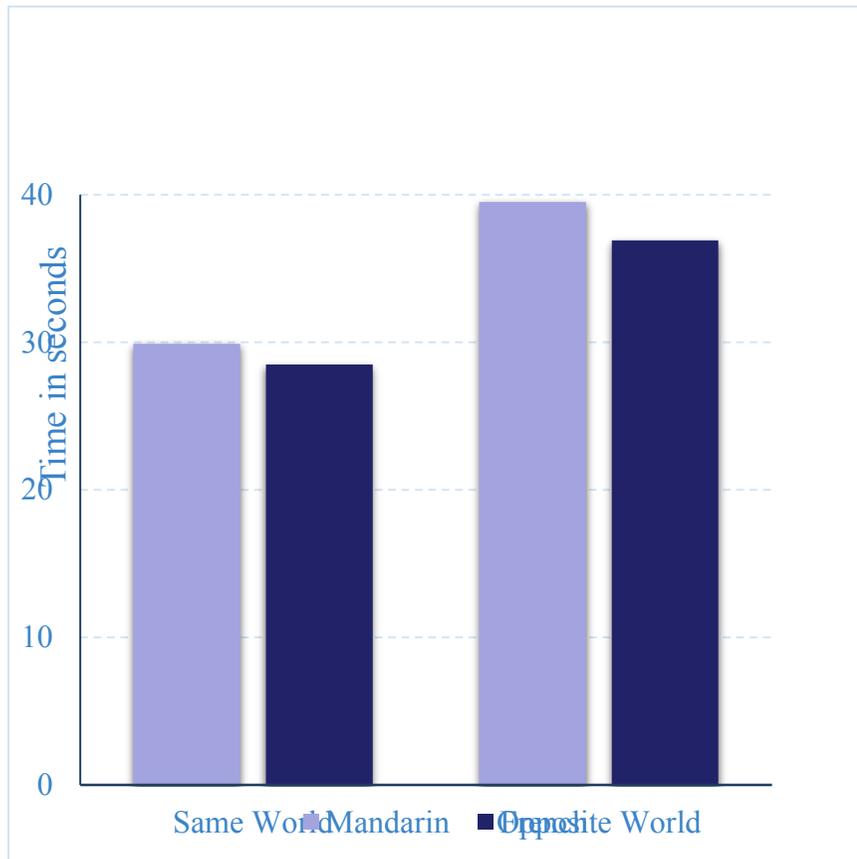
Figure 3: Percentage of characters correctly recognised by pupils receiving high versus medium input



# Early Chinese Learning Project results



## Second study:



- Above-chance performance on Chinese recognition tests
- No difference in cognitive and English tests between children exposed to Chinese and children exposed to French.

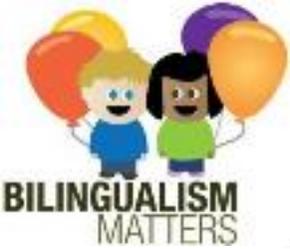


# Early Chinese Learning Project: recommendations



Our recommendations:

- Introduce a streamlined syllabus for all schools which forms the core of language activities.
- Increase the amount of training and support available to teachers and volunteers
- Swap volunteers between participating schools or classes.



# Multilingual classrooms



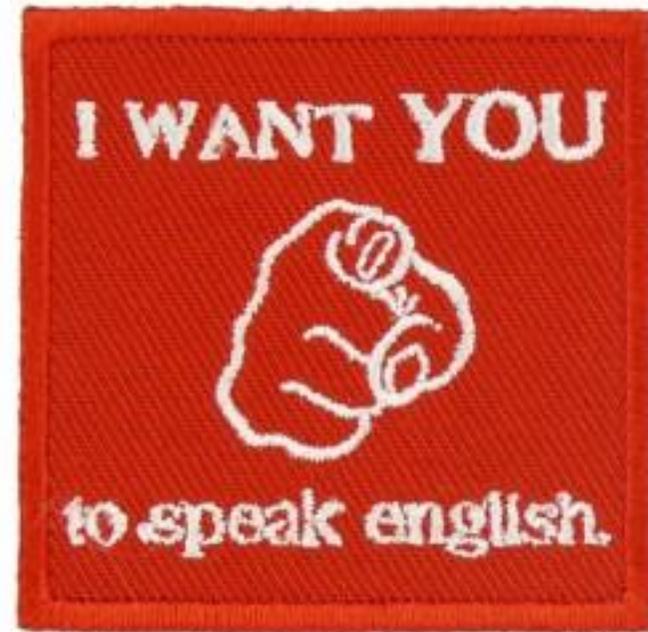
- Maintaining home languages in migrant children helps school achievement in general, and language learning in particular.

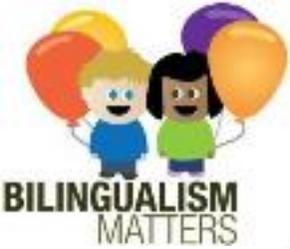


# Speaking English at home instead of the home language? NO



- Many families force themselves to speak the L2 at home rather than their L1.
- Research has shown that children exposed predominantly to impoverished non-native L2 input are at a disadvantage in acquiring the L2.

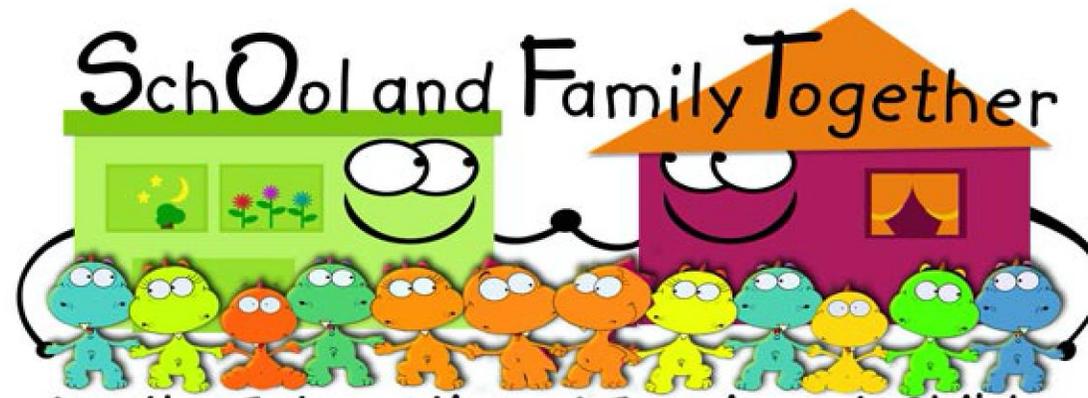


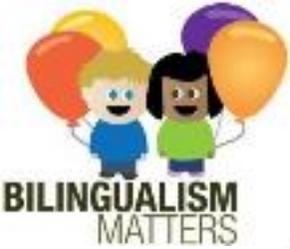


# The SOFT project



- Funded by EACEA – Lifelong Learning
- Partners: Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, UK (Scotland).
- Start date: 1 December 2012, end date: 30 November 2015.





# The SOFT project



- Aim: fostering the linguistic and social integration of migrant children through shared language learning activities that involve children, teachers, and families.



# The SOFT project



503 children:

Scottish: 227

Non-Scottish: 276

Countries of origin: Poland, Iraq, Syria, South Africa, Nigeria, Zambia, Slovakia, China, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Brazil

29 teachers



# The SOFT project

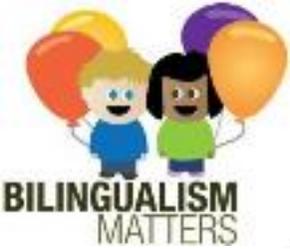


## Quantitative Data:

- Cognitive Test: DCCS
- Language tests in English and in the other language learned
- Questionnaire on home language use patterns

## Qualitative Data:

- Classroom observations by teachers and tutors.



# The SOFT project



*Question 1: Do children exposed to a language in a classroom setting develop better general cognitive abilities?*

→ Yes: all children do, but immigrant children show a steeper development

*Question 2: Do children who are already bilingual have an advantage at learning other languages?*

→ Yes, they do.



# Regional minority languages: Sardinian

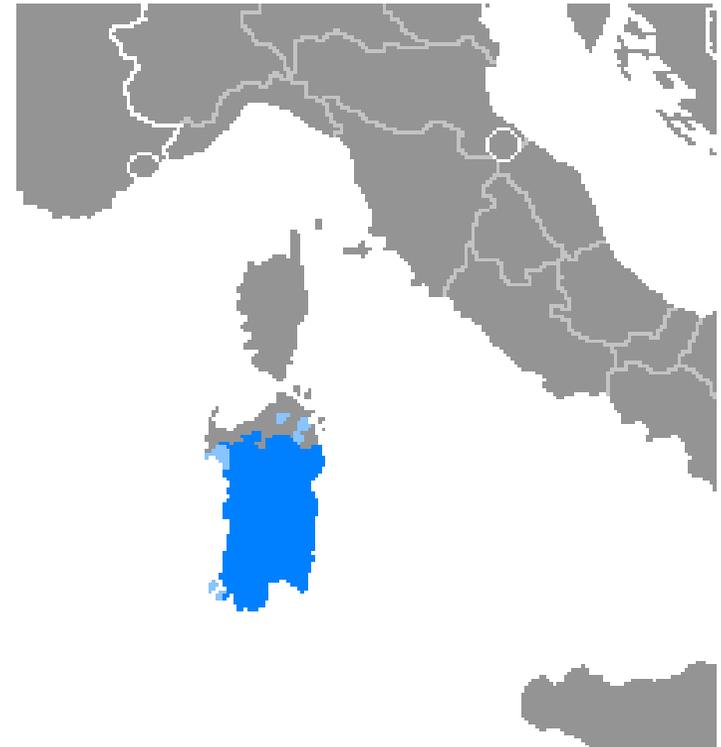


## Garraffa, Beveridge & Sorace (2015)

- 95 children attending primary 1 and 2 classes in central Sardinia:

40 Italian-Sardinian bilingual children

45 Italian monolingual children.







# Regional minority languages: Sardinian



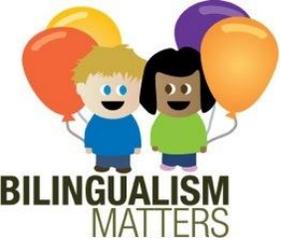
- **Cognitive tasks:** no differences for the younger children, but older children eventually overtake monolinguals.
- **Italian language task:** no differences between bilingual and monolingual children, except for two complex structures where bilinguals have an advantage on monolinguals.



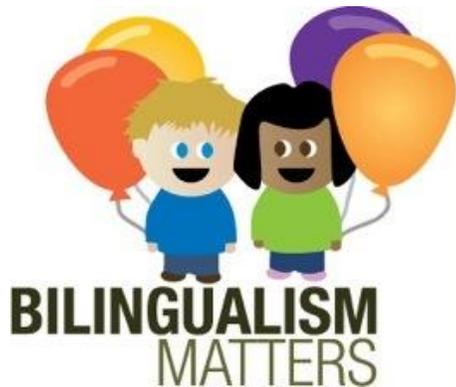
# Language learning in schools



**MORE INFORMATION =  
BETTER DECISIONS**



# ***Bilingualism Matters***



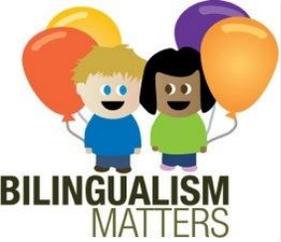
- University of Edinburgh Centre of Excellence
- Seminars and training for the community, international companies and institutions
- Public engagement and policy advice
- Regularly invited to comment by media (on language and multilingualism)
- Diversified network in Europe (15 branches), growing in North America (2 branches)



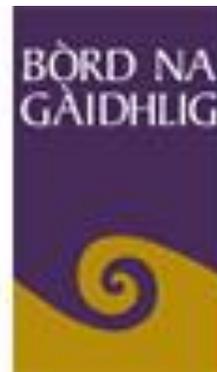
# Areas of engagement



- Early language learning in the preschool and primary school years
- Maintenance of home languages in immigrant children
- Maintenance of regional minority languages
- Language learning in young and older adults



# Partnerships and collaborations





# Projects



European Commission



Education and Culture DG

## Lifelong Learning Programme



REGIONE AUTONOMA DE SARDIGNA  
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA





# Website and contacts



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**THANK YOU!**