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# Bilingualism protects social cognition in aging: Effects of early bilingualism on older adult theory of mind

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## Abstract

The ability to understand and speak more than one language (i.e., bilingualism) may offer some protection against age-related cognitive deterioration. Although research on children and young adults has reported that bilinguals outperform monolinguals in some theory-of-mind (ToM) tasks, a similar positive effect of bilingualism on older adults' ToM has yet to be established. Here, we examined the effects of bilingual experience (i.e., onset age of bilingualism) on ToM in normal aging using the ToM Task Battery with 60 young adults (aged 18-30) and 72 older adults (aged 56-79). Results revealed that older adults showed deficits in ToM and their performance gradually declined with age compared to young adults. Importantly, early bilingualism mediated the age differences in ToM; earlier onset age of bilingualism predicted better ToM performance in older adulthood. Findings suggest a possible protective effect of early bilingualism against age-related declines in socio-cognitive functions.