

Do you know a second alphabet? Additional written languages give bilingual people's brains a boost

English and French are different languages that use the same alphabet, but Chinese uses an entirely different one. New research suggests that the brain of a bilingual person who knows two alphabets is different from that of a bilingual person who only knows one alphabet. The research, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, has been [published](#) to the BioRxiv preprint server.

When we learn to read, a small region of the cerebral cortex becomes highly sensitive to the letters and words of the script. This region lies within a patchwork of regions, each specialized to recognize a specific category of visual stimuli, such as faces or objects, based on their geometric features.

Known as the visual word form area (VWFA), this region is found in the same location in the brain in readers of all languages. It also is [organized hierarchically](#), with its sensitivity increasing from the back of the brain to the front, and it responds most strongly to strings of letters that match real words.

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It has long been known that [bilingualism](#) confers various mental health and social benefits. Perhaps knowing a second alphabet confers even more.

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