

**Claire Darmstadter**

Hello, everybody I'm joined today by Anne Neveu, doctoral student in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at UW-Madison who works closely with the folks in the lab that studies bilingualism. Thank you so much for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

**Anne Neveu**

Yeah, I'm really glad to be here.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yes, it'd be great if you could first just give us a really general overview of your educational and linguistic background and how you arrived at your current position where I think you're pursuing a second PhD if I got that correct.

**Anne Neveu**

Yeah, that's correct. So I'm French native. And I've always been interested in languages. And after high school, I decided to go to school for translation and interpreting, I studied English and Spanish. And then I got interested in research actually in that field. And so that's what led me to pursue a PhD in translation studies at Kent State University in Ohio. And then after that, I realized I was really interested in bilingualism and more like language processing and cognition. And the bridge to a postdoc was a little bit wide. So I decided to go for another PhD. And so that's why I'm here.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And so you said you have a background learning a couple different languages, so do you feel like over time that acquisition became easier over time or it became a less effortful process? Or what was kind of your strategy approaching that?

**Anne Neveu**

Oh, yeah, that's a great question. I would say, it's a little bit difficult to answer because I learned English pretty early in school, and then Spanish came not too long after. But I feel now that with other languages that I'm learning currently, it seems easier, yes because I have some strategies. And I have, you know, lots of different words that I can kind of hatch new words on to you know, so it definitely gets easier, I would say.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And so you approach language from a very scientific point of view, and I believe you've done like a TA, or just you worked with students and some of those intro level classes. Do you think that the scientific background makes it easier? Does it make you a better teacher? Is it sometimes distracting where you're like picking apart the linguistic qualities of everything they're saying, and not just focusing on general production?

**Anne Neveu**

Yeah, that's a really interesting question. And I think that the scientific background helps me have, I think, a robust foundation to teach, you know, some topics because I feel I have more confidence in, you know, teaching the topics, because there's kind of evidence for it right. And, and there's

explanations for it. And there's like experiments that back this up. So I do think that it helps you be a better teacher. And it's always exciting to talk a little bit about, you know, experiments and such with students. And they're always very curious. So that's, yeah, that's great.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, and so you specialize in translations. And I know, all the time schools are trying to be inclusive, right. And so they want to translate materials. But they might not always have access to a translator. So would you say it's better to use something like Google Translate, which may lead to misunderstandings or potentially even offensive content? Or just not do translations at all? If you don't have somebody who can guarantee that it's correct?

### **Anne Neveu**

Yeah, I would recommend having a translator do the work rather than Google Translate. But that's not to say that Google Translate is bad, it can actually be really good for more technical topics. And it can also potentially be a solution for like a first pass, and then the translator would kind of proofread the translation, although some don't recommend that because it may be even harder to work from kind of a sloppy translation rather than doing it from scratch, so there's different opinions on this. But ideally, I would say it's much better to have a human translator. We're not at the point yet that we can completely rely on computer assisted translation,

### **Claire Darmstadter**

For sure. And I'd love to talk a little bit more about the work you're doing in your research. *I just want to hop in here and say it may be a little choppy since the initial question I asked her about her work was a little bit out of date. The website I consulted wasn't necessarily up to date with what she is doing at present, so I apologize, but I'm just going to let her talk about all the great work she is doing right now!*

### **Anne Neveu**

So in the research that I do, though, talking about dual language immersion, something that we looked at was whether because a lot of parents are concerned, you know, like, Oh, I'm gonna send my child to dual language immersion, but are they gonna lose their native language? Are going to be slowed down, for example. And it turns out that dual language immersion doesn't affect your native language, because typically, the child has already developed a good level and their native language, and actually a solid basis of the native language helps develop the second language. And then we also were interested in looking at whether, you know, learning a second language as a child, gives you some other cognitive advantages, like, enhanced focus or ability to kind of like, inhibit irrelevant information, to focus on what's relevant at hand for any task. And it turns out that actually, there might be some very transient differences, but there's no major differences between monolinguals and bilinguals. So that should also reassure parents whose children are monolinguals that really, bilingualism is not necessarily that thing that we say is absolutely marvelous, and confers all these advantages. There's still a lot of research ongoing. It sure is a great benefit to be bilingual, not only, of course, for the cultural, you know, advantages that it brings, it looks like, you know, it makes you learn more. It's kind of a cognitive workout. But that's not to say that there's giant differences between monolinguals and bilinguals.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And do your findings vary depending on the language we're talking about. So if it's like Spanish dual immersion versus French versus Chinese, or is it all just kind of the same thing? Or how does that differentiate in the field?

**Anne Neveu**

I couldn't really answer that. Because the study I'm talking about focuses on English and Spanish. But I would expect really, that the results do transfer to other language pairs. One thing that I would see that could create a difference is how distant the languages are. Like, if you take Mandarin, for example, and English, there's a major difference in the fact that, you know, one uses an alphabet, like Roman alphabet, and the other uses logograms. And so there's some studies that have been looking at that. But I would guess that the kind of the cognitive mechanisms underlying learning, and processing would be quite similar, though.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And so we have all these great immersion programs, but the majority of students in the US are going to programs where it might be you start in sixth grade, you take Spanish one or French one, and you just kind of do that throughout high school. And at the end of six years, most kids walk away, and they can maybe ask, like, Where's the bathroom? Can you get me you know, a drink of water, but they don't feel super confident in their skills. So looking at the development of bilingualism, perhaps after like 12 years old or 15 years old, when we don't always see super high outcomes and attainment, what's the different way we can kind of look at it? Is it like, we just need to scrap the system and make sure we start early? Or is that we can actually probably do something at the, you know, middle and high school grades, we just have to change how we approach it?

**Anne Neveu**

Yeah, I think, you know, there's both research that shows that yes, the younger you learn, or the younger the age you learn, the more proficient you'll be. But that's not to say that you can't learn at any age, you absolutely can because the brain is plastic. And so even though it might be more difficult to learn a second language at a later age, especially for pronunciation, it's totally attainable. It's you can learn a second language later in life, whatever your age. And what I would say, though, is that the teaching has to be improved. And something that really helps language learning is to study abroad or to have any kind of experience abroad. Even for six months, it helps a lot. Because even if it's going to be difficult at the beginning, the first few weeks, maybe three weeks, you'll have like all of a sudden kind of it's going to unlock you know, to you and you'll be able to use the language and it's just such a wonderful achievement and feeling also, you know, and then typically, if you maintain the language, have to practice it and use it, it forms a solid basis for you know, additional learning when you're back home or wherever you are.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, and so within this field, of course, like there are a lot of people doing research in this area, but it is pretty nice compared to perhaps other areas of research and science and all those different things. So what are some ways you stay connected with the field? Is it like Facebook

groups? Do you go to conferences? Are you part of any other ways that you stay connected with individuals doing similar work?

**Anne Neveu**

Yeah so in our field, we're quite connected to the field of psychology as well. And some of the ways that we have these connections is both through publication of our research through various journals, through conferences, as you mentioned, So it's always really nice to kind of meet people, you know and network at conferences. And then I would say there's another way that we connect, but not within the field, but rather with the community to kind of make our research kind of, you know, applicable to the, to the community and keep a connection there. And for that, we're really focused on the local area here in Madison, and we take part in local events. We do have a Facebook page where we kind of talk about our research and you know, like, non-jargon terms, and we invite people to participate in our research as well, which is, you know, without participants, there wouldn't be any research. So we're really grateful for people who are always excited and willing to participate in our studies.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, for sure. I'll leave a couple links to those in the transcripts if people want to check them out. So the last question that I ask everybody is we tell little kids all the time that it's a superpower to speak more than one language. So can you give me one reason you can answer in English, French, Spanish, whatever you want? Why it's a superpower to speak more than one language.

**Anne Neveu**

[Answer in French]

**Claire Darmstadter**

I think I picked up on the words culture and people, so if you want to give a little English overview blurb that would be great.

**Anne Neveu**

Yeah, so I think it's a superpower because it opens doors to other cultures and it gives you the opportunity to meet new people. And in addition, it's a good workout for the brain, you know, so I would really encourage people to learn other languages if they can.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, for sure. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate all your time. I definitely would have added a CS&D major if I had space in my schedule, but that would be pushing it a little too much. So I really appreciate this. I love the work that you do. Thank you so much!

**Anne Neveu**

Yeah, my pleasure. Let me know if you need anything else.