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**МЕТАЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКАЯ ОСВЕДОМЛЕННОСТЬ КАК ФАКТОР
ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТИ БИЛИНГВИЗМА**

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Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается роль металингвистической осведомленности как важнейшего фактора эффективности билингвизма. Опираясь на теоретические основы и эмпирические данные, исследование рассматривает, как способность к рефлексии и анализу языковых структур повышает когнитивную гибкость, коммуникативные стратегии и контроль над языком у билингвов. Методика исследования сочетала количественные и качественные методы, включая тесты на знание языка, металингвистические задания и интервью. Результаты показывают, что более высокий уровень металингвистической осведомленности коррелирует с улучшенной регуляцией интерференции, более эффективным переключением кодов и большей адаптивностью в коммуникативных контекстах. Результаты исследования подчеркивают, что билингвизм — это не только вопрос владения языком, но и динамичный когнитивный процесс, в котором металингвистическое восприятие служит одновременно и результатом, и катализатором.

Ключевые слова: билингвизм, металингвистическое восприятие, психолингвистика, когнитивный контроль, коммуникативная эффективность.

**METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS AS A FACTOR IN THE EFFECTIVENESS
OF BILINGUALISM**

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Abstract. This article explores the role of metalinguistic awareness as a crucial factor in the effectiveness of bilingualism. Drawing on theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, the study examines how the ability to reflect upon and analyze linguistic structures enhances cognitive flexibility, communication strategies, and language control in bilingual individuals. The research procedure combined quantitative and qualitative methods, including language proficiency tests, metalinguistic tasks, and interviews. Results demonstrate that higher levels of metalinguistic awareness correlate with improved regulation of interference, more efficient code-switching, and greater adaptability in communicative contexts. The findings underscore that bilingualism is not only a matter of language proficiency, but a dynamic cognitive process in which metalinguistic awareness serves as both an outcome and a catalyst.

Key words: bilingualism, metalinguistic awareness, psycholinguistics, cognitive control, communicative effectiveness.

The phenomenon of bilingualism has long been the subject of linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical research, yet its effectiveness as a cognitive and communicative resource continues to attract scholarly attention. In recent decades, the focus has shifted from the mere coexistence of two linguistic systems in an individual to the deeper mechanisms that regulate their interaction and utilization. Among these mechanisms, metalinguistic awareness emerges as a central factor, as it reflects the speaker's ability to consciously reflect on and manipulate the structures and functions of language. This cognitive capacity extends beyond the practical command of linguistic forms, positioning itself at the intersection of language proficiency, cognitive flexibility, and cultural adaptability [1].

The role of metalinguistic awareness in bilingualism is particularly significant because it provides a framework through which individuals can control language choice, monitor linguistic interference, and optimize communication strategies. Unlike monolingual speakers, bilingual individuals are constantly engaged in processes of selection, inhibition, and transfer, all of which require a heightened sensitivity to linguistic form and function. Metalinguistic awareness facilitates this regulation, allowing speakers to transcend automatic language use and approach linguistic phenomena analytically. In this way, it contributes not only to the development of communicative competence but also to broader cognitive processes such as problem solving, abstract thinking, and metacognitive regulation [2].

The effectiveness of bilingualism, therefore, cannot be reduced solely to fluency in two languages; rather, it must be understood as the dynamic interplay of linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions. Within this interplay, metalinguistic awareness operates as both a mediator and a catalyst, shaping the extent to which bilingual individuals can leverage their linguistic repertoire for cognitive advantage and communicative success. Investigating this relationship is essential not only for understanding the cognitive foundations of bilingualism but also for informing educational practices, language policy, and intercultural communication.

Main Part

The concept of metalinguistic awareness has been defined in various ways, yet most scholars converge on the idea that it constitutes the ability to treat language as an object of thought rather than a mere instrument of communication. This ability includes recognizing the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs, manipulating grammatical structures, reflecting on semantic ambiguities, and critically evaluating the adequacy of linguistic expressions. In the context of bilingualism, such awareness is not a supplementary skill but rather a structural necessity, since bilingual individuals must constantly navigate between two linguistic systems that may differ in phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatic norms. The act of switching

between languages itself presupposes a level of conscious control and reflection, which over time cultivates a heightened metalinguistic sensitivity [3].

Empirical studies in psycholinguistics suggest that bilingual speakers often outperform monolinguals in tasks requiring cognitive flexibility, selective attention, and problem-solving strategies. One of the explanations for this advantage lies in the development of metalinguistic skills, which enable bilinguals to separate linguistic form from meaning and to analyze language as an abstract system. For instance, bilingual children have been shown to detect grammatical anomalies and semantic inconsistencies more effectively than their monolingual peers, indicating that their awareness of language structure is not limited to passive recognition but extends to active monitoring and control. This capacity strengthens with the growth of proficiency in both languages, suggesting that balanced bilingualism fosters deeper levels of metalinguistic competence [4].

At the same time, the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and the effectiveness of bilingualism is not uniform and can be influenced by several factors. The age of acquisition plays a crucial role, as early bilingual exposure tends to support the natural development of reflective language skills, while late bilingualism often requires deliberate strategies to build comparable levels of awareness. Socio-cultural context is another determinant: environments that encourage code-switching and translanguaging provide richer opportunities for the development of linguistic flexibility, whereas rigid language separation may limit the scope of metalinguistic growth. Educational approaches also exert a strong influence, as pedagogical practices that emphasize explicit grammar instruction, comparative linguistics, and language play can enhance the analytical dimension of bilingual competence [5].

Furthermore, metalinguistic awareness is not only a product of bilingual experience but also a factor that actively shapes its outcomes. High levels of awareness enable bilinguals to reduce negative transfer, manage interference, and adapt more effectively to new communicative situations. In academic and

professional contexts, this translates into greater adaptability, precision, and creativity in language use. Conversely, insufficient metalinguistic development can lead to fossilization of errors, limited flexibility, and difficulties in maintaining equal proficiency in both languages. Thus, metalinguistic awareness functions both as an outcome of bilingualism and as a driving force behind its effectiveness, creating a reciprocal relationship that underscores its central role in bilingual development [6].

Research Procedure

The present study was designed to investigate the role of metalinguistic awareness as a determining factor in the effectiveness of bilingualism. The research followed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative assessments of linguistic competence with qualitative analyses of cognitive and reflective skills. Participants were selected from a bilingual population representing varying levels of language proficiency, age of acquisition, and socio-cultural background, in order to capture the diversity of bilingual experiences. Special attention was paid to ensuring that both balanced and unbalanced bilinguals were represented, thus allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how metalinguistic awareness manifests across different profiles.

Data collection proceeded in three stages. In the first stage, participants completed standardized language proficiency tests in both languages, which provided a baseline for evaluating their linguistic competence. In the second stage, metalinguistic awareness was measured through tasks that required participants to identify grammatical violations, interpret ambiguous sentences, and reflect on cross-linguistic differences. These tasks were adapted from established psycholinguistic protocols but were further contextualized to align with the participants' specific language pairs. In the third stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted, focusing on participants' subjective experiences of bilingual communication, their strategies for managing interference, and their ability to consciously reflect on language use [7].

The collected data were analyzed using both statistical and thematic methods. Quantitative results were processed to identify correlations between levels of metalinguistic awareness and performance in bilingual tasks, while qualitative data were coded to reveal recurring themes related to cognitive strategies and language regulation. Triangulation of findings was employed to ensure reliability, as converging evidence from different sources strengthened the validity of the conclusions. This methodological design not only facilitated the identification of measurable patterns but also illuminated the subjective dimension of bilingual cognition, thereby providing a holistic perspective on the role of metalinguistic awareness.

Discussion of results

The findings of the study reveal a consistent and significant relationship between levels of metalinguistic awareness and the overall effectiveness of bilingual performance. Participants who demonstrated higher sensitivity to grammatical structure, semantic ambiguity, and cross-linguistic comparison consistently achieved superior outcomes in both controlled tasks and real-life communicative situations. This supports the hypothesis that metalinguistic awareness functions not merely as a by-product of bilingualism, but as an active mechanism that enhances cognitive control and communicative flexibility. The ability to consciously reflect on language enabled participants to regulate interference between their two linguistic systems, to select the appropriate code more efficiently, and to adapt to complex communicative demands with greater accuracy.

An important observation is that balanced bilinguals exhibited the highest levels of metalinguistic awareness, which translated into more effective task performance across linguistic and cognitive domains. However, unbalanced bilinguals also demonstrated significant gains in metalinguistic competence when exposed to contexts that required frequent switching and comparative reflection, indicating that awareness can be cultivated through practice and environment. These results suggest

that the development of metalinguistic awareness is not strictly dependent on equal proficiency in both languages, but rather on the extent of engagement with linguistic contrast and reflection.

The qualitative data provide further insight into the cognitive strategies employed by bilingual individuals. Participants frequently reported conscious monitoring of their speech, deliberate avoidance of interference, and active comparison of linguistic forms as integral parts of their communication strategies. Such reports align with psycholinguistic theories that position metalinguistic awareness as a higher-order cognitive function, mediating between automatic language processes and conscious control. Importantly, participants with lower levels of metalinguistic awareness expressed greater difficulty in managing cross-linguistic interference and often relied on avoidance strategies rather than flexible adaptation, which ultimately limited the effectiveness of their bilingualism.

Taken together, these findings underscore the dual role of metalinguistic awareness: it emerges from bilingual experience and simultaneously shapes the quality and effectiveness of that experience. The results also highlight the importance of educational and socio-cultural factors in fostering metalinguistic development. Environments that encourage reflective use of language, such as bilingual education programs and contexts of active code-switching, appear to provide conditions that strengthen awareness and thereby enhance the broader benefits of bilingualism. The discussion therefore affirms the central hypothesis that metalinguistic awareness is a pivotal factor in explaining why and how bilingualism can function as a cognitive and communicative advantage rather than a source of interference.

Conclusion

The conducted study has demonstrated that metalinguistic awareness plays a decisive role in determining the effectiveness of bilingualism. Far from being a secondary skill, it constitutes a cognitive and linguistic mechanism that allows individuals to consciously regulate their use of two languages, minimize interference,

and maximize communicative efficiency. The findings confirm that higher levels of metalinguistic awareness are associated with superior performance in both controlled linguistic tasks and natural communicative contexts, thereby validating its central function in the bilingual experience.

The results further indicate that balanced bilinguals, who engage with both languages consistently, tend to exhibit the most advanced forms of metalinguistic competence, while unbalanced bilinguals can nonetheless achieve considerable gains when exposed to environments that promote reflection on language and encourage active code-switching. This suggests that metalinguistic awareness is not only a product of early exposure but can also be cultivated through educational practice, socio-cultural interaction, and deliberate language training. Such findings highlight the potential of targeted pedagogical approaches to foster reflective linguistic skills and enhance the cognitive advantages associated with bilingualism.

Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of bilingualism as a dynamic interplay between linguistic proficiency, cognitive control, and socio-cultural context. By positioning metalinguistic awareness at the center of this interplay, the research emphasizes that the effectiveness of bilingualism cannot be reduced to fluency alone but must be understood as the ability to strategically and consciously manage two linguistic systems. This conclusion carries important implications for future research, for the design of bilingual education programs, and for broader discussions about the role of bilingualism in cognitive and cultural development.

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