

THE IMPACT OF BILINGUALISM ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

Bilingualism, the regular use of two languages in everyday life, has long been a subject of considerable interest in applied linguistics and second language acquisition research. In Uzbekistan, where most learners speak both Uzbek and Russian before encountering English, bilingualism plays a particularly significant role in the language learning process. This study examines the impact of pre-existing bilingual competence on the acquisition of English as a third language among university students. Following the IMRAD format, the study used a mixed-methods design with 100 participants from Tashkent Perfect University. Quantitative data were drawn from English proficiency assessments and a structured questionnaire, while qualitative insights came from semi-structured interviews. Results indicated that bilingual learners outperformed monolingual learners in metalinguistic awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and learning strategies. However, certain challenges were identified, including cross-linguistic interference and confusion between similar grammatical structures. The study concludes that bilingualism, when leveraged consciously through pedagogical practice, serves as a cognitive and linguistic asset for English language learning, supporting the broader recognition of multilingualism as a resource rather than a barrier.

Keywords: *bilingualism, multilingualism, third language acquisition, cross-linguistic influence, metalinguistic awareness, English language learning, Uzbek learners*

Annotatsiya

Ikki tillilik, ya'ni kundalik hayotda ikki tildan muntazam foydalanish, amaliy tilshunoslik va ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish tadqiqotlarida uzoq yillardan buyon katta qiziqish uyg'otib kelmoqda. O'zbekistonda aksariyat o'quvchilar ingliz tiliga duch kelishidan oldin o'zbek va rus tillarida so'zlashgani sababli, ikki tillilik til o'rganish jarayonida ayniqsa muhim o'rin tutadi. Mazkur tadqiqot universitet talabalari orasida avvaldan shakllangan ikki tilli kompetensiyaning ingliz tilini uchinchi til sifatida o'zlashtirishga ta'sirini o'rganadi. IMRAD formati asosida olib borilgan tadqiqot aralash metodologiya asosida tashkil etilib, unda Tashkent Perfect Universityning 100 nafar talabasi ishtirok etdi. Miqdoriy ma'lumotlar ingliz tili bilimni baholash testlari va tuzilgan so'rovnomalar orqali to'plandi, sifat ma'lumotlari esa yarim tuzilgan intervyular asosida olindi. Natijalar ikki tilli o'quvchilar metalingvistik ong, lug'at boyligini o'zlashtirish va o'rganish strategiyalari bo'yicha bir tilli o'quvchilarga nisbatan yuqori natijalarni ko'rsatganini aniqladi. Shu bilan birga, tillararo

interferensiya hamda o'xshash grammatik tuzilmalar o'rtasidagi chalkashlik kabi ayrim muammolar ham kuzatildi. Tadqiqot xulosasiga ko'ra, ikki tillilik pedagogik amaliyot orqali ongli ravishda qo'llab-quvvatlanganda, ingliz tilini o'rganishda kognitiv va lingvistik ustunlik vazifasini bajaradi hamda ko'p tillilikni to'siq emas, balki resurs sifatida e'tirof etish zarurligini tasdiqlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: *ikki tillilik, ko'p tillilik, uchinchi tilni o'zlashtirish, tillararo ta'sir, metalingvistik ong, ingliz tilini o'rganish, o'zbek o'quvchilari.*

O'zbekcha tarjima

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Ruscha tarjima

Аннотация

Билингвизм, то есть регулярное использование двух языков в повседневной жизни, давно является предметом значительного интереса в области прикладной лингвистики и исследований усвоения второго языка. В Узбекистане, где большинство обучающихся владеют узбекским и русским языками до начала изучения английского, билингвизм играет особенно важную роль в процессе изучения языка. Данное исследование рассматривает влияние уже сформированной билингвальной компетенции на усвоение английского языка как третьего языка среди студентов университетов. Исследование, выполненное в

формате IMRAD, основывалось на смешанном методе и охватило 100 участников из Tashkent Perfect University. Количественные данные были получены с помощью тестов на уровень владения английским языком и структурированного опросника, тогда как качественные данные были собраны посредством полуструктурированных интервью. Результаты показали, что билингвальные обучающиеся превосходят монолингвальных обучающихся по уровню метаязыкового сознания, усвоению словарного запаса и использованию стратегий обучения. Вместе с тем были выявлены определённые трудности, включая межъязыковую интерференцию и смешение схожих грамматических структур. Исследование приводит к выводу, что билингвизм, при его осознанном использовании в педагогической практике, становится когнитивным и лингвистическим преимуществом в изучении английского языка и способствует признанию многоязычия не как препятствия, а как ценного ресурса.

Ключевые слова: *билингвизм, многоязычие, усвоение третьего языка, межъязыковое влияние, метаязыковое сознание, изучение английского языка, узбекские обучающиеся.*

1. Introduction

The relationship between bilingualism and additional language learning has been the focus of extensive research in the fields of applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, and educational psychology. Bilingualism, traditionally defined as the regular and functional use of two languages, is a global norm rather than an exception, with more than half of the world's population speaking two or more languages. In Uzbekistan, the linguistic landscape is particularly rich, with most citizens speaking Uzbek as a native language and Russian as a second language, reflecting the country's complex sociohistorical context. Within this multilingual environment, English is typically learned as a third language.

Theoretical perspectives on the impact of bilingualism on additional language learning have evolved considerably over the past century. Earlier views, often informed by limited empirical research, portrayed bilingualism as cognitively burdensome and potentially detrimental to language and cognitive development. However, contemporary research has overwhelmingly demonstrated that bilingualism is associated with cognitive and linguistic advantages, including enhanced executive function, greater metalinguistic awareness, more flexible problem-solving, and superior strategies for language learning. These findings have led to a fundamental reconceptualization of bilingualism as a resource that can facilitate, rather than hinder, the acquisition of additional languages.

Despite the wealth of international research on bilingualism, context-specific studies focusing on Uzbek-Russian bilinguals learning English are relatively scarce. The unique linguistic profile of Uzbek-Russian bilinguals, with two structurally and

typologically distinct languages, offers a valuable opportunity to examine how prior bilingualism influences the learning of a third language that differs significantly from both. Understanding these dynamics has important implications for English language pedagogy in Uzbekistan and similar multilingual contexts.

The present study addresses three central research questions: (1) Do Uzbek-Russian bilingual students outperform predominantly monolingual students in learning English? (2) Which specific aspects of English learning are most influenced by prior bilingualism? (3) What challenges do bilingual learners face when acquiring English, and how can these be addressed pedagogically? By exploring these questions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of multilingual language learning and offers practical guidance for educators in Uzbekistan.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods comparative design. Quantitative data allowed for the comparison of English language proficiency between bilingual and predominantly monolingual learners, while qualitative data explored the cognitive, strategic, and affective dimensions of bilingual learners' experiences with English. The integration of these approaches enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions among the languages in learners' linguistic repertoires.

2.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 100 undergraduate students from Tashkent Perfect University. Based on a language background questionnaire, participants were classified into two groups. The bilingual group ($n=58$) included students who reported regular and proficient use of both Uzbek and Russian in their daily lives. The predominantly monolingual group ($n=42$) included students who used Uzbek as their primary language with limited or passive knowledge of Russian. Participants were aged 18 to 22 years, and their English proficiency ranged from intermediate (B1) to upper-intermediate (B2). Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

2.3 Instruments

Several instruments were used to collect data. A standardized English proficiency test assessed vocabulary, grammar, listening, and reading skills, with a total possible score of 100 points. A 30-item bilingualism questionnaire measured participants' frequency, contexts, and proficiency in using Uzbek and Russian. A learning strategies inventory adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning was used to measure metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies. Finally, semi-structured interview protocols guided the qualitative data collection.

2.4 Procedure

Data collection was carried out over a four-week period. Participants completed the language background questionnaire, the proficiency test, and the learning strategies inventory in classroom settings under standardized conditions. Subsequently, 20

participants (12 from the bilingual group and 8 from the monolingual group) were selected for semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes each. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Independent-samples t-tests compared the proficiency scores and learning strategy use between the two groups. Pearson correlations examined relationships between bilingualism scores and English proficiency. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, with themes generated inductively and validated through inter-rater agreement between two independent coders.

3. Results

3.1 Differences in English Proficiency

The bilingual group achieved significantly higher mean scores on the English proficiency test ($M=78.6$, $SD=7.2$) compared to the monolingual group ($M=70.3$, $SD=8.5$). The independent-samples t-test confirmed that this difference was statistically significant ($t=5.18$, $p<0.001$), with a moderate-to-large effect size (Cohen's $d=0.82$). The largest differences were observed in vocabulary and grammar, while the gap in listening and reading was smaller but still statistically significant. These results suggest that bilingualism confers a measurable advantage in English language learning, particularly in areas requiring conscious linguistic analysis.

3.2 Use of Learning Strategies

The strategies inventory results revealed that bilingual students employed a wider range of language learning strategies than monolingual students. Specifically, bilingual learners showed significantly higher use of metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning ($M=4.21$ vs. 3.58 on a five-point scale, $p<0.01$). They also demonstrated greater use of cognitive strategies involving cross-linguistic comparison, translation, and paraphrasing. Affective strategies, such as anxiety management and self-encouragement, were also more common in the bilingual group. These findings highlight the strategic sophistication that bilingualism appears to foster.

3.3 Metalinguistic Awareness

Interview data provided rich evidence of heightened metalinguistic awareness among bilingual participants. They frequently reflected on the structural similarities and differences between Uzbek, Russian, and English. For example, several students described how their understanding of Russian grammar helped them grasp English verb conjugation systems, while their knowledge of Uzbek aided their appreciation of agglutinative versus analytic structures. Bilingual learners often demonstrated an explicit awareness of how grammar functions across languages, which appeared to facilitate transfer of relevant features and avoidance of inappropriate ones.

3.4 Cross-Linguistic Influence and Challenges

Despite the advantages, bilingual learners also reported certain challenges related to cross-linguistic influence. Negative transfer, particularly from Russian to English, was a recurring issue. Examples included the use of double negatives ('I don't know nothing'), confusion between similar prepositions, and inappropriate use of articles, since Russian lacks a definite/indefinite article system. Some students reported confusion between false cognates, where words look similar across languages but have different meanings. These challenges underscore the complex nature of cross-linguistic influence, which can be both helpful and problematic depending on the specific feature being acquired.

3.5 Affective and Identity Dimensions

Beyond cognitive and linguistic factors, the interviews revealed important affective and identity dimensions of bilingual learning. Bilingual students often expressed greater confidence in their language learning abilities, having already successfully acquired and used two languages. Several participants described how their bilingual identity made them more open to embracing English as another important part of their linguistic repertoire. This positive disposition appeared to enhance motivation and persistence, particularly when learners encountered challenges.

4. Discussion

4.1 Bilingualism as a Cognitive and Linguistic Asset

The findings of this study clearly support the contemporary view that bilingualism constitutes a cognitive and linguistic asset for additional language learning. The significantly higher proficiency scores and more sophisticated strategy use among bilingual students align with substantial international research demonstrating that bilingual learners are advantaged in metalinguistic awareness, executive control, and learning agility. These advantages appear to translate directly into better outcomes in English language learning, particularly in areas requiring analytical and metalinguistic competence.

4.2 The Role of Cross-Linguistic Influence

The study confirms that cross-linguistic influence operates in complex ways, involving both positive and negative transfer. Bilingual learners benefit from a wider linguistic foundation, but they also face the challenge of disentangling the structures and features of multiple languages. The ability to consciously compare and contrast languages emerges as a crucial pedagogical entry point. When teachers help students recognize systematic differences and similarities, transfer can become more selective and productive, reducing the negative effects of inappropriate transfer.

4.3 Pedagogical Implications

Several pedagogical implications emerge from these findings. First, English teachers in Uzbekistan should explicitly leverage students' bilingual backgrounds rather than ignoring or suppressing them. Translingual practices, contrastive analysis, and cross-linguistic comparison activities can transform existing language knowledge into a

powerful resource for English acquisition. Second, teachers should be trained in multilingual pedagogy, which views all languages in the learner's repertoire as legitimate tools for learning. Third, classroom materials and activities should reflect the multilingual reality of Uzbek students rather than treating them as if they were starting from a monolingual baseline.

Moreover, the findings suggest that students should be taught explicit strategies for managing cross-linguistic influence. This includes raising awareness of common areas of negative transfer, such as articles, prepositions, and word order, and providing structured opportunities for noticing and self-correction. Strategies based on metalinguistic awareness, such as comparing English with Uzbek and Russian during learning activities, can transform potential confusion into a learning opportunity.

4.4 Implications for Language Policy

The findings also have implications for language policy in Uzbekistan. The maintenance and active development of both Uzbek and Russian alongside English should be viewed not as a competing demand but as a complementary investment in students' overall linguistic capital. Language policies that recognize and value the existing bilingualism of Uzbek students are likely to support stronger English language outcomes than policies that treat languages as discrete and competing entities.

4.5 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. The sample was drawn from a single university and may not represent the diverse linguistic profiles found across Uzbekistan. The proficiency levels in Uzbek and Russian were self-reported rather than independently assessed. Future research could include objective measures of bilingual proficiency, examine learners with different language combinations, and explore developmental aspects of trilingual acquisition. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for tracing how bilingualism affects English learning over extended periods.

5. Conclusion

This study provides robust evidence that bilingualism positively influences English language learning among Uzbek university students. Bilingual learners demonstrated higher proficiency, more sophisticated learning strategies, and stronger metalinguistic awareness than their predominantly monolingual peers, even though they also faced challenges related to cross-linguistic influence. These findings reinforce the growing consensus that bilingualism is a valuable resource for additional language learning. Educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in Uzbekistan should embrace and harness the multilingual nature of their students, designing instruction that recognizes Uzbek and Russian as foundations upon which English proficiency can be built. By doing so, they can help students transform their multilingual heritage into a powerful engine for global communication and academic success.

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