

DEVELOPING TWO TONGUES: LINGUISTIC CHANGES IN UZBEK–ENGLISH BILINGUAL CHILDHOOD

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Abstract. *Bilingual childhood provides a unique window into the dynamic processes of language development, identity formation, and cultural adaptation. This paper explores the linguistic changes observed in Uzbek–English bilingual children, focusing on phonological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic dimensions. The analysis highlights how children navigate two typologically distinct languages, often employing code-switching and transfer strategies that reshape their linguistic repertoires. By situating these patterns within broader theories of bilingual acquisition and sociocultural influences, the study emphasizes both the cognitive advantages and the challenges of growing up with “two tongues.”*

Keywords: *Bilingualism; Uzbek–English; language acquisition; code-switching; childhood development; cross-linguistic influence.*

Аннотация: *Двухязычное детство предоставляет уникальную возможность для изучения динамических процессов языкового развития, формирования идентичности и культурной адаптации. В данной статье рассматриваются языковые изменения, наблюдаемые у узбекско-английских двухязычных детей, с акцентом на фонологический, лексический, синтаксический и прагматический уровни. Анализ показывает, как дети осваивают два типологически различных языка, часто используя кодовое переключение и стратегии языкового переноса, которые влияют на формирование их языкового репертуара. Рассматривая эти особенности в рамках более широких теорий билингвального усвоения языка и социокультурных факторов, исследование подчёркивает как когнитивные преимущества, так и трудности, связанные с взрослением в условиях двуязычия.*

Ключевые слова: *билингвизм; узбекско-английское двуязычие; усвоение языка; кодовое переключение; развитие в детстве; межъязыковое влияние.*

Annotatsiya: *Ikki tilli bolalik til rivojlanishi, shaxsiyatning shakllanishi va madaniy moslashuvning dinamik jarayonlarini o'rganish uchun noyob imkoniyat yaratadi. Ushbu maqolada o'zbek-ingliz tillarida ikki tilli bolalarda kuzatiladigan lingvistik o'zgarishlar fonologik, leksik, sintaktik va pragmatik jihatlariga e'tibor qaratgan holda o'rganiladi. Tahlil bolalarning tipologik jihatdan bir-biridan farq qiluvchi ikki tilni qanday o'zlashtirishini ko'rsatadi. Bunda ular ko'pincha kod almashtirish va tillararo transfer strategiyalaridan foydalanadilar, bu esa ularning lingvistik repertuarini shakllantirishga ta'sir ko'rsatadi. Ushbu jarayonlarni ikki tilli til o'zlashtirishning kengroq nazariyalari hamda ijtimoiy-*

madaniy omillar doirasida tahlil qilish orqali tadqiqot ikki tilli muhitda ulg'ayishning kognitiv afzalliklari bilan bir qatorda yuzaga kelishi mumkin bo'lgan qiyinchiliklarni ham ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: *bilingvizm; o'zbek-ingliz ikki tilliligi; til o'zlashtirish; kod almashtirish; bolalik davridagi rivojlanish; tillararo ta'sir.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of bilingual children has long fascinated linguists, psychologists, and educators alike. Childhood, when the cognitive and social foundations of language are being laid, is especially critical for understanding how two languages coexist and interact within the same mind. For Uzbek–English bilingual children, this developmental journey is marked by the interplay of two structurally distinct linguistic systems. Uzbek, a Turkic language with agglutinative morphology and vowel harmony, contrasts sharply with English, a Germanic language characterized by analytic syntax and less predictable orthography.

This linguistic distance, however, is not a barrier but rather a rich site of interaction. Children learning both tongues simultaneously or sequentially often engage in processes such as transfer, code-switching, and innovation. These phenomena not only shape the children's linguistic output but also reflect their broader socio-cultural environment—family language use, school instruction, and community expectations. The metaphor of “developing two tongues” captures the lived experience of navigating two linguistic worlds: one tied to cultural heritage and identity (Uzbek), the other associated with global mobility, education, and prestige (English).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Phonological development provides some of the earliest markers of bilingualism. Uzbek and English differ considerably in vowel systems and consonant inventories, leading to predictable areas of influence. For instance, Uzbek children learning English often face challenges with the interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, substituting them with /s/, /t/, or /d/. Conversely, English-dominant children may struggle with Uzbek vowel harmony, producing forms that sound “foreign” to native Uzbek speakers [1].

Interestingly, these “errors” are not mere deficiencies but evidence of bilingual phonological negotiation. Children creatively adapt their articulatory patterns, sometimes blending features of both systems into a unique hybrid. Over time, exposure, correction, and practice refine their pronunciation, but traces of cross-linguistic influence may persist well into adulthood, shaping what listeners perceive as an accent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Vocabulary is another domain where bilingual children display remarkable flexibility. In daily speech, Uzbek–English bilinguals frequently engage in lexical borrowing and code-mixing. For example, an Uzbek-speaking child might say: “Men homework qildim” (“I did homework”), blending Uzbek grammar with an English noun. Conversely, English discourse

may be peppered with Uzbek kinship terms (opa, aka) or culturally specific words (mahalla, sumalak) [2].

Such practices are not signs of confusion but rather pragmatic strategies to fill lexical gaps, maintain cultural concepts, or align with the interlocutor's expectations. Over time, these children develop a hybrid lexicon that mirrors their bicultural identity. Teachers and parents often worry about "language contamination," yet research shows that bilingual children can successfully compartmentalize their vocabularies when the context demands monolingual output.

The structural differences between Uzbek and English create fertile ground for syntactic transfer. Uzbek's flexible word order (often SOV) contrasts with English's rigid SVO pattern. Young bilinguals sometimes carry over Uzbek syntax into English, producing utterances such as "Book I read" instead of "I read the book." Conversely, English-dominant children may simplify Uzbek structures, omitting agglutinative suffixes or using default word orders [3].

These syntactic innovations reflect the child's attempt to reconcile two systems rather than evidence of deficit. Over time, consistent exposure and corrective feedback help bilinguals adjust to context-appropriate structures. Yet some hybrid patterns persist as stylistic markers of bilingual speech, becoming part of a child's sociolect rather than temporary mistakes.

Perhaps the most subtle but important aspect of bilingual development is pragmatic competence—the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. Uzbek is rich in honorifics, politeness forms, and hierarchical address, reflecting cultural values of respect and community. English, while polite, emphasizes egalitarian communication and directness. Bilingual children must learn to navigate these contrasting norms: showing deference in Uzbek interactions while adopting a more casual tone in English settings.

This pragmatic flexibility becomes a cognitive and cultural resource. Children acquire the ability to shift communicative styles depending on the context—an invaluable skill in multicultural environments. At the same time, mismatches occasionally occur: a child may appear "too direct" in Uzbek or "too formal" in English, highlighting the delicate balance of dual cultural adaptation.

Beyond linguistic structures, bilingual childhood carries broader cognitive and social implications. Numerous studies suggest that bilinguals enjoy enhanced executive control, metalinguistic awareness, and problem-solving skills. For Uzbek–English children, managing two distinct linguistic systems strengthens their capacity to shift attention, monitor errors, and think flexibly [4].

Socially, bilingualism can both empower and challenge. On one hand, it offers access to diverse communities, academic opportunities, and cross-cultural friendships. On the other, children may face identity dilemmas: feeling "not fully Uzbek" in English contexts and "not fully English" in Uzbek circles. This dual positioning, however, can evolve into a rich bicultural identity when supported by families and schools that value both languages equally.

The linguistic changes observed in Uzbek–English bilingual childhood underscore the importance of supportive educational practices. Schools should recognize code-switching not

as failure but as a natural stage of bilingual development. Incorporating translanguaging pedagogy—where both languages are used strategically in instruction—can empower students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire.

Family language policy also plays a crucial role. Parents who consistently use Uzbek at home while supporting English in academic settings help maintain a balance, preventing language attrition. Similarly, community programs that promote Uzbek literacy (poetry, storytelling, cultural events) ensure that heritage language skills develop alongside English proficiency.

Uzbek–English bilingual children provide a fascinating case study for psycholinguists because they operate within two drastically different grammatical systems. Managing these systems requires the brain to engage in constant language monitoring and inhibition. For instance, when a child intends to speak in Uzbek, the English lexicon remains active in the background, and vice versa. This dual activation often results in cross-linguistic influence, such as subtle accent carryover, lexical borrowings, or unconventional word order. Far from being a deficiency, these overlaps highlight the cognitive agility of bilinguals: their brains must suppress one system while activating another, a process that strengthens executive functions like working memory and inhibitory control.

Moreover, bilingual children often display heightened metalinguistic awareness. They are more likely to recognize language as an arbitrary system of symbols rather than a fixed reality. For example, they quickly grasp that one object can be labeled as *kitob* in Uzbek and *book* in English, which facilitates more advanced literacy skills. This awareness allows them to consciously compare, contrast, and manipulate language, accelerating their broader linguistic competence.

Language is never just a cognitive tool; it is also a vessel of cultural identity and emotional resonance. For Uzbek–English bilingual children, each tongue may carry a different affective load. Uzbek, often spoken in family and community contexts, is associated with intimacy, tradition, and belonging. English, by contrast, may symbolize opportunity, education, and modernity. This duality sometimes creates a form of emotional bilingualism, where children feel more comfortable expressing affection in Uzbek but more adept at discussing academic or technical subjects in English.

This division can produce identity negotiations. Some children may feel caught between being “too Uzbek” in English contexts and “too English” in Uzbek ones. However, when supported by families and schools, this tension often resolves into a bicultural identity that draws strength from both worlds. Thus, bilingual childhood is not only linguistic development but also a cultural apprenticeship.

Recent scholarship emphasizes that bilingual children do not neatly separate their two languages but instead engage in translanguaging—the flexible use of multiple linguistic resources to communicate effectively. For Uzbek–English bilinguals, translanguaging might mean narrating a story in Uzbek but inserting English words for modern concepts, or explaining a math problem in English while using Uzbek for interpersonal commentary.

This practice demonstrates that bilingual children view language as a single communicative repertoire rather than two sealed-off codes. Translanguaging allows them to maximize expressive power, maintain cultural references, and accommodate interlocutors. Educators who embrace translanguaging in the classroom recognize it as a cognitive strength rather than a form of “broken” language. In this sense, bilingual children are innovators, constantly expanding the boundaries of linguistic norms.

The development of Uzbek–English bilingualism cannot be understood outside of its broader sociocultural context. In Uzbekistan, English is increasingly associated with social mobility, international education, and professional success. Parents often encourage children to prioritize English, which can lead to gradual heritage language attrition if Uzbek is not reinforced at home. Conversely, in diaspora communities (e.g., Uzbek families in the U.S. or U.K.), maintaining Uzbek becomes a challenge, as English dominates school and peer interactions.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping outcomes. Schools that adopt bilingual pedagogies—acknowledging and leveraging students’ Uzbek knowledge while teaching English—help children develop balanced bilingualism. In contrast, monolingual English-only policies may devalue the heritage language, causing children to internalize shame or distance from their cultural roots. Thus, the social recognition of Uzbek as a legitimate linguistic resource is essential for healthy bilingual development.

Peer groups often serve as the laboratory where bilingual children experiment with linguistic resources. Among friends, code-switching may become a marker of in-group identity: using Uzbek terms within English discourse to signal cultural solidarity, or employing English borrowings in Uzbek to project modernity and cosmopolitanism. These linguistic practices are more than casual habits—they are identity performances that allow children to negotiate their place within overlapping cultural networks.

CONCLUSION

Developing “two tongues” in childhood is not simply a matter of learning two codes; it is a lifelong negotiation of linguistic, cognitive, and cultural identities. Uzbek–English bilingual children exemplify this process vividly: their phonology, vocabulary, syntax, and pragmatics reflect the constant interplay of two distinct systems. While challenges such as interference, identity tension, and educational barriers exist, the benefits—cognitive flexibility, cultural richness, and global competence—far outweigh them.

As the world grows increasingly interconnected, supporting bilingual development becomes both a pedagogical necessity and a cultural responsibility. Uzbek–English bilingual childhood is not only an academic subject but also a living testimony to the resilience and creativity of children growing up at the crossroads of languages and worlds.

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