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The Metalinguistic Awareness of Filipino Adolescent

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Abstract: Philippines, a country of not only culturally diversified environment, majority of the adolescent are very much into many other languages aside from their dominant language. The influence of media and the internet provides many opportunities for them to be exposed in different language. Media in one way or another has potential effects in bilingualism if not multilingualism of adolescent. The study at hand investigates how the degree of bilingualism, that is partial and full bilingualism, affects metalinguistic awareness of adolescent. To be more specific, I would like to find out how partial and full bilinguals perform in tests of metalinguistic abilities and whether there are differences between partial and full bilinguals in these metalinguistic tasks. This paper delves into how the degree of bilingualism affects metalinguistic awareness of adolescent. It compares partial and full bilinguals' performance in three tests: language arbitrariness test, phonological awareness test, and vocabulary test. Forty-four students aged 13-14 to 15-16 withstand two versions of the three tests: English and Filipino. Full bilinguals outpoint the partial bilinguals in the three metalinguistic awareness tests. Also, the findings here concur of Bialystok (2001) claims that while both, monolingual and bilingual develop metalinguistic knowledge, balanced bilinguals appear to develop metalinguistic ability and awareness earlier than monolinguals. Results of the study shows that full bilinguals have a larger vocabulary than the partial bilinguals.

Key Words: metalinguistic awareness, partial bilinguals, full bilinguals, adolescent

1. INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of secondary schools offer bilingual programs, where lessons are taught in more than one language (Edelenbos & de Jong, 2004). Concerns have been raised about possible detrimental effects of bilingual education on the first language or on overall academic achievement (Lazaruk, 2007). However, several studies suggest that children who master two languages have better cognitive development, better able to form concepts, flexible in their thinking, and have better control over their attention than children who master only one language (Bialystok, McBride-Chang, & Luk, 2005).

Cummins (1976) attempts to provide an adequate explanation for the inconsistent findings from studies on proficiency in two languages also known as threshold hypothesis with which level of bilingual proficiency must attain by children to gain

advantages and avoid disadvantages in both languages.

Several studies have found that bilingual children have better metalinguistic awareness than monolingual children (Ransdell, Barbier, & Niit, 2006); (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Metalinguistic awareness allows reasoning and application of logic with language. Metalinguistic awareness is related to a greater ability to discover connotations from paralinguistic clues, and to understand ambiguities in language (Edwards & Kirkpatrick, 1999).

Bialystok & Ryan (1985) stated that bilingual appear to outperform their monolingual peers in tasks that demand high levels of control; that is ability to selectively attend to specific aspects of a representation, particularly in sentences that contain semantic errors. Yet per Bialystok & Majumder (1998) only the balanced bilingual show higher degrees of analysis. High levels of control and analysis lead to "an increasingly metalinguistic and literate use of language" (Bialystok and Ryan 1985 p. 635) and numerous studies have shown bilingual's advanced metalinguistic skills (e.g. Ben Zeev 1977, Bialystok 1988 & 2001).

Before presenting details on these studies, it is imperative to provide a working definition for metalinguistic skills. Cummins (1978) defined metalinguistic skills as "the ability to look at language rather than through its intended meaning". (Cromdal, 1999) point out the metalinguistic skills applied to all levels of language and that they are instantiated whenever people reflect on rhymes, synonymy, or grammaticality.

Bialystok (2001) states that metalinguistic skills are very complex and that they include at least three different elements: knowledge, ability, and awareness. Carranza (2009) cited tasks of word awareness examine ability to look at the language in an objective manner. On the other hand, Bialystok (2001) stated that the solution to word awareness tasks depends on high levels of control, a fundamental part of metalinguistic skills.

Zeev (1977) tested 96 Hebrew-English balanced bilinguals and two groups of monolinguals on a similar task. He developed a creative task to assess children's awareness of the formal properties of words. The task, symbol substitution, assessed children's level of awareness of referential arbitrariness.

Few studies have assessed phonological awareness and most studies included unbalanced bilinguals (Bruck & Genesee, 1995).

Studies that have investigated metalinguistic variables aimed to test the hypothesis that word definition ability require explicit instruction and practice in the semantic and syntactic conventions of a definition. Some of these studies involved monolingual subjects from the US (Wehren et. Al 1981) and Northern Italy (Benelli, 1988) while others include French-English (Davidson et. Al 1986; Snow, 1990) and Spanish-English bilinguals (Carlisle, Beeman, Davis, & Spharim, 1999). Of these, the studies with bilingual subjects have contributed the most in the understanding of the metalinguistic nature of the word-definition ability.

The study at hand investigates how the degree of bilingualism, that is partial and full bilingualism, affects metalinguistic awareness of adolescent. To be more specific, the researchers would like to find out how partial and full bilinguals perform in tests of metalinguistic abilities and whether there are differences between partial and full bilinguals in these metalinguistic tasks.

2. METHODOLOGY

The subjects in this study were 44 Grade-8 students – 22 partial bilinguals and 22 full bilinguals – with age group 13 – 14 to 15 – 16 from Alaminos National High School in Alaminos, Laguna.

The participants' degree of bilingualism was determined largely from the personal and academic evaluation of the teachers through the reading inventory and scholastic records of students. There are four major subjects that are formally taught: Filipino, English, Science and Mathematics and the others minor subjects: Araling Panlipunan, Technology and Livelihood Education, Music, Arts, PE & Health and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao.

Three instruments were used in the study: the Arbitrariness test, the Phonological Awareness test, and the Vocabulary test. All materials were patterned after Dita (2009) study. In addition, there are two versions of the materials: English and Filipino. All items of the test were pilot tested to four students: two from Grade 7 and two from Fourth year students who are younger and older to the current participants of the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results showed a comparison of partial and full bilingual on measures of language arbitrariness, phonological awareness, and vocabulary using the Cohen d effect size estimate. The approach was used so that sample size (n=44) will not influence the comparisons. In interpreting effect size, a Cohen's d value of 0.0 to 0.2 is a small effect size, 0.21 to 0.5 is medium effect size, and 0.51 and above is large effect size.

Language Arbitrariness

Table 1 shows that partial bilinguals scored lower than the full bilinguals in both versions of the task. Of the ten items, the partial bilinguals (n=22) got a mean of 9.36 for Filipino and 9.41 for English while the full bilinguals (n=22) got 9.91 in Filipino and 9.82 in English. The trend of the responses indicates that participants commit error usually on the initial part of the task. As they continue they become more familiar with the rule of the test and thus commit lesser errors. Also noticeable is that even if the two versions of the test differed only in the language being used, the scores in Filipino test did not obtain perfect scores. Nonetheless, the full bilinguals improved a bit from Filipino to the English version of the test.

Table 1. *Between Languages and between Group Means on Language Arbitrariness Test*

	Partial	Full	Total	Effect Size
Filipino	9.36	9.91	19.27	0.41
English	9.41	9.82	19.23	0.3
Total	18.77	19.73		0.71

Phonological Awareness

The three measures of phonological awareness were analyzed separately.

Initial phoneme detection. Comparison of scores between the partial and full bilinguals reveals that full bilinguals outscored partial bilinguals in Filipino with 14.05 with no difference in English as can be seen in Table 2., full bilinguals got a mean of 14.05 partial bilinguals got 13.55.

Table 2. *Between Languages and between Group Means on Initial Phoneme Detection*

	Partial	Full	Total	Effect Size
Filipino	13.55	14.05	27.6	0.27
English	12	12	24	0
Total	25.55	26.05		0.27

Final phoneme detection. Full bilinguals outscored partial bilinguals in both test in final phoneme detection. Having 8.64 the full bilinguals was leading in a matter of 1.87 points to partial bilinguals and 0.63 points in English.

Table 3. *Between Languages and between Group Means on Final Phoneme Detection*

	Partial	Full	Total	Effect Size
Filipino	6.77	8.64	15.41	0.35
English	5.23	5.86	11.09	0.17
Total	12	14.5		0.52

Deletion task. The process of deleting a phoneme or a syllable from the word was uncommon to the participants. Of all the tasks, this requires most number of practices. Full bilinguals got a mean of 8.41 for the English version while the partial bilinguals got 8. Table 4 shows the comparison of two languages.

Table 4. *Between Languages and between Group Means on Deletion Task*

	Partial	Full	Total	Effect Size
Filipino	8.23	8.77	17	0.33
English	8	8.41	16.41	0.30
Total	16.23	17.18		0.63

Vocabulary Measure. Table 5 shows a comparison of mean scores between the partial and full bilinguals

in two levels of vocabulary task. Of the two levels and two languages, the partial bilinguals outscored the full bilinguals, in Filipino version, the partial bilinguals got a mean of 8.14 in easy task while full bilinguals got only 7.91 nevertheless in the difficult task in Filipino the full bilinguals outsmart the partial bilinguals with 0.04 points. In English version, the full bilinguals excel in both easy and difficult tasks opposite partial bilinguals.

Table 5. *Between Languages and between Group Means on Vocabulary Measure*

	Partial		Full	
	Easy	Difficult	Easy	Difficult
Filipino	8.14	7.41	7.91	7.45
English	7.59	6.95	8.36	7.09
Total	15.73	15.73	16.27	14.54

Table 6 encapsulates the mean scores in all the three different tasks including its sub-components. Of the ten-item tasks, language arbitrariness, deletion tasks, and easy level of vocabulary measures, the final phoneme detection was the category where the subject performed the lowest. And between the 15-item tasks, initial phoneme and final phoneme detection, initial phoneme detection appears to be the category where the subjects performed higher. The full bilinguals (n=22) performed better than the partial bilinguals (n=22) in all three tasks: language arbitrariness test, phonological awareness test, and vocabulary measure.

Table 6. *Summary of Results*

	Partial		Full	
	FIL	ENG	FIL	ENG
Language Arbitrariness	9.36	9.41	9.91	9.82
Phonological Awareness				
Initial Phoneme	13.55	12	14.05	12
Final Phoneme	6.77	5.23	8.64	5.86
Deletion Task	8.23	8	8.77	8.41
Vocabulary Measure				
Easy Level	8.14	7.59	7.91	8.36
Difficult Level	7.41	6.95	7.45	7.09

4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings for the metalinguistic skills and vocabulary measures demonstrate that full bilinguals performed better than partial bilinguals. Results for the vocabulary measure – Easy Level showed higher mean scores of partial bilinguals to full bilinguals, but only in that category. The totality of scores still showed that full-bilinguals scored higher than its partial counterpart. Results of the study shows that full bilinguals have a larger vocabulary than the partial bilinguals.

In short, the study reported here aims to explore the effects of bilingualism that is partial and full bilingualism, in the metalinguistic skills and vocabulary measures of adolescent. Given the results of the study, it is recommended there be a more systematic way of determining the degree of bilingualism among adolescent. Several factors need to be considered in the conduct of this study. Amount of language exposure to English, the language used in the community, reading comprehension tests, parent's reports are other factors that might play a great role in determining the degree of participants' bilingualism.

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