



INFLUENCE OF BILINGUAL BACKGROUND ON ENGLISH COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The article examines the influence of a bilingual background on the development of English communicative skills, focusing on linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural factors. It highlights how bilingual individuals process language differently, how cross-linguistic transfer affects communicative competence, and how bilingual experience shapes vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, and pragmatic fluency. The study also discusses the advantages and challenges bilingual learners face in English acquisition and evaluates effective pedagogical strategies for enhancing communicative performance.*

Keywords: *bilingualism, communicative competence, cross-linguistic transfer, English acquisition, sociolinguistics, linguistic interaction, bilingual learners, language development.*

INTRODUCTION.

Bilingualism, as a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon, has been the subject of extensive academic discussion due to its profound implications for language acquisition, communicative development, and cognitive functioning. In contemporary linguistics, bilingualism is no longer perceived merely as the ability to use two languages, but rather as a dynamic, multidimensional system shaped by sociocultural, psychological, and interactional factors. Researchers increasingly emphasize that bilingualism develops along a continuum, influenced by linguistic exposure, educational environment, and patterns of language use within the family and community. This expanded view allows scholars to analyze bilingual individuals not simply as users of two distinct linguistic codes, but as speakers who navigate complex communicative contexts and demonstrate unique strategies of meaning-making, language choice, and pragmatic negotiation. [1]

The concept of communicative competence forms the second fundamental theoretical pillar underlying the present study. Moving beyond traditional notions of grammatical proficiency, communicative competence encompasses a wide range of skills necessary for effective language use: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, and pragmatic components. Hymes, Canale and Swain, and later scholars argue that the successful speaker of a foreign language must not only produce accurate grammatical structures but also interpret social cues, manage interactional conventions, and adapt speech to varying communicative purposes. In the case of bilingual learners, these competencies are shaped simultaneously by the first and second language systems, leading to distinctive patterns of comprehension, expression, and interaction. Consequently, the development of English communicative skills cannot be isolated from the bilingual learner’s linguistic background, as cross-linguistic influences, cultural frameworks, and cognitive habits consistently mediate their performance.

A central theoretical mechanism linking bilingualism with communicative competence is cross-linguistic transfer. This phenomenon includes both positive transfer, when the first language facilitates the acquisition of structures in the second language, and negative transfer, which manifests as interference or structural inaccuracies. The extent of this transfer is determined by typological proximity between languages, learner awareness, and the sociolinguistic value assigned to each language. In bilingual contexts, English communicative development therefore emerges as an outcome of continuous interaction between linguistic systems rather than a linear learning process. Moreover, cognitive theories of bilingualism stress that bilingual



individuals often demonstrate enhanced metalinguistic awareness, heightened sensitivity to linguistic form, and more flexible communicative strategies, which may accelerate certain aspects of English acquisition. [2]

A central mechanism emerging from bilingual experience is cross-linguistic transfer, which may manifest positively or negatively depending on the typological distance between the languages and the learner’s metalinguistic awareness. Positive transfer facilitates the acquisition of English structures that are congruent with those in the learner’s known languages, thereby accelerating vocabulary development, syntactic comprehension, and structural prediction during communication. Conversely, negative transfer produces interference, particularly in phonetics, word order, collocation patterns, and pragmatic conventions. For instance, bilingual learners whose first languages lack specific grammatical categories—such as articles or aspectual markers—may experience recurrent difficulties when attempting to maintain accuracy in English communication. At the same time, their bilingual exposure may strengthen cognitive flexibility, attentional control, and the ability to alternate between communicative strategies, ultimately improving overall interactional performance. [3]

Table-1. Key Mechanisms of Bilingual Influence on English Communicative Skills

Mechanism	Positive Influence	Potential Difficulty
Cross-linguistic transfer	Faster vocabulary growth; easier acquisition of familiar structures	Interference in grammar, phonetics, and lexical choice
Metalinguistic awareness	Better error detection and self-correction	Over-analysis slowing down spontaneous speech
Cognitive flexibility	Enhanced strategy use in communication	Difficulty maintaining consistent linguistic norms
Sociocultural background	Richer pragmatic understanding	Misalignment with English discourse conventions

The table summarizes the principal mechanisms through which bilingual experience affects English communicative development. It shows that bilingualism offers both supportive and challenging conditions: while transfer and metalinguistic awareness contribute to efficient learning, they also generate interference and variability in performance. Cognitive flexibility improves adaptability during communication, yet may complicate the stabilization of English norms. Sociocultural factors enrich pragmatic competence, but can lead to misunderstandings in intercultural interaction.

Taken together, these mechanisms demonstrate that the bilingual learner’s path toward English communicative proficiency is characterized by a dynamic interplay of facilitation and constraint. The bilingual mind constantly negotiates between multiple linguistic systems, reorganizing internal structures while constructing new communicative patterns in English. This process does not merely reproduce elements from the known languages; rather, it reshapes the learner’s entire communicative repertoire. Consequently, the development of English communicative skills in bilingual individuals is best understood as a continuous process of integration, adjustment, and refinement, influenced by cognitive sophistication, linguistic interaction, and sociocultural identity. [4]

Further analysis reveals that bilingual learners’ strengths in English communication are typically associated with their heightened metalinguistic awareness, allowing them to consciously monitor language use, detect inconsistencies, and adjust speech to communicative demands. Classroom-based research demonstrates that such learners often outperform monolingual students in tasks requiring comprehension of implicit meaning, interpretation of discourse markers, or recognition of pragmatic intent. However, the same empirical evidence shows recurring difficulties related to lexical choice and syntactic stability, particularly in spontaneous speech. These difficulties arise from the ongoing competition between linguistic systems, which may temporarily inhibit retrieval or trigger structures from the dominant language. Despite these challenges, bilingual learners show strong potential for rapid improvement when exposed to systematic feedback and interactive, meaning-focused instruction.



From a pedagogical perspective, the findings underscore the need for targeted instructional approaches that leverage bilingual learners' strengths while addressing their specific difficulties. First, educators should incorporate contrastive analysis techniques that explicitly highlight similarities and differences between English and the learners' other languages, thereby minimizing negative transfer. Secondly, communicative tasks should be designed to encourage strategic language use, allowing students to develop fluency while practicing self-monitoring and correction. Empirical evidence suggests that dialogic activities, collaborative problem-solving, and role-play scenarios are particularly effective for enhancing interactional competence among bilingual students. Additionally, integrating authentic audio-visual materials and culturally contextualized communication tasks promotes the development of pragmatic awareness, helping learners adjust their communicative behavior to English-speaking norms. [5]

The pedagogical implications extend beyond classroom practice to broader considerations of curriculum design and educational policy. Programs that incorporate bilingual learners' linguistic resources—rather than suppressing them—are more likely to support sustainable communicative development. Teachers should be trained to recognize bilingualism as an asset, not an obstacle, and to adopt methodologies that encourage transfer of positive linguistic and cognitive skills. Furthermore, assessment practices must evolve to capture the multidimensional nature of bilingual communicative competence, focusing not solely on grammatical accuracy but also on strategic ability, coherence, and pragmatic appropriateness. Ultimately, empirical findings affirm that bilingual learners possess unique capacities that, when adequately supported by informed pedagogical strategies, significantly enhance the quality and depth of English communicative skills.

The analysis conducted in this work demonstrates that a bilingual background plays a significant and multifaceted role in shaping the development of English communicative skills. Theoretical perspectives confirm that bilingualism influences linguistic processing, cognitive flexibility, and pragmatic behavior, creating both advantageous conditions and specific challenges for learners. Empirical observations further reveal that bilingual students possess heightened metalinguistic awareness and a wider repertoire of communicative strategies, which support effective interaction in English. At the same time, issues related to interference, lexical selection, and spontaneous fluency highlight the need for targeted pedagogical support. The study emphasizes that instructional approaches must acknowledge bilingualism not as a barrier but as a valuable resource that enriches communicative development. When properly integrated into teaching practices, the bilingual learner's linguistic experience enhances adaptability, critical thinking, and intercultural competence. Ultimately, understanding bilingual mechanisms allows educators to design more effective methodologies that foster confident and contextually appropriate English communication.

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