



## Who is in advantage: a Balanced or Dominant Bilingual

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether significant differences exist between dominant and balanced bilingual readers in their metacognitive awareness and perceived use of specific strategies when reading for academic purposes in English by using an ex-post facto design. Ninety three undergraduate college students in India (56 dominant vs. 37 balanced) completed an instrument designed to measure their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies after they read some reading comprehension passages. The results indicated that there is no significant difference between dominant and balanced bilingual students in employing metacognitive reading strategies and their sub-categories. Furthermore, no significant difference was reported in the scores of students with high and low proficiency in their aforementioned strategies. Finally, the interaction between linguality and proficiency was found to be non-significant in using metacognitive reading strategies and their sub-categories indicating that pattern of these strategies scores are similar for both high and low-proficient students without considering the bilinguality background.

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**Key words:** Metacognitive reading strategies, global, problem-solving, and support strategies, dominant and balanced bilingual

**Introduction**

Multilingualism is the natural potential available to every normal human being rather than an unusual exception; it is only the environmental factors which may fail to provide the opportunity to learn another language that provide monolingual speakers: “ Given the approach environment, two languages are as normal as two lungs” ( Cook, 2001b, p. 23); “ A theory purporting to account for universal language learnability cannot be considered adequate if it excludes the non-monolingual speakers of this world” ( Satterfield, 1999, p. 137).

The ability to speak two languages is often seen as something of a remarkable achievement, particularly in the English-speaking countries. Since 70% of the earth’s population is thought to be bilingual or multilingual ( Trask, 1999), there is good reason to believe that bilingualism is the norm for the majority of people around the world.

Defining bilingualism might at first seem self-evident: a bilingual person can speak more than one language. However, defining the term becomes more complicated when one starts to consider what knowing a language actually means and how one defines things such as fluency. Bilinguals’ language proficiency may vary considerably from being able to communicate to some extent in a second language, to having considerable skills in both languages (Crystal, 1987, p. 362). Since the speakers’ skills in a second language might vary from native-like competence to knowing only a few areas of research, there are different degrees of bilingualism.

Also, several researchers have attempted to define bilingualism with the help of dichotomies and different kinds of scales. Usually they relate to three central criteria in



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bilingualism: the level of proficiency means of acquisition, and age of acquisition. The extreme view of bilingualism is mastering both languages with native-like competence, and being able to use either language in any context or situation. This is often referred to as *balanced bilingualism* .i.e. being approximately equally fluent in two languages ( Baker, 1996, p.8). On the other hand, *dominant bilinguals* are those who only master their L2 partially but who have native competence in their first language (L1), or as Hamers & Blanc (1989) believes they have superior competence in one of their two languages.

As far as it is concerned with advantages of bilingualism, research conducted has concluded that bilingualism can have positive effects on the individuals if their competence in one of their L1s is sufficient. Cummins and Swain (1986) reported some advantages existing among bilinguals including better linguistic skills, orientation to linguistic structures, sensitivity to feedback cues, general intellectual development and divergent thinking. In addition, Diaz and Klinger (1991) stated the advantages like concept formation, classification, creativity, analogical reasoning, meta-linguistic skills and sensitivity to language structure and detail.

Regarding the context in which a person is experiencing his/her second language or more, South Asian bilingualism, in general and Indian bilingualism, in particular provide an excellent progressive, realistic, contemporary, and multicultural windows on the phenomenon of bilingualism. Shaped largely by the natural democratic focus of linguistic, accommodation and assimilation, they reveal the complexity of multiple bilingual language choices and use which is conducive to linguistic diversity and additive bilingualism. There is no denial that language rivalry and conflict are natural consequences of bilingualism. However, contrary to the popular conception, language rivalry in India often does not lead to linguistic and national disintegration. On the contrary, it provides an impetus to the focus of national development and anti-discrimination.



Bilingualism in India is a stable and a natural phenomenon. The acquisition of an additional language does not commonly lead to gradual loss of the first language; the possession of an additional language is like possessing an additional garment, or tool, needed for a different situation or purpose. It is not transient as in the case of migrant communities in some countries like the USA, or where it is an intermediate, temporary phase in the movement from monolingualism in one language to monolingualism in another. It is the expected behavioral norm when languages are in contact, and not an exceptional one.

In the last decade or so as knowledge of the breadth of bilingualism has grown, discussion of bilingualism has concentrated on “the many kinds and degrees of bilingualism and bilingual situations” (Crystal, 2003, p.51), leading to in-depth description of the varied circumstances involved in bilingualism, anticipating the recent call for understanding the bilingual situation through its context and its purpose (Edwards, 2004). For instance, Sundman (1994) conducted a study in Finnish schools which showed positive results in balanced bilingualism. The balanced bilinguals were also successful in other subjects besides their L1 / writing skills.

On the other hand, the study of metacognition- what readers know about themselves, the task of reading and various reading strategies – has proven to be a fruitful area of investigation. In fact, learners’ metacognitive strategies knowledge involves thinking about the reading processes, planning for reading, monitoring comprehension while reading and verifying what is read, as well as specific steps in problem-solving during comprehension (Flavell, 1987; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Young & Oxford, 1997). For example, from research focused on mainstream monolingual English speakers, we know that older and more successful readers know more about themselves as learners, that they approach different genre, in distinct ways, and that they use more reading strategies (Baker & Brown, 1984; Garner, 1987).



As far as it is concerned with metacognitive reading strategies of bilinguals, a little research has been done by different scholars in this field. For example, in a comparative study of the bilingual reading (Spain- English) of native-language Spanish speakers and native language English speakers, Carrell draw this conclusion that only the better readers adjusted their reading strategies depending on the text language and their perceived proficiency in that language. In another study, Jimenez et al. (1995) focused on understanding what eight bilingual Latin/o sixth and seventh grade students in the US knew about their reading processes and use of their reading strategies across two languages, how they used certain strategies while reading, and under what conditions they invoked such strategies. Several important findings were reported. First, successful bilingual readers “tended to have a unitary view of reading. Second, almost all of the successful bilingual readers demonstrated awareness of several strategies, with some limited actual use of certain strategies. Finally, the successful bilingual readers were aware of the “transference of knowledge” across languages. In other words, they “know that information and strategies learned or acquired in one language could be used to comprehend text written in another language” ( Garcia,G.E., Jimenez,R.T., Pearson, P.D., 1998, p.204).

In addition, the positive relationship between target language proficiency and strategy use has been reported in a number of studies. For example, Baker and Brown (1984) determined that proficient readers employ a number of metacognitive strategies during reading that assist them to understand a text. Also, as Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) indicated, Indian college students having a high proficiency in English reported a significantly higher mean frequency of strategy use than students having a lower proficiency in English. What is more, successful language learners tended to employ strategies in an orchestrated way, while unsuccessful learners did not (Vandergrift, 2003).



On the other hand, Anderson (1991) investigated the individual differences in using reading strategies and concluded that there was no single set of processing strategies that significantly contributed to success. Both high and low scoring readers appeared to be using the same kinds of strategies, although high scoring students seemed to be applying strategies more efficiently and appropriately in comparison to low scoring ones. Another result which could be drawn from this study was that reading is not only a matter of knowing which strategies to use, but also the reader must know how to successfully apply strategies.

Taking all of the above results into account, the issue which has not been considered by any of the researchers in the field is the impact of bilinguality and proficiency on the awareness and use of metacognitive reading strategies in an ESL context. Therefore, the following hypotheses are suggested for the current study.

1. Dominant and balanced bilingual students differ significantly in employing metacognitive reading strategies, in general and global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies, in particular.
2. There is a significant difference between low and high-proficient students in utilizing total metacognitive reading strategies and their sub-categories including global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies.
3. There will be significant interaction between bilinguality and proficiency in global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies, in particular, and metacognitive reading strategies, in general.

## **Methodology**

### ***Subjects***

The participants in this study were consisted of 93 undergraduate students from three private and public colleges in Mysore, India. The students, who were both freshman and sophomore and were admitted to their respective colleges for full-time academic study,



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were majoring English Literature. All subjects had completed 12 years of schooling and had graduated from high school prior to their enrollment in college. They were of 18 to 28 years of age with the mean of 20 (M=20). These colleges were randomly selected.

After the results of a self-evaluation questionnaire on bilinguality analyzed, two groups of students were elicited for the purpose of this research including:

*Group A:* 26 female and 30 male dominant bilinguals

*Group B:* 17 female and 20 male balanced bilinguals

In the present study, it should be notified that a *dominant* bilingual is a person who is more proficient in one of the two languages ( in most cases native-like), in this particular case, those subjects who are capable of communicating in Kannada and English but are more dominant in Kannada. On the other hand, a *balanced* bilingual is someone who is more or less equally proficient in both languages, but will not necessarily pass for a native speaker in both languages. In connection with this study, those subjects whose mother tongue are Kannada and also are native-like in English have been regarded as balanced bilinguals. That is, although they are not native speakers in English, they use it in their daily conversations competently. Regarding all other variables such as age, the kind of method used at schools, and the number of hours dedicated to English instruction, participants were homogenous in both groups.

### ***Materials***

In order to meet the purpose of this study, the following instruments were used:

**Language Proficiency Test (TOEFL):** This test consisted of multiple-choice grammar, vocabulary, and reading questions. Before this test was utilized for the real sample of this study, a pilot study was carried out on 20 students with the intention of testing the reliability of the proficiency test. Its reliability, through the K-R21 formula, turned to be 0.75, which confirmed the appropriateness of this test for taking the next step.



**Reading Comprehension Test in English:** The test of reading comprehension was taken from Kit of Reading Comprehension (Rajinders., 2008). The time allotted to this study was 60 minutes as it was determined at the piloting stage. The reading passages used in this study included a general content, which were of interest to the students. Also, running through K-R21, it was demonstrated that this reading comprehension test was reliable enough (0.78) for the relevant goals in the current study. Then, the test turned out to be suitable for this study after the correlation coefficient (0.70) between the TOEFL proficiency test and the test of reading in English in the piloting stage was calculated for creating a valid test.

**Background Questionnaire:** A background questionnaire was developed by the investigator for the purpose of eliciting information about the participants including age, gender, place of living, years of studying English, and medium of instruction (see Appendix 1)

**Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS):** The students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies was assessed through this instrument, which was designed for measuring adolescent and adult students' awareness and use of reading strategies while reading academic or school-related materials. The MARS questionnaire (see Appendix 3) measures three broad categories of reading strategies including:

- (1) Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), which can be thought of as generalized or global reading strategies aimed at setting the stage for the reading act (for instance, setting purpose for reading, previewing text content, predicting what the text is about, etc.);
- (2) Problem-Solving Strategies (PROB), which are localized, focused problem-solving or repair strategies used when problems develop in understanding textual information (for instance, checking one's understanding upon encountering conflicting information, re-reading for better understanding, etc.); and



(3) Support Reading Strategies (SUP), which involves using the support mechanisms or tools aimed at sustaining responsiveness to reading (for instance, use of reference materials like dictionaries and other support systems).

The 30-item questionnaire was validated by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) using large subject population representing students with equivalent reading abilities ranging from middle school to college. The internal consistency reliability coefficient for its three above subscales ranged from 0.89 to 0.93 and reliability for the total sample was 0.93, showing a reasonably dependable measure of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. However, to see whether this question is reliable for the subjects of this study or not, it was given to 20 students of the similar group participating in the study. Based on the collected data, the reliability coefficient alpha for this questionnaire was calculated to be 0.70.

**Self-evaluation Proficiency Scale:** This questionnaire was utilized to measure the degree of bilinguality of the subjects, and classify them based on *Dominant* and *Balanced* bilinguals. They were requested to evaluate their abilities in languages which are popular in this state including Kannada, English, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu and Telugu on 4-points in each language (the subjects were also recommended to write if there is any language not mentioned in the questionnaire). In order to achieve this purpose, the researcher developed a questionnaire included five tables; different languages and different skills a person knows were provided in each table. Then, students were requested to have a self-evaluation on their own level of proficiency in different languages based on Likert scale varying from excellent (1) to very weak (4) (see Appendix 2) . Like other instruments in this study, this self-made questionnaire was piloted to 20 students of the similar group in order to determine the internal consistency reliability coefficient which was calculated to be 0.68. In addition, in order to increase the reliability of this questionnaire, some researchers in the respective field were asked to express their opinions on this questionnaire.





Global	Low	43.75	5.82	42.00	7.12	43.5	6.36
	High	44.37	7.82	43.50	7.07	44.02	7.45
	Total	44.01	6.69	42.64	7.04	43.47	6.83
Problem-Solving	Low	28.06	4.51	29.23	4.83	28.52	4.63
	High	30.08	3.83	28.12	5.38	29.30	4.55
	Total	28.92	4.31	28.75	5.04	28.86	4.59
Support	Low	32.06	4.06	32.19	4.67	32.47	4.27
	High	31.66	5.18	31.12	5.61	31.17	5.30
	Total	31.86	4.53	31.72	5.05	31.82	4.72
Total Reading strategies	Low	103.87	11.17	103.42	12.74	103.69	11.70
	High	106.12	14.55	102.75	14.09	105.27	14.28
	Total	104.51	12.65	103.12	13.15	104.16	12.81

**Table2.** Two-way ANOVA result for mean scores on global, problem-solving, support, and total metacognitive reading strategies scores of Dominant and Balanced Bilinguals with high and low-proficient groups

Parameters	Source of variation	F value	DF	P value
Global	Between linguality (A)	.793	1	.376
	Between Proficiency (B)	.520	1	.473
	Interaction (A*B)	.088	1	.767
Problem-Solving	Between linguality (A)	.159	1	.691
	Between Proficiency (B)	.214	1	.645



	Interaction (A*B)	2.549	1	.114
Support	Between linguality (A)	.041	1	.840
	Between Proficiency (B)	.508	1	.478
	Interaction (A*B)	.107	1	.745
Total Metacognitive Strategies	Between linguality (A)	.474	1	.493
	Between Proficiency (B)	.080	1	.778
	Interaction (A*B)	.279	1	.599

The results of data analysis (Two-way ANOVA) in the above table indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between balanced and dominant bilinguals in employing total metacognitive reading strategies and its sub-categories including global, problem-solving, and support as far as it is concerned with the first hypothesis because the obtained F value of .974 was found to be insignificant at .05 level. However, dominant bilinguals reported a better mean score than balanced ones (105.13 and 103.12, respectively) in total metacognitive reading strategies and their subcategories.

By considering these results, the first hypothesis is rejected for both total reading strategies and their subcategories (global, problem-solving, and support).

Regarding the second research hypothesis (students with high and low proficiency are significantly different in employing total metacognitive reading strategies and their subcategories), there is no significant difference between high and low-proficient bilinguals in employing these strategies as the obtained F value of .80 was not significant at .05 level. Though, students with high proficiency reported to use more metacognitive reading strategies in all categories except support strategies in comparison to those of low proficiency as far as it is concerned with mean score of these two groups (105.27 vs. 103.69). In other words, low-proficient students in both balanced and dominant bilinguals had better mean score in support reading strategies than high-proficient ones (32.47 vs.



31.17. It means that they use these strategies to compensate for their lack of knowledge or vocabulary. Altogether, the second hypothesis is also rejected for total metacognitive reading strategies and their sub-categories.

Taking the third hypothesis into account ( there will be significant interaction between linguality and proficiency in metacognitive reading strategies, in general, and global, problem-solving, and support strategies, in particular), there was no significant difference between dominant and balanced bilinguals and proficiency in employing total metacognitive reading strategies ( $F= .279$ ;  $P<.599$ ), global strategies (  $F= .088$  ;  $P< .76$ ), problem-solving strategies (  $F= 2.549$  ;  $P<.114$ ), and support strategies (  $F= .107$  ;  $P< .745$ ). It means that pattern of metacognitive reading strategies scores are similar for students with high and low proficiency without considering their bilinguality levels. Therefore, the third hypothesis is rejected for total metacognitive reading strategies as well as their sub-categories.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, I wanted to explore the metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies of balanced and dominant bilinguals at undergraduate level while reading academic materials. The data analysis of this study showed that bilinguality and proficiency as the two dependant variables have no impact on the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. In other words, there is no significant difference between balanced and dominant bilinguals in employing global, problem-solving, and support metacognitive reading strategies without considering the level of proficiency of the students.

### **Recommendations**

Data analysis of the current study investigated that balanced and dominant bilinguals used equally the same strategies without considering the role of proficiency as no significant difference was reported between high and low-proficient students. However,



an examination of the mean score of the type of strategies reported used by the subjects in this study indicates that , despite the mean usage differences noted, both groups of bilingual students invoking a low to moderate strategy awareness level with clear preference for using global strategies, followed by support strategies, and problem-solving strategies. These results are completely different from the study done by Mokhtari and Reichard (2004) in which they studied metacognitive awareness of reading strategies in native (US) and EFL (Moroccan) contexts. In this study, the students reported using a moderate to high strategy awareness level with a preference for employing problem-solving, followed by support strategies, and global reading strategies.

By delving more into the results of this study, teaching different kinds of metacognitive reading strategies is a necessity for teachers without considering the role of proficiency and bilinguality as strategy instruction was found to positively affect both reading performance and strategy use of language learners of varying abilities (Anderson, 1991; Muniz-Swicegood, 1994; Jimenez, 1997). Anderson (1991) found that after strategy instruction in varying contexts, adult second language learners of varying abilities used similar strategies. Muniz-Swicegood (1994) concluded that the bilingual third grade students receiving instruction outperformed the control group in reading comprehension test. Also, Jimenez (1997) reported that instruction positively influenced the use of cognitive strategies in seventh grade Latino students of a lower proficiency level. As a result, strategy instruction positively benefits bilingual reading.

Considering the relationship between learners' L2 proficiency and strategy use, a lot of empirical studies have been investigated indicating that conscious, "tailored" use of strategies is related to achievement and proficiency, and successful learners use a wider variety of strategies to improve their reading skills and performance (Oxford, 1996, p.xi). However, this study showed this is not the case for undergraduate bilingual students studying English as a second language. Therefore, teachers can teach these strategies irrespective of the role of proficiency in the classroom.



Altogether, a limited amount of research work has focused on documenting the development of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies as far as monolinguality and different levels of bilinguality is concerned. In other words, do major difference in metacognitive awareness and use of reading strategies exist among different groups of learners studying English in different contexts? This is a thought-provoking question which should be subjected to systematic research.

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## Appendix 1

### *Students Pro forma*

**Attention: Please answer the questions honestly. We keep them strictly confidential.**

1. Name of the student:.....
2. age:.....
3. Gender.....
4. Name of college.....
5. Class studying: :.....
6. Medium of instruction.....
7. Are you coming from Urban or Rural areas?.....
8. I have .....familiarity with English language.
  - a. complete
  - b. average
  - c. a little
9. How many years have you been studying English except the usual classes in school?  
 .....years .....months
10. What is your purpose of learning English?
  - a. To continue education
  - b. To travel
  - c. To find a good job
  - d. To compete with other students
  - e. others (please write)
11. My attitude toward English is.....
  - a. positive
  - b. negative
  - c. no comment

## Appendix 2

### *Measurement of degree of bilingualism*

Please indicate the language or languages you know,(Table 1) and use with different groups (Table 2 – 5). Please place one of the following numbers in each cell to indicate your competence in these skills of language(s)



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Excellent =1

Good =2

Weak =3

Very weak =4

**1. Self**

<b>Name of language</b>	<b>Understand</b>	<b>Speak</b>	<b>Read</b>	<b>Write</b>
Kannada				
Urdu				
Hindi				
Telugu				
Marathi				
English				
Tamil				
Others(specify):				

**2) Language(s) used with Friends**

<b>Name of language</b>	<b>Understand</b>	<b>Speak</b>	<b>Read</b>	<b>Write</b>
Kannada				
Urdu				
Hindi				
Telugu				
Marathi				
English				
Tamil				
Others(specify):				

**3) Language(s) used with Brothers/Sisters**



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Name of language	Understand	Speak	Read	Write
Kannada				
Urdu				
Hindi				
Telugu				
Marathi				
English				
Tamil				
Others(specify):				

#### 4) Language(s) used with Parents

Name of language	Understand	Speak	Read	Write
Kannada				
Urdu				
Hindi				
Telugu				
Marathi				
English				
Tamil				
Others(specify):				

#### 5) Language(s) used with Neighbors

Name of language	Understand	Speak	Read	Write
Kannada				



Urdu				
Hindi				
Telugu				
Marathi				
English				
Tamil				
Others(specify):				

### Appendix 3

#### *Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory*

Direction: Listed below are statements about what people do when they read academic or school-rated materials such as textbooks or library books. Five numbers follow each statement (1,2,3,4,5), and each number means the following:

- 1 means “ I **never or almost never** do this.”
- 2 means “ I do this **only occasionally**.
- 3 means “ I **sometimes** do this.”
- 4 means “ I **usually** do this.”
- 5 means “ I **always or almost always** do this.”

#### **Strategy**

1. I have a purpose in mind when I read. (**Glob**)
2. I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read. (**Sup**)
3. I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text. (**Sup**)
4. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration. (**Prob**)



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5. I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it. **(Sup)**
6. I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read. **(Sup)**
7. I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding. **(Glob)**
8. I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading. **(Glob)**
9. I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read. **(Sup)**
10. I guess the meaning of unknown words by separating different parts of a word. **(Prob)**
11. I think about what I know to help me understand what I read. **(Glob)**
12. I preview the text to see what it is about before reading it. **(Glob)**
13. When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read. **(Sup)**
14. I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose. **(Prob)**
15. I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I am reading. **(Prob)**
16. I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding. **(Sup)**
17. I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization. **(Glob)**
18. I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading. **(Prob)**
19. I decide what to read closely and what to ignore. **(Glob)**
20. When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading. **(Prob)**
21. I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading. **(Prob)**
22. I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read. **(Prob)**
23. I use typographical aids like boldface and italics to identify key information. **(Glob)**
24. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text. **(Glob)**
25. I go back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas in it. **(Sup)**
26. I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information. **(Glob)**
27. I try to guess what the material is about when I read. **(Glob)**
28. When text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding. **(Prob)**
29. I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text. **(Sup)**
30. I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong. **(Glob)**