



THE ROLE OF METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS IN CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE AND SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Metalinguistic awareness is an important component of children's cognitive and language development. It is the ability to recognize and analyze the structure of language, as well as to control one's own speech. In recent decades, metalinguistic awareness has been considered a key factor contributing to successful literacy acquisition and language development. This article examines the main components of metalinguistic awareness, its functions in cognitive and language development, and its role in bilingual education.

Introduction. One of the most important components of children's cognitive and speech development is **metalinguistic awareness**. It refers to the ability to understand the language system, analyze its elements, and consciously control speech production. Contemporary linguistics and psycholinguistics recognize metalinguistic awareness as a decisive factor in the development of literacy, analytical thinking, and the mastery of oral and written language. In a bilingual environment, where children must consciously switch between two linguistic systems, this phenomenon acquires particular significance.

According to numerous studies conducted by both domestic and international scholars, the transition from intuitive language use to conscious control of linguistic structures is facilitated by metalinguistic awareness. The works of J. É. Gombert, E. Bialystok, E. S. Kubryakova, T. V. Akhutina, and T. A. Gridina emphasize the importance of metalinguistic reflection.

Research findings indicate that metalinguistic reflection serves as a **fundamental mechanism in the development of children's thinking and linguistic identity**. This process is especially important in bilingual and multilingual educational settings, as it requires complex skills of analyzing, regulating, and comparing linguistic forms.

The importance of metalinguistic development for students' speech and cognitive competence is also emphasized in studies conducted by Uzbek scholars. In a cross-linguistic

study of adolescents' lexical development, D. G. Madrakhimova demonstrated that a high level of metalinguistic competence leads to better vocabulary acquisition, recognition of morphological structures, understanding of polysemy, and the development of vocabulary learning strategies. Through metalinguistic reflection, learners are able to apply their knowledge across different linguistic contexts and establish semantic connections between words. Similar conclusions are presented in the work of O. Madrakhimova, who views metalinguistic awareness as a key component of bilingual education and a crucial element in the development of critical literacy.

According to contemporary scientific theory, metalinguistic awareness refers to an individual's ability to identify and evaluate the language system outside the immediate communicative context. It includes the ability to recognize phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic structures of language, as well as to consciously manipulate linguistic units. One of the first scholars to systematically define metalinguistic development was J. É. Gombert, who distinguished it from implicit language skills by characterizing it as deliberate and controlled language use. The researcher emphasizes that metalinguistic awareness develops gradually and plays a crucial role in the transition to written language.

E. Bialystok proposed a two-component model of metalinguistic awareness, consisting of **analysis of linguistic knowledge** and **control of information processing**. The ability to distinguish form from meaning is associated with the first component, while attentional control and the ability to shift between linguistic levels are associated with the second. The researcher argues that metalinguistic awareness—particularly evident in bilinguals—represents a set of cognitive processes that ensure adaptability and efficiency in language use rather than mere linguistic knowledge.

In Russian linguistic scholarship, metalinguistic awareness is regarded as a type of linguistic consciousness associated with language reflection. E. S. Kubryakova highlights its cognitive nature and its connection with understanding language as a sign system. Based on studies of child speech, T. A. Gridina defines metalinguistic awareness as a child's ability to evaluate the accuracy of speech forms and explain linguistic phenomena. According to T. V. Akhutina, the development of written speech and higher mental functions is closely linked to the growth of metalinguistic reflection.

Most researchers emphasize the **multilevel structure** of metalinguistic awareness. The phonological level, which includes the ability to recognize and evaluate sounds and syllables, is considered the most significant predictor of reading and writing skills. The morphological level facilitates grammar acquisition and vocabulary expansion and is associated with awareness of morphemic word structure. The syntactic level, which enables understanding of sentence structure, forms the basis for the development of literate writing. The semantic level directly influences conceptual thinking and text comprehension, as it is related to understanding word meanings, figurative language, and logical-semantic relations.

Metalinguistic awareness serves several important functions. The **cognitive function** is manifested in the development of analytical and reflective thinking. The **regulatory function** is associated with error correction, speech planning, and attentional control. The **educational function** ensures the acquisition of literacy skills and a smooth transition from oral to written language. The **communicative function** contributes to more precise and adequate verbal

interaction. According to contemporary research, these functions are particularly pronounced in bilingual individuals, enhancing their cognitive flexibility and language control.

Thus, metalinguistic awareness should be regarded as a **fundamental mechanism of children's cognitive, linguistic, and educational development**. It ensures an understanding of language as a system, fosters analytical and self-regulatory abilities, enhances literacy, and promotes effective learning, especially in bilingual contexts. The development of effective methodologies for the purposeful enhancement of metalinguistic awareness in preschool and school-age children, including within bilingual and digital learning environments, remains a promising area for future research.

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