



REL Pacific Ask A REL Response

English Learners, Curriculum and Instruction

September 2019

Question:

I'm curious to know more about how metalinguistic awareness can support students' language learning. What does the research say about this, and what are effective strategies to build students' metalinguistic awareness?

Response:

Following an established REL Pacific research protocol, we conducted a web-based search for resources related to developing metalinguistic awareness to support students' language learning (see Methods section for search terms and resource selection criteria). We focused our search in particular on studies in the Pacific and other indigenous contexts for greater relevancy to our partners in the Pacific region; however, we did include studies with more generalizable findings due to the limited amount of research available in these contexts.

References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. Descriptions of the resources are quoted directly from the publication abstracts. We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, our search included the most commonly used research resources, but they are not comprehensive and other relevant references and resources may exist.

Research References

De la Fuente, A. A. & Lacroix, H. (2015). Multilingual learners and foreign language acquisition: Insights into the effects of prior linguistic knowledge. *Language Learning in Higher Education*, 5(1), 45–57. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1122327>.

From the abstract: “In foreign language classrooms we often find that, in addition to their mother tongue (L1), learners already speak—or are learning—at least one other language. As a result, they already have an array of linguistic and cognitive skills that may prove very useful if they are adequately exploited during the language learning process. However, in contrast with the growing interest displayed by researchers in the processes involved in the

acquisition of a third or subsequent language (e.g. Cenoz 2001; De Angelis 2007; Rothman 2011), the particular characteristics of multilingual learners often go unnoticed by foreign language teachers (Pauwels 2014). In light of this, we present a survey of key concepts in the field of third language acquisition (TLA) and make a number of suggestions for classroom practice based on current research in the area. We first analyze concepts such as psychotypology (Kellerman 1978, 1983) and cross-linguistic influence. Then, drawing on work done by authors such as Thomas (1988), Jessner (1999, 2006, 2008a) and Carvalho and Silva (2006), we propose that teachers should take advantage of multilingual learners' metalinguistic awareness, for example by adopting strategies such as reactivating prior linguistic knowledge and exploring the formal differences and similarities between the languages present in the classroom."

Henderson, K. I., Ingram, M. (2018). "Mister, you're writing in Spanglish": Fostering spaces for meaning making and metalinguistic connections through teacher translanguaging shifts in the bilingual classroom. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 41(3), 253–271. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1191601>.

From the abstract: "We examine how a third-grade bilingual teacher engaged in 'translanguaging shifts'—the moment-to-moment changes in language practices—during instruction in response to students' language performances. We demonstrate how a teacher's high level of multilingual awareness connected to fostering classroom spaces with linguistic flexibility that leveraged translanguaging practices as a resource. We present pedagogical practices of teacher translanguaging used intentionally for access to academic content, the cultivation of classroom community, and development of student metalinguistic awareness. This case study adds information about translanguaging in a bilingual classroom with implications for the role of teacher critical multilingual awareness within a translanguaging pedagogical framework."

Jessner, U. (2008). A DST model of multilingualism and the role of metalinguistic awareness. *Modern Language Journal*, 92(2), 270–283. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ794002>.

From the abstract: "This paper suggests that a dynamic systems theory (DST) provides an adequate conceptual metaphor for discussing multilingual development. Multilingual acquisition is a nonlinear and complex dynamic process depending on a number of interacting factors. Variability plays a crucial role in the multilingual system as it changes over time (Herdina & Jessner, 2002). A number of studies on multilingualism have shown that there are qualitative differences between second and third language learning and that these can be related to an increased level of metalinguistic awareness. From a DST-perspective, metalinguistic knowledge and awareness of this knowledge play a crucial role in the development of individual multilingualism."

Lado, B., Bowden, H. W., Stafford, C., & Sanz, C. (2017). Two birds, one stone, or how learning a foreign language makes you a better language learner. *Hispania*, 100(3), 361–378. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1156404>.

From the abstract: “Experience with a second language (L2) has been shown to facilitate learning of a third or subsequent language (L3) (Sanz 2000). However, little is known about how much L2 experience is needed before benefits for L3 development emerge, or about whether effects depend on type of L3 instruction. We report two experiments investigating initial learning of semantic role (agent/patient) assignment in L3 Latin by native English speakers at different levels of formal experience in L2 Spanish (Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, Very Advanced). In Experiment 1, (N = 76), learners engaged in a computerized Latin practice session that included metalinguistic information in feedback. In Experiment 2, (N = 0), feedback indicated only if learners’ responses in practice were right or wrong. Development was operationalized as improvement in accuracy and/or reaction time. Results showed that when feedback was metalinguistic, an intermediate level of formal L2 experience was enough to yield an advantage, however only those learners with very advanced L2 experience showed longer-term retention of that advantage. In contrast, in the absence of metalinguistic feedback, very advanced experience was required for any advantage to appear. These results inform classroom accommodations for learners with different levels of previous language experience.”

Soto Huerta, M.E. & Riojas-Cortez, M. (2014). Playful dialogues of a bilingual child in everyday conversations: Foundations of early literacy. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 8(3), 231–249. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1033330>.

From the abstract: “Many young children of Mexican heritage enter U.S. schools with knowledge of two language systems and emergent biliterate abilities. Bilingualism in young children may go unnoticed when instructional practices favor English. This case study describes how Lucía's bilingualism and emergent biliteracy parallel competencies essential to literacy development. The language samples highlight the influence of adult-mediation interactions in everyday conversations as well as during playful dialogues, characterized by the incorporation of fantasy and symbolic play. The findings show how adult-mediated dialogues challenged the young bilingual to engage her metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness when positioned to meet communicative goals and to solve conceptual conflicts, both verbal and written. These opportunities guided the young child to also critically think about language and to expand her notions about literacy. We draw implications about how educators can leverage these metacognitive and metalinguistic competencies as educational resources.”

Velasco, P., & Fialais, V. (2018). Moments of metalinguistic awareness in a kindergarten class: Translanguaging for simultaneous biliterate development. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21(6), 760–774. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1190407>.

From the abstract: “This aim of this article is to contribute to the development of a socio-cultural model of emergent biliteracy that recognizes the dynamic interactions amongst two languages. The present field study took place in a French-German public Kindergarten class in Alsace, France, where students are in the initial process of learning to read in both languages. The teacher, fluent in both French and German, created a translanguaging space where a simultaneous biliterate practice using cognates (or words in two languages that share

similar print characteristics and meaning), and identical and non-identical false cognates (words that share all or some print characteristics in both languages but not the same meaning) could be enacted. The selected words enabled these five year olds to engage in a simultaneous biliterate practice that highlighted the students' interlinguistic abilities specific to print, phonology and meaning across languages.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- "metalinguistic awareness" AND "practices"
- “metalinguistic awareness” AND “multilingual” AND “practices”
- “metalinguistic awareness” AND “practices” AND “Pacific region”
- “metalinguistic awareness” AND “practices” AND “Pacific students”
- “metalinguistic awareness” AND “practices” AND “Pacific”

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences, for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic databases ProQuest and Google Scholar. We also scanned the reference sections of studies, particularly those studies discussing pedagogical practices, for additional resources.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

REL Pacific searched ERIC and other academic journal databases for studies that were published in English-language peer-reviewed research journals within the last 15 years. REL Pacific prioritized documents that are accessible online and publicly available, and prioritized references that provide practical information based on peer-reviewed research for the practitioners who requested this Ask A REL.¹ Sources included in this document were last accessed in September 2019. Methodological priorities were given to randomized controlled trials and quasi experiments, as well as those studies in Pacific contexts for the review and selection of the references. However, given the limited nature of these studies, REL Pacific additionally considered qualitative studies (including case studies and ethnographic studies) and literature reviews. REL Pacific also considered relevant contexts in second language learning beyond the Pacific region.

¹ This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educational stakeholders in the Pacific Region (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Hawai‘i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL Pacific) at McREL International. This memorandum was prepared by REL Pacific under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-17-C-0010, administered by McREL International. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

