CHILDHOOD BILINGUALISM,
METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS AND CREATIVITY

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ABSTRACT

A number of studies have investigated the effects of bilingualism on either metalinguistic awareness or creativity, and the majority of these lend some support to the view that bilingualism has a positive influence on abilities relevant to both concepts. However, the two types of abilities have not been studied simultaneously before. It was hypothesised here that there would be positive relationships between abilities in the metalinguistic awareness and the creativity areas, for both bilingual and monolingual children. This hypothesis was based primarily on the notion of the "objectification of language", which has also been proposed for explaining the more widespread cognitive gains associated with bilingualism.

One of the other themes included in this thesis was the degree of consistency among different metalinguistic awareness tasks. The findings from two experiments with English speaking monolinguals supported the view that there is a general metalinguistic ability. In Experiment 1 children aged between 5 and 9 years were studied, but some tests were found to be rather easy for the older children. Therefore only 5 and 6 year olds were tested in Experiment 2. Furthermore, Experiment 2 was specifically designed to study metalinguistic awareness, and its relationship to general intellectual development. Although, evidence was found for the notion of a general metalinguistic ability, the findings also suggested that metalinguistic abilities were not clearly distinguishable, in factorial terms, from other tests of intellectual abilities.
The hypothesis that there would be positive relationships between measures of metalinguistic awareness and creativity was investigated by Experiments 3 and 4. In both experiments the subjects were 5 and 6 year olds, however in Experiment 3 subjects were Italian-English bilinguals and English monolinguals from South Australia, whilst Experiment 4 subjects were Italian-English bilinguals and Italian monolinguals from Rome. Overall this hypothesis was not supported, however, the results were consistent with the Threshold Theory. In both Experiments 3 and 4 the findings suggested that whilst high levels of performance in two languages may promote some aspects of cognitive development, lower levels do not. The results were also discussed in relation to other theoretical views.