

Concrete and Metacognitive Verb Comprehension in Polish-English Intentionally Bilingual Children: An L1-L2 Comparison

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Research on bilingual vocabulary development has focused predominantly on migrant and heritage-language contexts, using concrete vocabulary measures. Far less is known about intentional bilingualism – a situation in which caregivers deliberately introduce a second language they are not native speakers of – or about metacognitive vocabulary. Metacognitive verbs (e.g., *know*, *guess*, *remember*, *wonder*) reflect children's developing capacity to represent mental states, making them a theoretically meaningful site of variation in early language development.

This ongoing study asks whether intentionally bilingual children differ across their two languages, L1 Polish and L2 English, in comprehension of concrete and metacognitive verbs. We have examined 27 children aged 3-6 years raised in intentional bilingualism living in Poland. Two vocabulary measures were administered in both languages: the verb comprehension subtest of the LITMUS Cross-Linguistic Lexical Task (CLT; Haman et al., 2015), a picture-based tool for concrete vocabulary assessment, and the receptive subtest of MetVoc (Polish version: Mieszkowska et al., 2016; English version: Astington & Pelletier, 2004), a 14-item picture-and-story task assessing comprehension of metacognitive verbs.

The results for concrete verbs comprehension showed significantly higher scores in L1 Polish ($M = 27.3$ out of 32) than in L2 English ($M = 21.63$ out of 32), $p < .001$. This finding was expected as the participants were exposed mostly to Polish. A similar pattern was observed for metacognitive verb comprehension. Children scored significantly higher in their L1 ($M = 8.37$) than in L2 ($M = 6.7$), $p < .01$. This contrasts with prior findings for natural bilinguals, who showed no cross-language gap in metacognitive verbs on the same instrument (Muszyńska et al., 2024).

These findings do not uniformly mirror vocabulary development patterns reported for natural bilinguals, nor the morphosyntactic profile documented for intentionally bilingual children (Banasik-Jemielniak et al., 2025). An ongoing analysis further examines whether children's metacognitive verb comprehension is linked to the frequency of metacognitive verbs in their parents' picture-elicited narratives, targeting input quality as a candidate explanation for the observed cross-language variation.

References

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