

ADDITIVE AND SUBTRACTIVE BILINGUALISM IN AN UZBEK ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER

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Introduction

In multilingual societies, bilingualism represents not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a sociocultural and cognitive process. The distinction between additive and subtractive bilingualism, introduced by Lambert (1974), plays a crucial role in understanding the outcomes of second language acquisition. In the Uzbek context, English has gained significant importance as a global language, yet its relationship with the Uzbek mother tongue varies depending on educational and social factors.

This study explores how additive bilingualism—where the second language adds to the learner’s linguistic repertoire without diminishing the first language—contrasts with subtractive bilingualism, which occurs when the second language replaces or erodes proficiency in the first. Using data from Uzbek English Language Learners (ELLs), this research examines sociolinguistic and psychological influences that determine whether bilingualism becomes additive or subtractive in Uzbekistan’s educational system.

Research Background

Since Uzbekistan’s independence, English has become a strategic language for modernization and global integration. Governmental initiatives such as the 2012 Presidential Decree on Improving Foreign Language Learning have encouraged the early introduction of English in schools. However, outcomes vary across regions and social classes.

Globally, additive bilingualism has been linked to enhanced cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, and academic success [1]. For example, Canadian immersion programs show that students proficient in both English and French outperform monolingual peers in problem-solving tasks [2]. In contrast, subtractive bilingualism, often observed among minority groups exposed to dominant global languages, can lead to language loss and cultural disconnection [3].

In Uzbekistan, English is typically learned as a foreign language (EFL) rather than a second language, but increasing exposure through media and international education has led to complex bilingual profiles. Thus, it becomes essential to assess whether bilingual development in Uzbek learners is additive or subtractive.

Methodology

A mixed-method study was conducted among 120 Uzbek university students majoring in English Philology and Education. The research used:

- Questionnaires to evaluate language attitudes and usage frequency (Uzbek vs. English).
- Interviews to capture qualitative perspectives on identity and linguistic confidence.
- Language proficiency tests to assess balanced bilingual competence.

Data were analyzed statistically using SPSS 25.0, focusing on correlations between language attitudes and proficiency outcomes.

Findings and Discussion

1. Quantitative Results

- 74% of respondents reported that learning English improved their overall linguistic awareness, indicating additive bilingual tendencies.
- 18% reported decreased use of Uzbek in academic writing or thinking, suggesting incipient subtractive bilingualism.
- Students from urban, English-medium universities exhibited stronger additive patterns, while those from rural regions displayed partial erosion of Uzbek academic vocabulary.

2. Qualitative Results

Interviews revealed that students with positive identity integration—those who viewed English as a tool for global communication rather than cultural replacement—demonstrated additive bilingualism. Conversely, those perceiving English as superior to Uzbek tended to devalue their mother tongue.

3. International Comparison

- In Canada, additive bilingualism is promoted through dual-language immersion, resulting in 30–50% higher academic outcomes for bilingual students [2].
- In Singapore, English serves as a lingua franca, yet strong mother-tongue maintenance policies sustain additive bilingualism [4].
- In Kazakhstan, however, some Kazakh learners experience subtractive bilingualism due to Russian dominance [5].

These comparisons suggest that Uzbekistan’s approach—if not balanced—may risk reproducing similar subtractive patterns unless active Uzbek language reinforcement continues.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Uzbek English Language Learners exhibit both additive and subtractive bilingual tendencies, depending on their linguistic environment, educational system, and cultural attitudes. Urban, internationally oriented learners tend to achieve additive bilingualism, benefiting cognitively and academically. However, the risk of subtractive bilingualism persists in contexts where English is perceived as socially or intellectually superior to Uzbek.

To ensure additive bilingualism, language policy in Uzbekistan must emphasize the parallel development of Uzbek linguistic and cultural identity alongside English proficiency. Integrating mother-tongue-based bilingual education and intercultural competence training could sustain both languages as complementary resources.

Statistical Summary

<i>Category</i>	Additive (%)	Subtractive (%)	Neutral (%)
<i>Urban Universities</i>	78	12	10
<i>Rural Colleges</i>	61	27	12
<i>Average (National)</i>	74	18	8

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