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**Level:** LMD 3

**Module:** Linguistics

**Course Title:** Bilingualism and its Types

Generally speaking, when an individual has a considerable control over two distinct languages, s/he can be qualified as a bilingual. Thence, bilingualism refers to the speaker’s native-like command over two (or more) languages. This control is not only shown in the production of utterances in a different language, but also in understanding and manipulating the components of those languages. This competence can be, according to some scholars, primary, i.e., by understanding the other language, as it can be full, i.e., producing and mastering the two languages (perceptive and productive skills).

Different types of bilingualism can be seen. The two languages can have differing roles in a given society (macro level). They can be used for either official or conversational purposes (societal bilingualism) meaning that these two languages are ‘sometimes’ given official recognition by the community’s law and government (de jure bilingualism), and sometimes not where the two languages exist in a society but with no official status (de facto bilingualism).

At a micro level, bilingualism can be studied within an individual who possesses a certain competence over two languages (individual bilingualism). Categories of bilinguals are classified according to a number of criteria including: cognitive functioning (mental representation and structuring of the two languages), social and psychological mechanisms (feelings towards the use of the two languages), time and age of acquisition (early or advanced learning of the new language), context and circumstance of learning (forced or by self-will of learning the two languages), and finally language proficiency (active or passive bilinguals).