The ability to be proficient in two languages has always been viewed with mixed opinions. The two conflicting views on this subject are that it is a deficit on one hand, and an advantage on the other. Those who take the view that being bilingual taxes one's cognitive and/or linguistic system do so with the assumption that one's mind has been programmed to handle only one linguistic system at a time. On the other hand, those who take the opposing view that one's ability to be proficient in two or more languages at a time is advantageous presuppose that such a linguistic phenomenon impacts positively on and enhances one's metalinguistic skills. One of the many metalinguistic abilities bilinguals are perceived to possess is their translation ability (Malakoff 1992), in particular, their natural translation ability (Harris 1977).

For the purposes of this paper, bilingualism and translation are functionally defined. Bilingualism “begins when the speaker of one language can produce meaningful utterances in the other language” (Haugen 1953). Translation, on the other hand, is “used to refer to all modes of reformulating a message from one language (the source language) into a message in another language (the target language). This is as opposed to making a distinction between the oral mode (interpretation) and the written mode (translation).

Given these principles and assumptions, this study investigated the hypothesis that if translation is a bilingual skill, Filipino-English bilingual students who are proficient in both Filipino and English could utilize this skill for reading comprehension purposes.

This study examined whether bilingual students’ metalinguistic ability of translating a reading passage enables students to comprehend the text better as compared to other reading intervention tasks used for the same purpose. Four group conditions were created to test this hypothesis. These group conditions refer to the absence of or the type of intervention used in the group to aid comprehension. The students were university freshmen from four different classes taking up the same introductory English subject. Students in all groups read the text for phase 1. For phase 2, the control group (group 1) had no intervention activity. Groups 2, 3, and 4, on the other hand, all had interventions, which were translation, unlocking of difficulty, and re-reading, respectively. For phase 3, all students in the four groups had to then answer a twelve-point comprehension test. The test is composed of nine factual questions and three inferential questions. Results showed that students from group 2, who had to translate the text, performed significantly better in the comprehension test than the other students. Moreover, the same group of students scored the highest in the inferential aspect of the test. These results seem to suggest that in cases where students are proficient in both source and target languages, translation ability leads to better comprehension.