

Reading and Writing of Bilingual Children with and Without Reading Difficulties in Two Alphabetic Scripts

Authors : Baran Johansson

Abstract : This PhD dissertation aimed to explore children's writing and reading in L1 (Persian) and L2 (Swedish). It adds new perspectives to reading and writing studies of bilingual bilingual children with and without reading and writing difficulties (RWD). The study used standardised tests to examine linguistic and cognitive skills related to word reading and writing fluency in both languages. Furthermore, all participants produced two texts (one descriptive and one narrative) in each language. The writing processes and the writing product of these children were explored using logging methodologies (Eye and Pen) for both languages. Furthermore, this study investigated how two bilingual children with RWD presented themselves through writing across their languages. To my knowledge, studies utilizing standardised tests and logging tools to investigate bilingual children's word reading and writing fluency across two different alphabetic scripts are scarce. There have been few studies analysing how bilingual children construct meaning in their writing, and none have focused on children who write in two different alphabetic scripts or those with RWD. Therefore, some aspects of the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) perspective were employed to examine how two participants with RWD created meaning in their written texts in each language. The results revealed that children with and without RWD had higher writing fluency in all measures (e.g. text lengths, writing speed) in their L2 compared to their L1. Word reading abilities in both languages were found to influence their writing fluency. The findings also showed that bilingual children without reading difficulties performed 1 standard deviation below the mean when reading words in Persian. However, their reading performance in Swedish aligned with the expected age norms, suggesting greater efficient in reading Swedish than in Persian. Furthermore, the results showed that the level of orthographic depth, consistency between graphemes and phonemes, and orthographic features can probably explain these differences across languages. The analysis of meaning-making indicated that the participants with RWD exhibited varying levels of difficulty, which influenced their knowledge and usage of writing across languages. For example, the participant with poor word recognition (PWR) presented himself similarly across genres, irrespective of the language in which he wrote. He employed the listing technique similarly across his L1 and L2. However, the participant with mixed reading difficulties (MRD) had difficulties with both transcription and text production. He produced spelling errors and frequently paused in both languages. He also struggled with word retrieval and producing coherent texts, consistent with studies of monolingual children with poor comprehension or with developmental language disorder. The results suggest that the mother tongue instruction provided to the participants has not been sufficient for them to become balanced bilingual readers and writers in both languages. Therefore, increasing the number of hours dedicated to mother tongue instruction and motivating the children to participate in these classes could be potential strategies to address this issue.

Keywords : reading, writing, reading and writing difficulties, bilingual children, bilingual

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