
Predictors of reading abilities in bilingual children learning to read in Italian-L2

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Résumé

Learning to read in a second language (L2) is similar, in many ways, to learning to read in a first language (L1). Nevertheless, reading development also relies upon oral language proficiency and is greatly influenced by orthographic consistency. Furthermore, the Simple View of Reading (SVR; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990) suggests that performance in reading comprehension is the product of decoding and listening comprehension skills. Many studies comparing bilingual and monolingual groups have found an achievement gap in bilingual children in terms of comprehension tasks [see Melby-Lervåg and Lervåg (2014) for a meta-analysis]. However, very few studies have focused on reading acquisition of bilingual children learning to read in a L2- transparent language. This longitudinal study (two-time assessment procedure : T0 = beginning of Grade 1; T1 = end of Grade 2) aimed to analyze the role of linguistic predictors (phonological awareness, letter knowledge, pseudoword repetition, syntactic comprehension, lexical knowledge and rapid naming) in reading outcomes (fluency, accuracy and comprehension) in a group of bilingual children ($n = 30$) reading Italian as an L2, compared to a group of monolingual children ($n = 56$). At T0, all children were aged 75.4 months ($SD = 4.3$ months) and at T1 they were aged 88.6 months ($SD = 9.3$ months). The bilinguals represented 10 native language groups. Monolingual children were matched to bilinguals for chronological age and nonverbal IQ. We ran a multi-group structural equation model. Although Rapid Automatized Naming was a significant predictor of reading speed in both groups, the study revealed different patterns of predictors for reading accuracy (i.e. predictors for monolinguals : LK, phonological awareness and lexical knowledge; predictors for bilinguals: pseudoword repetition). Furthermore, syntactic comprehension was the most important predictor of comprehension skills in bilingual children.

Mots-Clés: reading, linguistic predictors, simple view of reading, bilingualism, second language learners

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