

Predictors of Word Reading in Turkish: Evidence from a Longitudinal Study of Monolinguals and Bilinguals

Serhat Kurt, Belma Haznedar, Nalan Babür
Middle East Technical University

Abstract

Much work on literacy development has focussed on certain cognitive and linguistic variables that have direct or indirect impact on word reading in various languages. The underlying processes of reading in bilingual populations, however, have received somewhat limited attention. The aim of this study is to examine word reading abilities of Kurdish-Turkish bilingual children in Turkey. Data collection started at the kindergarten level and continued until the end of Grade 2. Here, we present some preliminary findings from 96 kindergarten (49 girls, 47 boys, mean age= 67.8 months) and Grade 1 students. We specifically investigate how Turkish monolinguals' (N=46) and Kurdish-Turkish bilinguals' (N=50) phonological awareness (PA), rapid automatized naming (RAN), verbal memory, listening comprehension and vocabulary knowledge measured in the kindergarten predict their Turkish word reading in Grade 1. The participants were individually tested at three time intervals: at the beginning (time 1) and at the end of the kindergarten (time 2), and at the end of Grade 1 (time 3). The findings showed that, despite the observable development in both groups, the monolingual children outperformed the bilingual children except for the PA tasks. However, through formal instruction, the monolingual children caught their bilingual counterparts in the PA tasks. The monolingual children statistically did better than bilingual children especially in vocabulary and listening comprehension measures as well. Overall, irrespective of the groups, PA and RAN turned out to be the best predictors of word reading in this data set. The findings have implications for pedagogical practices during the initial years of literacy development in monolingual and bilingual children.

Keywords: bilingual children; literacy development; Turkish; word reading