

The longitudinal effects of vocabulary, morphosyntax, and home literacy activities on Greek-English bilingual and bi-literate children's reading comprehension

Background: Reading comprehension is a complex process that requires various abilities, such as decoding and oral language skills, and can be influenced by environmental factors, such as the home literacy environment. Previous studies have shown that bilingual children perform lower on vocabulary tasks than their monolingual peers (Bialystok et al., 2010), but they perform similarly or better on decoding skills than monolinguals. Although the significant contribution of vocabulary in reading comprehension among monolinguals has been extensively shown (Oakhill et al., 2012), its contribution among bilinguals is less clear. Furthermore, few studies have investigated the contribution of morpho-syntax in reading comprehension skills in bilingual children (Peets et al., 2022). Importantly, morpho-syntax is a significant factor for reading comprehension, specifically in the later stages of reading in monolinguals (Bellochi et al., 2017). The home literacy environment has also been shown to be a significant predictor in monolinguals' reading comprehension (Sénéchal, 2006), although its contribution among bilinguals to reading comprehension has not been extensively examined.

Aims: The present study aimed to investigate the performance of primary school Greek-English bilingual and bi-literate children on language and literacy measures. Specifically, our study explored the effects of vocabulary, morphosyntax, and home literacy activities on children's development of reading comprehension in both of their spoken languages (Peets et al., 2022). Based on the Simple View of Reading framework and home literacy environment model, we hypothesized that decoding and oral language skills, specifically morphosyntax along with home literacy activities could predict children's reading comprehension in each language separately. Moreover, we hypothesized that the amount of home literacy activities would benefit children's reading performance in each language separately (De Houwer, 2007) (Scheele et al., 2010).

Methodology: Forty children attending Years 1 and 3 of English primary school in the UK were assessed in language and decoding skills. After one school year, they were assessed in oral language skills, decoding, and reading comprehension in Year 2 and 4 respectively. The PABIQ questionnaire (Tuller, 2015) was used to obtain data on the children's language history, quantity and quality of input, and use.

Results: The results showed that the children performed better on all tasks in Time 2 than in Time 1 and the older children performed better than the younger ones. Their performance was also better in English than in Greek tasks. This demonstrates that children were English-dominant. The results also showed that Greek morphosyntax and home literacy activities were significant predictors of Greek reading comprehension, suggesting that bilinguals may use their morphosyntactic knowledge to support their reading comprehension in their heritage language. Moreover, heritage language exposure through home literacy activities may benefit reading comprehension of that language.

Conclusions/Implications: This study is one of the few longitudinal studies examining the development of bilingual and bi-literate children's performance in language and reading skills considering the effects of home literacy activities. The results of the present study expand our current understanding by providing evidence concerning the home literacy environment among bilingual children who speak Greek as their heritage language and English as their majority language. Supporting heritage language and literacy skills could also promote the dominant language because several language skills are considered transferable across

languages. Moreover, these findings enhance the existing literature regarding the factors that can facilitate bilingual children's literacy development.

References

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