

Phonological Awareness, Linguistic Differences and Related Cognitive Processes

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Abstract

Phonological awareness is the development of insight or metalinguistic understanding that spoken words are made up of smaller units of speech such as syllables and phonemes. It is assessed through the tasks that require recognition and manipulation of sound units in the spoken words. Phonological awareness has been the focus of research for its predictive role in early reading acquisition. Its role in reading acquisition in various languages has also been explored. Whether phonological awareness is a single construct across languages or a language specific ability has been the question lately. In the present paper the relation between phonological awareness, linguistic differences in English and Kannada, and the cognitive processes underlying phonological awareness tasks in these two languages are examined. The pre-intervention data collected in a study on Yoga as an intervention strategy on 57 children with an average age of 10.93 years was analyzed using correlation technique. Phonological awareness tasks in two languages; English and Kannada correlated with each other. Elision task in English correlated with phoneme deletion task in Kannada ($r=0.31$, $p < 0.05$) and phoneme reversal task in English correlated with phoneme reversal task in Kannada ($r=0.29$, $p < 0.05$). And two cognitive processes; attention and planning correlated with phonological awareness tasks in both the languages. Planning correlated with four tasks in English; segmenting non-words ($r=0.4$, $p < 0.05$), phoneme reversal ($r=0.43$, $p < 0.05$), elision ($r=0.47$, $p < 0.05$) and blending non-words ($r=0.54$, $p < 0.05$) and one task; phoneme deletion ($r=0.42$, $p < 0.05$) in Kannada. Attention correlated with two tasks in English; blending non-words ($r=0.29$, $p < 0.05$) and phoneme reversal ($r=0.27$, $p < 0.05$) and two tasks in Kannada; phoneme oddity ($r=0.30$, $p < 0.05$) and phoneme reversal ($r=0.27$, $p < 0.05$) respectively, possibly indicating that phonological awareness is a unitary construct across languages and is related to common cognitive abilities. The results indicate potential implications for remediation. Remediation that addresses the general underlying cognitive processes and modality specific linguistic skills should improve reading performance in either language.

Keywords: Phonological awareness, linguistic, cognitive

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