

Abstract

The present study compared phonological awareness among kindergarten and first grade children in Xian, Hong Kong and Toronto who could read both English and Chinese. The relative importance of the different levels of phonological awareness towards reading Chinese and English were assessed across cultures. It was found that syllable awareness was the most important predictor of reading Chinese while phonemic awareness was more important for reading English. Superior phoneme awareness in Chinese did not help to explain better reading. Chinese speakers also tended to show higher syllable awareness as compared to their English counterparts. Developmentally, the sequence of phonological awareness was influenced by the native language effect, and it was found that there was more diversity in the phonological awareness development pathways among native English than native Cantonese speakers.