Abstract

This dissertation consisted of two studies investigating the nature of parental mediation of writing among Zambian second graders and their parents across two prominent languages in Zambia, i.e. Bemba and English, and further investigated cognitive/metalinguistic skills that explain word recognition and writing across the two languages. In Study 1, three scales of parental mediation based on parent-child interactions were created, namely, literate mediation, print mediation and demand for precision mediation. The literate and print mediation scales were developed following work on Hebrew parent-child interactions by Aram and Levin (2001; 2004) while the demand for precision mediation scale was based on Aram's (2007) work. These scales were modified and tested among 57 parent-child dyads from Zambia. The results showed that parents tended to use different strategies when supporting children to write word items in the native Bemba as well as the second language of English. For the literate and print mediation scales, the parents used lower level support strategies that were negatively associated with the children's literacy skills when scaffolding English tasks, while for the Bemba tasks parents used higher level more analytical strategies of support that were positively associated with word recognition and writing skills even with parents' education, age and nonverbal reasoning skills statistically controlled. However, for the demand for precision measure, parents used higher levels of mediation where they requested that a child correct an error committed while writing more frequently during English than Bemba tasks.

In Study 2, I used various cognitive/metalinguistic measures in Bemba and English to establish their associations with literacy skills across the two languages among 71 Zambian second graders from five different schools. Results of Study 2 showed that cognitive/metalinguistic skills such as alphabet knowledge, speeded naming, phonological and

orthographic awareness could uniquely explain literacy skills in both Bemba and English. For example, alphabet knowledge could explain 42% of the variance in English word writing and 15% of the variance in Bemba word recognition, The results further demonstrated that Bemba phonological awareness skills at the segmental level could better predict Bemba and English literacy skills than phonological awareness in English. In addition to this, evidence for Bemba phonological awareness transfer was demonstrated in explaining English literacy skills even with English related cognitive/metalinguistic skills taken into consideration. For example Bemba phonological awareness explained 3% unique variance in English word recognition and writing.

The present research was among the first attempts to analyze the nature of parental mediation of writing across two languages and further determine its association with literacy skills across languages. The findings not only highlight the importance of parental mediation of writing among second graders independent literacy skills in both Bemba and English but also shed light on the cognitive/metalinguistic skills that are associated with literacy acquisition in Bemba and English.