

Abstract

This thesis aims at investigating how Chinese-English bilingualism interacts with reading and spelling difficulties. In Hong Kong, bilingual education begins in grade 1, such that Chinese-English bilingual children are common in Hong Kong. Grade 2 local school students are therefore chosen in the present study. In a bilingual education curriculum, students are required to manage both languages of equal importance. For children with reading and spelling difficulties, they might face greater challenges in learning both languages. Therefore, it is worth investigating whether the linguistic knowledge learnt in one language transfers to another language, to complement each other or hinder the development of both languages. The present study mainly focuses on investigating the role of compounding morphological awareness (MA) to word reading and spelling in both Chinese and English, as compounding MA is found to be salient to Chinese word reading and spelling in previous studies, and there is still little knowledge about the importance of compounding MA in English word reading and spelling.

Results revealed that there is cross-language transfer of MA between Chinese and English. For within-language contribution, Chinese MA is salient to Chinese word reading but not to spelling, and English MA is salient to both English word reading and spelling. For cross-language contribution, English MA significantly contributes to Chinese word reading and spelling, however, Chinese MA does not significantly contribute to English word reading and spelling. For reading difficulties in Chinese, it is related to cognitive deficits in both Chinese and English MA, while the reading difficulties in English is only related to cognitive deficits in English MA.

Keywords: Chinese-English Bilingualism · Reading Difficulties · Morphological Awareness