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ABSTRACT

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Cross-language studies have found evidence of transfer of phonological awareness in one language to word reading skill in a subsequent language and have also found differing levels of error in phonological recoding and different word reading strategies as a function of language. This thesis is based on four papers which aimed to examine how second language word reading is influenced by first language phonological skill and how word reading efficiency and word reading strategies in two languages with very different spelling systems are influenced by their respective orthographies. In Paper I a comparative study of English and Swedish reading skills among two groups of Swedish dyslexic readers is presented, where one group stated a preference for reading English and the other a preference for Swedish. This study found a significant difference in word reading and phonological awareness performance between normal and dyslexic readers, and also a significant difference in English scores between the two dyslexic groups, in spite of close similarity in scores on Swedish reading tasks. Paper II presents two comparative studies of word reading among English and Swedish beginning readers, based on error analysis. Both studies found a significant difference in word reading efficiency on a chronological age matched comparison and among low scorers (below the 30th percentile) both studies found that English children attempted more items than Swedish children. These results indicate different approaches to the task, with English children working faster and making more errors in order to achieve the same scores as Swedish children. Paper III compared the performance of monolingual and multilingual Swedish speakers on measures of word reading in Swedish and English and of Swedish phonological skill. The language groups were equally represented at the 20th percentile on composite phonology and word reading measures and phonological scores predicted word recognition equally powerfully for both language groups. Results suggest that it is possible to assess a range of phonological skills among speakers of minority languages using the same battery of tasks as for native speakers. Paper IV presented a study of multilingual students' performance on rapid naming tasks in three languages. Multilingual students were found to perform equally well in Swedish, their additional language, as monolingual class peers. Multilingual students outperformed monolinguals on English digit-naming and nonword reading speed. Differential predictors for rapid naming were found for the language groups respectively. Results are discussed with reference to effects of multilingualism on automatization of lexical access and metalinguistic awareness.

Keywords: Cross-language, Dyslexia, Multilingual, Orthography, Phonological awareness, Reading efficiency, Word recognition

Louise Miller Guron, Department of Psychology, Göteborg University, Box 500, SE-405 30 Göteborg, Sweden.
Tel: +46 31 773 4282 Fax: +46 31 773 4628. E-mail: Louise.Miller@psy.gu.se