

Identifying the complex precursors for developing early reading skills in Polish

Edward Gillian

Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim

Urszula Paradowska

Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim

The importance of emergent literacy, or the concepts, skills, and knowledge that are acquired before achievement of beginning reading, spelling, and writing in English, has been well documented (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Catts, Fey, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2002) and has been identified as involving a complex set of precursor language concepts. However, the development of these skills in Polish is only approximately known (Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska & Zielińska, 1997; Janiszewska, 2008; Matczak, 2003).

Within the area of emergent literacy, the area of written language awareness, or the complex construct of knowledge that children need to develop their awareness of written language (Justice & Ezell, 2001), has been identified as crucial for early reading skills (Justice et al, 2009). Written language awareness encompasses the identification of language concepts such as beginning/end, top/bottom, left/right, and same/different (Justice & Ezell, Justice et al., 2009). The development of these spatial/locational concepts has not been researched in detail for Polish children (Gillian et al. in press; Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska & Zielińska, 1997; Janiszewska, 2008; Matczak, 2003).

Currently, research is being conducted in the commune of Bogdaniec in the Lubuskie region of Poland. The emergent literacy and numeracy skills of a large sample of Polish 5 – 6-year-old students (87) is being assessed at the beginning and end of the school year using an oral language screening assessment tool developed by the research team. The pre-test results have indicated that that the this cohort of students has difficulties with identifying the concepts of ‘po lewej’ (on the left) ‘po prawej’ (on the right), ‘góra/dół’ (up/down; top/bottom), ‘nad’ (over), and ‘przód/tył’ (front/back). Several hypotheses will be advanced to explain these difficulties with learning these literacy precursors. For example, ‘po lewej’ and ‘po ‘prawej’ may be later developing concepts like in English, thus showing similarities between the development of languages in children which could be reflective of complexity invariance and ‘góra/dół’ may be more difficult to learn as these words represent two directions, horizontal and vertical. In contrast, the differences in the development between these groups of children could be due to differences in cognitive abilities, different learning opportunities, different socio-economic backgrounds, different interests, and/or all of these factors. Also, hypotheses will be put forward to explain the impact of these Polish word concepts on the complex process of learning the skills necessary for early literacy development in Polish.

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