

1.24 Phonological Awareness and Reading Research: Do all Roads really lead to Rome?

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ABSTRACT

Research on reading has been mostly influenced by research findings on reading in English as well as reading in Romance languages. Phonological awareness is now considered the main linguistic factor contributing to reading acquisition (Durgunoglu, Nagy & Hancin-Bhatt 1993). Out of the several phonological phenomena related to reading, a high level of phonemic awareness was long held to be the most important characteristic of a good reader. Research on other alphabets in the last two decades, however, has shown that this is too simplistic a view. Findings of studies on Hebrew, Arabic and Korean have complicated the previously held views on reading acquisition by questioning the bias towards the Roman alphabet in research. The previous decade has also seen a limited amount of research on reading in syllabaries, such as Hindi and Kannada, which has contested the role of phonemic awareness in reading acquisition (Karanth 2002). I have reviewed studies on both alphabets and on syllabaries to show that the type of phonological awareness used for reading differs according to the characteristics of the script and that the first language acquisition of reading affects acquisition of reading in other languages.