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Understanding Morphological Competence Through A Multilingual Lens

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Abstract

This research looks at the part played by morphology in learning to read and its influence in bilingual students in both alphabet and non-alphabet-based languages. Identifying and working with morphemes in language is linked to better word recognition, building vocabulary and understand what is read. The paper discusses the way in which children's ability to learn different forms of speech develops, affects their ability to form sounds and grammar and helps them grow in reading and writing. The study explains that morphological features such as those found in English, Chinese, Arabic and Kurdish, work differently and examines how transferring some aspects from one language to another takes place when people master different languages. It seems that detailed instruction about how words are built in a language greatly supports fast reading, mainly in settings where multiple languages are used. It is clearly shown in the research that teaching morphology improves literacy for learners from many different language backgrounds and ages.

Keywords: Morphological Competence, Reading Development, Bilingual Literacy, Literacy Instruction

Introduction

To understand text, one has to decode it, identify words, process the structure and build its meaning (Carlisle, 2003), a reason why read aloud instruction should be appreciated for its impact on comprehension. Morphological awareness which helps a person work with morphemes, has been important in reading researches across languages and cultures (Deacon, 2021). Because of its role, morphological awareness is essential to fluent reading and understanding words which leads to better vocabulary and word recognition. Morphological awareness aids, as found by research, help individuals recognise more words in the process of reading. Because alphabetic languages, including English, identify morphemes, readers can become more fluent by recognising the meaning of words fast (Kuo and Anderson 2006; Deacon and Kirby 2004). Even though morphology affects reading in all languages, the way this happens is not the same for every language. For instance, because phonological and morphological features help in recognising words in alphabetic languages, logographic Chinese prizes understanding word shapes and the ability to spot characters, making this skill very important in reading (McBride-Chang et al., 2005; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013).

From understanding small morphemes and inflexions, children begin to recognise more complex forms of morphology (Nagy, Carlisle and Goodwin, 2014). The growth of this skill is mixed with abilities such as recognising sounds and forming sentences and it eventually shapes a person's core reading experience (Bowers, Kirby, & Deacon, 2010). It has also been noted that bigger vocabularies are linked to greater knowledge of grammar and conversely (Apel & Diehm, 2014). Cross-linguistic transfer of awareness related to morphology does not have a different effect on reading in bilingual children. Readers can support their reading skills in another language by bringing to mind morphological knowledge and bilingual readers may make stronger connexions between these skills when there are similarities in how words are structured (e.g., Ramirez et al., 2010; Ramirez et al., 2020). Supporting or challenging reading can be done by using similarities between languages. Research findings in education prove that regular morphological instruction boosts both reading comprehension and learning new words. There is evidence from studies that helping students recognise and use complex words in their language is achieved by teaching students to recognise and play with morphemes (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013; Reed, 2008). It is revealed by such studies that morphological awareness goes beyond language and uses more complex neuronal processes (Lehtonen et al., 2014).

The structure and creation of words is very important for knowing how words form and grow. Here, the topic is how morphemes form words and how this tie in with other parts of language such as syntax, semantics and phonology. This study relies on verbs taken from the Iklil Journal for Humanity Studies which author Al-Khafaji uses to talk about how Arabic verbs are constructed and what their root-based system means. The analysis sheds light on how morphology greatly contributes to our knowledge of languages and good approaches to teaching them. Abdul-Rahman (2021) reviews key morphology in Kurdish and explains that this knowledge is helpful for those who want to learn the language as it gives them more opportunities to expand their vocabulary. In addition, Al-Samarrai and Jameel (2022) found that improving morphological awareness helps bilingual children from Iraq understand reading, improve their vocabulary and develop strong overall reading skills.

Children begin acquiring moral learning as early as three years and these skills usually develop along an expected path. At the beginning, children notice morphemes for tense, plural and ownership in words which form the core of their later improvement abilities (Kuo and Anderson, 2006; Berninger et al., 2010). Children progress from speaks to derivational morphology to alter base words to express new meanings or types of words. Nevertheless, this stage is reached later, at the end of elementary school and it quickly strengthens reading skills and vocabulary (Nagy et al., 2006; Goodwin et al., 2017). Inflectional awareness generally comes first, but at the same time other new words are formed through the combination of root words (for example, the word 'toothpaste' is made by combining tooth and paste). When using this skill, children have to grasp the meaning of compound words and how different words join together to create new meanings (Clark, 2014; McBride, 2016). Most English students know that morphology tends to move from inflexion to derivation and finally to compounds and this pattern is known to occur widely across most languages. As an example, Russian which is highly inflectional, has acquired inflectional awareness before less inflectional English, that instead relies on many derivational forms and the arrangement of its words (Levesque, Kieffer and Deacon 2019).

Having many language experiences and receiving special instruction in literacy help children to develop their morphological skills. There is a strong case for focusing on morphology because providing explicit instruction on this subject helps students understand suffixes, prefixes and becomes faster when reading and expanding their vocabulary (Bowers, Kirby, & Deacon, 2010). Different studies have shown that early literacy programmes emphasising morphometric analysis bring about improvements for children, as they learn more about how words are structured and do better at reading (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). When children advance in thinking, they gather more and more detailed information about sounds and their functions which supports their ability to deal with abstract language. When children improve their ability to think, they relate

affixes to root words and then learn new words and become better readers (Apel, 2014; Nagy et al., 2014). Other language skills such as phonological and syntactic awareness, are usually developing together with morphological awareness. People gain better understanding of morphemes through the skills of phonological awareness and proper understanding of sentence structures (McCutchen & Stull, 2015; Deacon et al., 2013).

When comparing different languages, it was seen that bilingual children can develop differently and they often become skilled in the systems of grammar in both languages. Because of cross-linguistic transfer, children learning two similar languages can use their knowledge of one language's morphology to aid their learning in the other language which may help them read better (Ramirez et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2016). All in all, having a good sense of language forms requires both the language structure and ongoing cognitive experience when children are being taught how to read and listen. Children's abilities to understand words and read well are promoted as they move from stage to stage of morphological learning (inflexion, formation and linking). Knowing these stages of development helps teachers and researchers assist in the language and literacy learning of students who speak many different languages.

Alphabetic Literacy and Morphological Structure

It is important in English which uses alphabets, to have morphological awareness as you learn to read; this means being able to find and change the morphemes in spoken words. Phoneme grapheme relationships are part of any language and they show which letters create sounds, yet many words include more complex parts called morphemes that give them extra meaning. If readers notice morphemes in complex words, they understand and say them more easily which leads to better reading and comprehension skills (Deacon & Kirby, 2004). Morphological awareness enables a reader to recognise that many words consist of smaller meaningful parts which gets easier as the reading task gets harder with more multi morphemic words (Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006). In English, morphology related to inflexion and derivation allows a person to discover the key aspects of words and use them to recognise words quickly. In the example, when you know that the root is "predict" and the suffix is "able," you can understand predictable easily. English speaking youngsters who study morphology are more successful in reading comprehension (Carlisle, 2000) because they can analyse and understand difficult words (Carlisle, 2000). Still, this is very handy with languages such as English, where the ability to form new words through derivation gives you many more words to use.

Having a sense of word structure is important for making lists and good spelling is a basic skill for understanding reading. Most of the time, the spelling of English words is based on morphemes, rather than the way the words sound. To give an example, the same morphemic pattern used by "creation" is recognisable which encourages kids to read more easily and with more confidence (Apel & Diehm, 2014). Spelling patterns help you to read more quickly and easily which makes reading and understanding easier. Because English and similar languages have many different spellings for one sound, it's necessary to notice morphological features. English is unlike Spanish because although spellings usually match how a word is said, if we don't analyse the grammar, we won't understand the exceptions. Similar to word meanings, understanding morphology benefits a person's ability to read and comprehend text (McBride-Chang et al., 2005).

By learning new words and understanding well, readers are able to understand words they are not sure of thanks to their morphological awareness. The process can become very helpful as students meet specialised words in different subjects. Learning how to identify morphemes with lessons has been shown to help students increase their vocabulary and understand complicated words (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). It's true that these abilities are needed and they are key to understanding more advanced books as well. According to the research, improving morphological awareness helps mitigate the load on our brains when reading which promotes good reading speeds. If readers realise that words have morphemes, comprehending texts will be much easier for them. It has been consistently discovered that learning about letters and sounds through morphological training helps people read multi-syllable words and this also benefits connected text

comprehension and reading (Levesque, Kieffer, & Deacon, 2019). Also, the abilities covered by derivational morphology highlight the need for all-round awareness of morphology, as it helps the vocabulary grow. Through spotting the morphemes in new words, readers increase their vocabulary and the ability to understand text more easily. It has been found that people with a good understanding of morphology are better at reading and learning more advanced text (Bowers, Kirby & Deacon, 2010). One-on-one instruction about letter shapes helps many people who find reading hard. Students who find reading tough show better results in reading comprehension and vocabulary when morpheme and word structure have been taught. According to findings, having emphasis on morphology, rather than only phonics, shows more advantages in learning and being aware of morphology helps students with different learning needs (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). In general, when learning to read, paying attention to word structures matters a lot. A person's ability to recognise and think about different letter forms is key to reading in any alphabetic language and it is equally necessary for both beginners and more advanced readers.

Morphology in Non-Alphabetic Literacy

Languages that use symbols or logographs like Chinese and Japanese rely on morphological awareness. While alphabetic languages use only a relationship between single phonemes and letters, these languages make you recognise entire morphemes that appear as characters. Basically, since each character in Chinese translates into a morpheme or numerous morphemes, knowing about them is fundamental for amplifying one's vocabulary and better understanding text (McBride, 2016). People who are able to arrange morphemes and read them, usually understand both the structure and the meaning of the language more easily. How Chinese speaking children develop an understanding of morphological patterns. Research results suggest that Chinese kids learn the key parts of characters based on meaning instead of sound which follows the structural nature of the language. By entering formal schooling, many children are familiar with compound representations that greatly help them enlarge their vocabulary and read well (Tong et al., 2009). Chinese language also helps in compounding, where words are formed using characters. If children understand the process, they will be able to figure out what unfamiliar words mean and improve how well they read (Li et al., 2012).

Chinese learners should also be able to identify semantic radicals which show what a word means. Being a part of characters, these radicals bring words and meanings together and help readers make sense of new characters by recognising their meanings (Shu et al., 2006). A focus on the structure and meanings of characters is introduced in Chinese learning, unlike the character sound rules of alphabetic phonics programmes (Wu, Li, & Anderson, 2009). Being aware of morphology is also important in other languages that do not use the alphabet such as Japanese which includes symbols for words (Kanji) and syllables (Hiragana and Katakana). Kanji characters that appear like morphemes depend on their morphology and this is what helps Japanese readers to read and understand them. Naka and Naoi (1995) found in their research that kids who know Kanji components score higher in reading tests. According to Cho, McBride and Kim (2008), researchers of Korean agree that knowing where smaller phonological units start and end in each syllable is useful for readers. In languages that do not use an alphabet, recognising the various grammar parts becomes key for reading advancement and understanding complex academic words. Teaching letter shapes and patterns in reading helps develop reading and expand vocabulary in any alphabetic or nonalphabetic language (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). On the whole, the work suggests that understanding form is vital for reading to develop in non-alphabetic languages. It gives learners a chance to read words and assign the appropriate meanings.

Transference of Morphological Competence Across Languages

Transferring skills from one language to another is called cross-linguistic transfer. It is understood from a morphological awareness standpoint that a bilingual can identify and use L1 morphemes which assists with learning to read in the L2. Most studies point out that using only one language of instruction can negatively influence people who speak both languages in developing their reading skills. Similarities in the structure of languages, how well someone knows each language and the time they spend with each language affect the transfer between different languages (Koda & Reddy, 2008). Transferring knowledge of word forms from one language can greatly help with reading development. Studies of Chinese–English bilinguals found that how well they knew Chinese grammar was linked to better English word reading possibly because it gave them an advantage in decoding and understanding, using English as well (Wang, et al., 2006). If both languages work similarly in terms of syllables (such as adding prefixes or suffixes) it becomes easier to apply our understanding of both languages. Thus, Spanish morphology helps Spanish speakers reading English, since both languages rely on changing words by using prefixes and suffixes (Ramírez, Chen, & Pasquarella, 2013).

How well people speak two languages affects the morphological transfer between them. The better a person is in their first language, called L1, the more likely their skills and knowledge will be applied when using the second language, L2. Sometimes, people's L1 skills are not sufficient and this shortcoming may prevent abilities in the underlying L1 from helping in L2 learning (Kang, 2012). Moreover, people must be aware of their language to use skills from one language in another. Generally, people who speak more than one language are often able to recognise similar morphemes in their languages and use their first language often in learning their second language (Bialystok, 2007). Morphological awareness gained in one language often helps people in learning another language. Research involving people who grow up with Chinese–English and Spanish–English shows that being aware of the grammar in L1 helps them read in the L2. For people who speak Chinese and English, using morphological skills helps them with English compounds (Pasquarella et al., 2011) and for those who speak Spanish and English, knowing Spanish morphology is important to understand English complex words (Pasquarella et al. 2011). Especially, these studies of Chinese learners have found that having good L1 skills in morphology helps with learning English vocabulary and, therefore, improves L2 literacy.

In education, one can use cross linguistic transfer by teaching about morphological factors found in all languages. If we take cognates and morphological rules, learning a new language's vocabulary and reading comprehension can be easier for students. In addition, teachers can compare the ways morphology works in the students' home language and in English which benefits their awareness of language learning and helps in transferring skills (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012). For this reason, teachers should recognise differences and similarities in L2 vocabulary, as it helps clear up doubts in students and strengthens the processing of the new words (Deacon, Chen and Luo, 2013). Differences in language dominance, exposure and similar sociolinguistic factors also play a role in cross-linguistic transfer. It is best to let students have equal time with both languages and to help them transfer skills in both directions, compared to having little or negative views on one language (Cummins, 2017). Such factors as identical features in languages, expertise in the mother tongue and knowledge about language work as facilitators. Educators can help bilingual learners gain L2 reading skills through cross lingual transfer.

Morphology and Its Linguistic Interfaces

Along with phonological awareness, syntactic awareness and knowing vocabulary, morphological awareness is featured as part of a larger group of language skills developed at the same time. It was discovered that both morphological and phonological awareness strengthen each other in languages such as English, at stages when new readers read complex words (McBride-Chang et al., 2005). A person needs phonological awareness before they can read and having morphological awareness makes it easier to understand the

meaning of what one is reading. Since English and similar languages have a great deal of detail in their spelling, both morphology and phonology are vital and their connexion plays a key role in reading and spell without errors. A good example is that readers can figure out if a nonsense word means 'signal' or 'signature' regardless of how it is pronounced (Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006). For this reason, being sensitive to morphology makes it easier for readers to infer the meaning and sound of words at the same time.

Similar to knowing words, morphological awareness is related to vocabulary which means that strengthening vocabulary skills also helps expand one's knowledge of morphology and the same goes the other way around. For instance, Students who understand the structures of words usually learn new vocabulary better and read more accurately, since they can guess the meaning of words based on their components (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012). This interplay points out that morphology supports the formation of vocabulary in various languages. Above all, the awareness of sentence structure, known as syntactic awareness, is very similar to morphological awareness, mainly because morphology plays a key role in grammar. As an illustration, having morphological awareness helps in languages with complicated inflexions such as Russian, because it helps the grammar to cover many grammatical aspects of each word (Levesque et al., 2019). In the case of Chinese which relies on characters to represent meanings, morphological awareness can be more important since it helps in going beyond sound to the real meaning of the language (McBride-Chang et al., 2005).

In Korean, morphological awareness works together with phonological and syntactic skills since all three skills help reading. Korean readers have to read blocks that carry both phonetic and morphemic details and move across them. It is believed in the literature that developing an understanding of Korean morphology helps Korean children tell apart syllable units and their related grammatical structures (Cho, McBride, & Kim, 2008). All in all, the development of morphological awareness relies on phonological, syntactic and vocabulary skills to support reading development. Although the details change from one language to another, these findings prove how difficult learning a new language can be and why it's essential to teach literacy in many ways. The details collected by the educator make it possible to create targeted lessons that aid in the development of reading and strong language skills.

In addition, understanding language helps learners analyse grammar and sentence structures in various languages as well. People who know two languages find it easier to transfer knowledge among languages, they process languages more effectively and this is shown by higher skills in morphology and syntax (Bialystok, 2007). The way these skills go together is very important in guiding reading instruction. Learning literacy works better when all three kinds of instruction—morphological, phonological and syntactic—are combined, not kept apart. In fact, when morphology, phonics and vocabulary are part of a programme, students see major gains in reading and acquiring vocabulary (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). Using a whole approach to teaching language learning literacy shows that language learning includes many different aspects.

Educational Implications

It has been discovered that ability in detection and awareness of word parts helps with reading and supports the addition of morphological training in literacy education. Students are more successful at reading and getting to know different words when teachers use morphemes. If educators discover morphology, they may help students to break down complicated words, infer their meaning and build a larger vocabulary that results in better reading skills (Bowers, Kirby & Deacon, 2010). It is morphology based, meaning the instruction can fit to any language structure and therefore, literacy can be taught best according to every student's needs. Most importantly, students who receive morphological instruction can manage to read words that are unfamiliar to them by detecting prefixes, suffixes and roots. The method becomes very useful in English and it teaches students to figure out complex words so they learn to be independent with their vocabulary (Carlisle 2010). Also, changing the focus to strategies based on the meaning of words can enhance the reading skills of students with dyslexia. An approach very similar to the one mentioned above has contributed to

improvements in dyslexic reading, with better word recognition and understanding (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). It benefits everyone by helping all students gain new vocabulary skills. This approach of focusing on morphemes helps students from many language groups keep new vocabulary securely (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012). Also, for those who speak more than one language, this technique brings in metalinguistic awareness where students consider not only the features but also the meaning of language (Ramírez, Chen, & Geva, 2010).

Besides, when morphological instruction is designed for different languages, it is likely to support students in improving their reading skills. Russian which has rich inflexions and many grammatical markers, typically needs instruction on how to identify these aspects. Meanwhile, derivational morphology increases the vocabulary in English, so teaching should guide students to notice the role of affixes in changing word meaning and to decipher new words using such analysis (Levesque, Kieffer, & Deacon, 2019). As a result, this way of teaching English focuses on language specifics and helps instruction match the language's requirements. A common part of using content area reading in science and history is for students to deal with specialised terms. Prefixed words in science like 'bio' and 'geo' help learners to figure out what some scientific terms mean, understand tricky concepts and access knowledge specific to the subject (Pedro and Hjemdal, 2013). Besides, helping young students learn about word form early in literacy lessons allows them to learn faster about the origins of words, their meanings and spelling (Apel & Diehm, 2014).

Morphological instruction can be carried out by straightforward teaching of morphemes, creating word webs and including morphology in reading comprehension tasks. Active participation in learning allows students to use morphology to find out what words mean (Goodwin, Petscher, & Carlisle, 2017). Students improve their performance on tests when they include up to 5 morphemes during practise, so this level is important for them (Levesque, Kieffer, & Deacon, 2019). All in all, including knowledge of language's morphology in literacy instruction can greatly help with reading development. Assisting young children in learning morphemic skills makes it easier for them to read, gain vocabulary and understand what they read. Learning about morphemes makes us better readers and prepares students for academic achievements by making it easier for them to handle hard language structures. Developing teachers' knowledge of word forms can support the creation of confident and successful readers.

Discussion

According to this study, understanding word structure is important for reading, influencing education across languages. Knowing how to work with morphemes helps students as they try to decipher unfamiliar words. In discussing this, special features of how people with alphabetic and non-alphabetic languages use morphemes, the transfer of these skills among people who speak two languages and their link with other language abilities are highlighted to explain why integrated literacy instruction is important. Essentially, this research demonstrated that being aware of changes in words is essential for reading as a whole, but it plays an especially important role when kids encounter complicated words. Both awareness of sounds (phonological) and forms (morphological) are used together in alphabetic writing; phonological awareness concerns sense structure and morphological awareness helps in expanding roots and affixes in words with more than one part (for example, unhappiness) (Deacon & Kirby, 2004). Morphological awareness plays a role in Chinese because it allows people to identify logographic characters that support better reading comprehension. In other words, each language's morphology brings a unique meaning and reading instruction should address the particular structure of each tongue.

Because teens who are exposed to two languages early on benefit from cross-linguistic sharing of understanding grammar, it is highly beneficial. Bilingual students apply the rules of one language's structure when doing things like reading in a second language. As an example, Chinese-English bilinguals improve their ability to recognise words in English by being more aware of their morphological aspects from Chinese (Wang et al., 2006). It points out that using the grammar knowledge from their first language could support

students' progress in their second language where there is similar grammar. Besides, having awareness of different sounds, structures and vocabulary works together to fully develop a person's reading abilities. Through helping readers to analyse and understand unfamiliar words by breaking them into morphemes and giving them support with vocabulary and syntax, they are provided with morphological awareness. This approach works better than separate practise because the real connexion among these skills is used for better reading (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012).

From this research, we can see that it is important to focus on morphological concepts in this kind of literacy programme. If you learn how to identify morphemes, it will become simpler to understand words and add more vocabulary and reading fluency to your knowledge. More specifically, morphology gives struggling readers methods for understanding beyond the clues offered by sound in Celeste Bowers' theory (Celeste Bowers et al., 2010). Besides, the way morphology is taught may relate to each language's grammar and help improve reading skills: grammatical instruction for Russian and expansion of vocabulary using derivative forms for English (Levesque, Kieffer, & Deacon, 2019). A large amount of research supports that morphological awareness plays a major role in literacy education. Understanding word forms helps people read, learn new words and understand complicated texts, so it is important for good reading skills. If educators give morphology instruction that matches the language, readers can develop their reading skills and be ready for difficult literacy tasks.

Conclusion

Word recognition, vocabulary expansion and reading comprehension, important for literacy, are all linked to having morphological awareness in multiple languages. Whenever readers understand morphemes, they can derive the meaning from a text by figuring out new words and their definitions. These findings suggest that teaching about letter shapes, forms and sounds should be central to the process of educating students to read well during the early years and to improve their ability to read more complex texts and perform well in school. Though morphological and literacy skills work together, they both help readers in storing complex words by picking out their roots, prefixes and suffixes. If the text has more complicated words, readers require using both these abilities. In languages that use an alphabet, morphology becomes important, but it plays a key role especially in Chinese: Since one character can mean an entire morpheme, morphological awareness is very important when you come across an unknown word. By using a lot of morphemes, as is the case in these languages, the reader needs to have knowledge of morphemes to grasp most of the text, making it necessary to teach based on the language in question.

Being aware of morphology tends to help reading, though, even knowing one language may boost reading in another for students who read poorly. With these languages having identical word structure, this example makes us doubt how learning about morphology in the first language promotes reading in the second language. With these links, educators have a chance to teach bilingual students how to read in both languages and boost their literacy in both. Strong understanding of English morphology is necessary in content area literacy since students find complex vocabulary in their studies. Even though using such terminology makes things harder to understand in these subjects, breaking words down to their structures can ease the process. As a result of contextual learning, students are given skills to tackle difficult texts with confidence and can use these skills in their education and careers. To sum up, awareness of letter forms is very important in learning to read and in teaching literacy. Morphology is an important element in teaching and students should always have their linguistic development considered when designing specific and inclusive literacy plans. Familiarity with morphology speeds up recognising words and helps someone develop a stronger vocabulary. It also lays the foundation for expertly handling complicated texts that assist in understanding more. If morphology is used in teaching literacy, students create a solid understanding of language which helps them overcome different language hurdles.

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