

Monoliteracy or biliteracy in second language learners of Italian

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This study aimed to establish whether (1) biliteracy negatively affects literacy education in L2 Italian children and (2) biliterates with an alphabetic script differ from biliterates with a logographic script in Italian. We recruited 95 monoliterate and 86 biliterate bilingual children, attending Grade 1st, 3rd, and 5th. They were administered Raven, an expressive vocabulary task and reading tasks (words, non-words and text). Analyses revealed that biliterates had a higher Raven score than monoliterates (Biliterates: $M=28.2$ $SD=4.6$; monoliterates: $M=22.4$, $SD=6.4$); the two groups did not differ in expressive vocabulary. From 3rd Grade, both groups read words faster than pseudowords, proving that reading had started to be automatized as in monolingual development. In general, we did not find penalty in reading in biliterate. Some advantages in text comprehension was found among biliterate. Then, the group of biliterates was split with 36 children belonging to the Group with an alphabetic script (A_BL) and 50 children to the logographic script (L_BL). We found that A_BL children obtained a higher score in expressive vocabulary ($F(1,80) = 8.84$, $\eta^2 = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$). Both groups read the word faster than pseudowords from 3rd Grade; L_BL improved faster than A_BL, as indicated by the Group by Grade interaction ($F(2,80) = 5.15$, $\eta^2 = 0.1$, $p < 0.05$). Small differences were found, due mostly to grades.

Our results indicate that biliteracy may provide some advantages for text comprehension. This may be due to biliterates' higher experience with written texts in two languages (see also Rolstad *et al.* 2005) or to their higher non-verbal reasoning ability. The comprehension of a text is a complex ability that involves different skills. No consistent difference between A_BL and L_BL was found, likely due to the fact that literacy in the L1 is not well-advance, as these children attend L1 classes only on the weekend and in summer.