

Assessing Phonological Awareness in 6-7 year old Indonesian Children

Reading skill is of paramount importance in today's literate, global society. Current scholars (e.g. Goswami & Bryant, 1990; Gough, Ehri, & Treiman, 1992; Eleveld, 2005; Bree, 2007) postulate that phonological awareness which develops before children start to learn reading is important to the acquisition of reading skill. Being able to identify children who have problems with phonological awareness is essential to assist the children and avoid reading failures, with their various psychological and educational consequences.

In this study, the phonological awareness of one potentially reading-impaired (aged 7;5 years old) and three normally developing (aged 6;2-6;10) Indonesian children was assessed. Testing materials were taken from Anjarningsih (2006). Key issues addressed in the current experiment were:

1. The suitability of the phonological awareness parts in Anjarningsih (2006) to be used with 6-7 year olds, both those with a potential reading impairment and those developing normally.
2. The tasks and performance that may show problems with phonological awareness.
3. Other tasks that are necessary to be supplemented into the test.

The following tasks from Anjarningsih (2006) were used: (1) choosing the shorter word, (2) repeating words and syllables, (3) deciding if a syllable is a part of a word, (4) repeating non-words, (5) transposing syllables in non-words, and (6) choosing words with the same rhyme as the rhyme of the example word. In the testing of the child with potential reading-impairment, the following tasks were devised: (7) deciding if a syllable is a part of a word (with simpler syllable structure than that in task 3), and (8) generating words starting with the syllables "pi" and "ku."

The results show that the number of items needs to be reduced to accommodate young children's limited attention span. This reduction, however, must not result in compromised discriminatory ability. However, although the test was not administered in full, especially when administered to the potentially reading-impaired child, the results suggested the following points that may show problems with phonological awareness:

1. Identification and repetition tasks helped to distinguish if the children had auditory problems or not.
2. Phonological awareness problems were suggested by difficulties in the tasks that asked children to analyse words into syllables and phonemes.
3. Delay in the development of phonological awareness was suggested by the observation that the older potentially reading-impaired child performed (aged 7;5) similar to the younger control child (aged 6;10) with the lowest performance. Of importance was also the fact that the older child was in the second year at first grade.

4. Children's performance in the third and seventh tasks seemed to suggest that children with phonological awareness problems process Consonant Vowel (CV) syllables easier than CVC syllables.
5. Children's fluency and accuracy in the word generation task suggested how easy it was for them to map phonemes in the syllables to existing words in their lexicon. The rate of their guessing or production of irrelevant words may also suggest difficulties with the mapping.

The two last tasks were quite effective in revealing if children had basic phonological awareness, considering the age of the current participants. Therefore, these two tasks need to be developed further to make the test more suitable for this age group.

References

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