Introduction to ARWA special issue

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I have great pleasure in introducing the inaugural special issue resulting from our Association for Reading and Writing in Asia (ARWA) conference held in India in February, 2019. Many interesting keynotes, talks, and poster presentations were shared with colleagues at that conference. The ten peer reviewed papers that have been selected for this special issue showcase the array of languages and scripts being researched by members of ARWA and a wide range of methodologies and populations. Very much in line with the diversity that Reading and Writing has become known for, it is anticipated that this special issue will encourage additional research on Asia's many languages and scripts, and its peoples.

Here is a very brief overview of the ten papers included in this special issue. You will have to read each paper to find out the results! Some of the papers on Chinese included in this special issue are longitudinal studies. Yang and co-authors report on a longitudinal study that examined whether aspects of phonological processing predicted Chinese word reading skills and arithmetic. The phonological processing tasks measured phonological awareness, phonological memory, and rapid automatized naming. Participants were elementary school children living in Hong Kong.

Liu and Liu examined elementary school children living in Hong Kong. Their focus was the link between Chinese word writing and Chinese reading comprehension and mediators of this link. The authors provide interesting suggestions for future research including investigation of whether the link between writing and reading comprehension in Chinese might change over time and whether the link might be different for users of traditional versus simplified Chinese characters.

Chung and colleagues focus on Chinese adolescents living in Hong Kong. Students with and without dyslexia undertook a test battery, which included measures of executive functioning, so that predictors of reading comprehension in L1 (Chinese) and L2 (English) could be determined. The authors used narrative text when exploring reading comprehension and point out that it would be valuable to explore other text types in future studies, among other recommendations.

Zhang and colleagues argue that much of the research on the link between the home literacy environment and children's reading skills comes from Western societies, with

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less known about the link between the home literacy environment and Chinese reading skills. Unlike the above-mentioned Chinese studies that included children living in Hong Kong, the participants in the study by Zhang and colleagues were children living in Jinling, a south-western province of China.

This special issue also includes a paper on Persian, and a paper on Arabic. Mohseni and McBride examined predictors of word reading and word dictation in Persian. Elementary school students living in Iran undertook tests of cognitive, linguistic, and reading-related skills as well as reading and spelling tasks. Persian has some unique features in its orthography-to-phonology mappings. These unique features may contribute to the finding of a correlation between reading and spelling of .48. The authors point out that there are dialects of Persian which differ from the standard form and discuss how the influence of dialect may affect spelling.

Saiegh-Haddad, Shahbani-Kassem, and Schiff worked with elementary school children living in the north of Israel who speak a local dialect of Arabic. Their focus was on phonological awareness tasks that comprised some items which have an identical form in Standard Arabic and in the spoken local dialect versus other items which differ in Standard Arabic and the spoken local dialect. Moreover, they explored the impact of this phonological distance in Arabic diglossia in low and mid-high SES backgrounds.

The paper by Cho, McBride, and Kim discusses Hangul learning by Korean kindergarteners. The authors point out that Hangul is a shallow orthography and widely considered to be easy to learn. Yet, there are different instructional methods, and little is known about their effectiveness. Four types of teaching instruction were compared in the novel study reported in this special issue. The authors acknowledge the relatively modest sample sizes and recommend replication studies.

Several of the papers in this issue focus on non-native speakers of English. Shenoy and colleagues examined how instruments used in the US such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELSNext) and Easy Curriculum Based Measurement (easyCBM) are being used to monitor progress in English literacy instruction in schools in Bangalore. The authors emphasise the multi-lingual background of students in Bangalore who may be exposed to up to four languages from 0 to 13 years of age. In addition, they point out that instruction in English literacy is pervasive in India and is being delivered in low-cost, middle-cost, and high-cost schools. Quantitative student data is complemented by qualitative data from teachers who shared information on their methods of instruction.

The paper by Yin and colleagues focuses on the English spelling skills of non-native speakers of English, in this case students living in Beijing who are learning English but come from either Chinese or Korean L1 backgrounds. In particular, the authors were interested in the phenomenon of consonant doubling in the spelling of nonwords (e.g. 'zimen' vs 'zimmen'), and the contexts in which it occurs. The authors frame their work as an investigation of statistical learning as a mechanism underpinning spellers' choices around consonant doubling and explore influences of L1 on L2 spelling.

O'Brien and colleagues worked with data drawn from a larger study on bilingual children who were learning to read in English as well as learning to read in Chinese, Malay, or Tamil. While some data from that study has already been published, the work included in this special issue is distinctive in its focus on both reading and spelling skills. The authors point out unique features of these different scripts. For example,

while English is represented by an orthography comprised of 26 letters of the alphabet, Tamil is represented by more than 200 symbols. The authors discuss how these differences can impact on reading and spelling skills in different ways.

Many thanks to the contributors and the reviewers for their help with this special issue. I know you will enjoy reading the collection of papers presented here and invite you to join us at future meetings of ARWA.

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