**PHD DEFENCE**

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**PhD Candidate (Linguistics)**

**Title: The Effect of Early Multiple Language Literacies on Learners’ Metalinguistic Awareness: A Cross-Linguistic Study**

*Date: Wednesday 18th April 2018 at 10:00am*

*Venue: Humanities Resource Centre*

**ABSTRACT**

This study set out to investigate the correlative and predictive power of early simultaneous trilingual literacy on metalinguistic awareness in three (English, French and Kirundi) languages taught in Burundi classrooms.The study first scrutinized input, output, and cognitive factors that may cause variation in the two trilingual learning paradigms before comparing learners’ performance on metalinguistic awareness.It investigated thepredictive power of those factors on learners’ metalinguistic awareness as well as the question of MLA transferability.

This study was conducted on a sample population of 40early simultaneous and 40 late sequential trilingual young learners aged ten to eleven, attending four primary schools in Burundi. Questionnaires to parents and children collected data on the learners’ family background and their language experiences. Standardized French and English versions of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, together with a matched researcher-teacher Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) for Kirundi languagemeasured learners’ language proficiency. Using ninemetalinguistic tasks administered in either language, the study measured the learners’ metalinguistic awareness.

The findings are discussed in relation to Bialystok’s (1986a) analysis and control framework and Cummins’ (1976) threshold hypothesis. Findings revealed common and dissociating factors between the two learning conditions grouped under language exposure time, age of enrolment and sequence of instruction as common factors, and differentiating factors ranged from language proficiency, home language use and working memory. Upon comparing their performance on MLA, results indicated a comparative advantage of the ESLL condition on tasks assessing analysis abilities and a LSLL advantage on +CONTROL tasks for each language. The study found a strong relationship between language proficiency measures and the analysis tasks. Furthermore, the learners’ performance on tasks demanding control abilities was found to be related to low linguistic proficiency.Results of the hierarchical regression showed that the early trilingual learning variables(age of enrollment, sequence of instruction) were stronger predictors of MLA performance than language proficiency and working memory, while home language use did not display any predictive power.Concerning MLA transferability, it was found that MLA is construct-based and skill-based and is transferable homogeneously across the two trilingual learning paradigms. Overall, the results indicate that metalinguistic awareness is a transferable and complex construct that feeds on language instruction modes as well as language proficiency and working memory levels.