CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS OF LEARNERS IN THE MULTI-CULTURAL, MULTI-LINGUAL SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION CONTEXT

Chapter aims: This chapter aims to identify and describe the need for research into phonological awareness skills within the multi-cultural, multi-lingual South African education context, to present a well-formulated problem statement and rationale for the study, to provide an outline of the chapters included in this thesis, and to discuss the terminology and abbreviations used in this thesis.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

"Most researchers who have studied both monolinguals and bilinguals undoubtedly agree that working with bilinguals is a more difficult and challenging enterprise."

(Grosjean, 1998:131)

Internationally, researchers agree that academic success depends largely on a learner's language ability (Hoff, 2005; Owens, 2001; Owens, 1999). In the case where a learner's receptive and expressive language skills are not age-appropriate, he/she will experience the scholastic demands of the educational setting as a learning barrier and will struggle to cope with these demands (Owens, 2001). Although these language skills develop from a young age (Rossetti, 2001), it is of paramount importance that an individual's phonological awareness skills should expand in concurrence with their language development. The development of basic receptive and expressive language skills serves as underpinning for the adequate development of phonological awareness skills.

Academic success is therefore largely dependent on a learner's phonological awareness skills and according to Stackhouse (1997:157) phonological awareness is "the ability to reflect on and manipulate the structure of an utterance (e.g. into words, syllables and sounds) as distinct from its meaning." A learner's language ability needs to be developed to a level where the learner is able to think and reflect on the structure of the words, syllables and sounds (Stackhouse, 1997), thus leading to the

1

development of the meta-linguistic skill of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is a component of meta-linguistics, which develops due to the higher cognitive level of language use (Goldsworthy, 2001). The knowledge that a word consists of smaller units leads the learner to understand that he/she can divide them into sounds, syllables, and sub-syllabic constituents (McFadden, 1998). Furthermore, the learner becomes aware that these constituents can be manipulated (Goldsworthy, 2001) The learner will not be ready for reading and writing instruction until he/she reaches this meta-linguistic level of language use (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; McFadden, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden, 1998). Learners with poorly developed phonological awareness skills will most likely struggle with reading and spelling, because they will only be able to read and write age-appropriately when they know how to render a graphemic representation of the phonological structure (Goldsworthy, 2001).

The age-appropriate development of phonological awareness is initiated from as young as two years of age when the child is exposed to rhyme, alliteration and stories (Roth & Baden, 2001). The development of phonological awareness skills ranges along a continuum of shallow, deep, and sophisticated levels of awareness (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004). Figure 1.1 presents a visual representation of the development of phonological awareness skills.
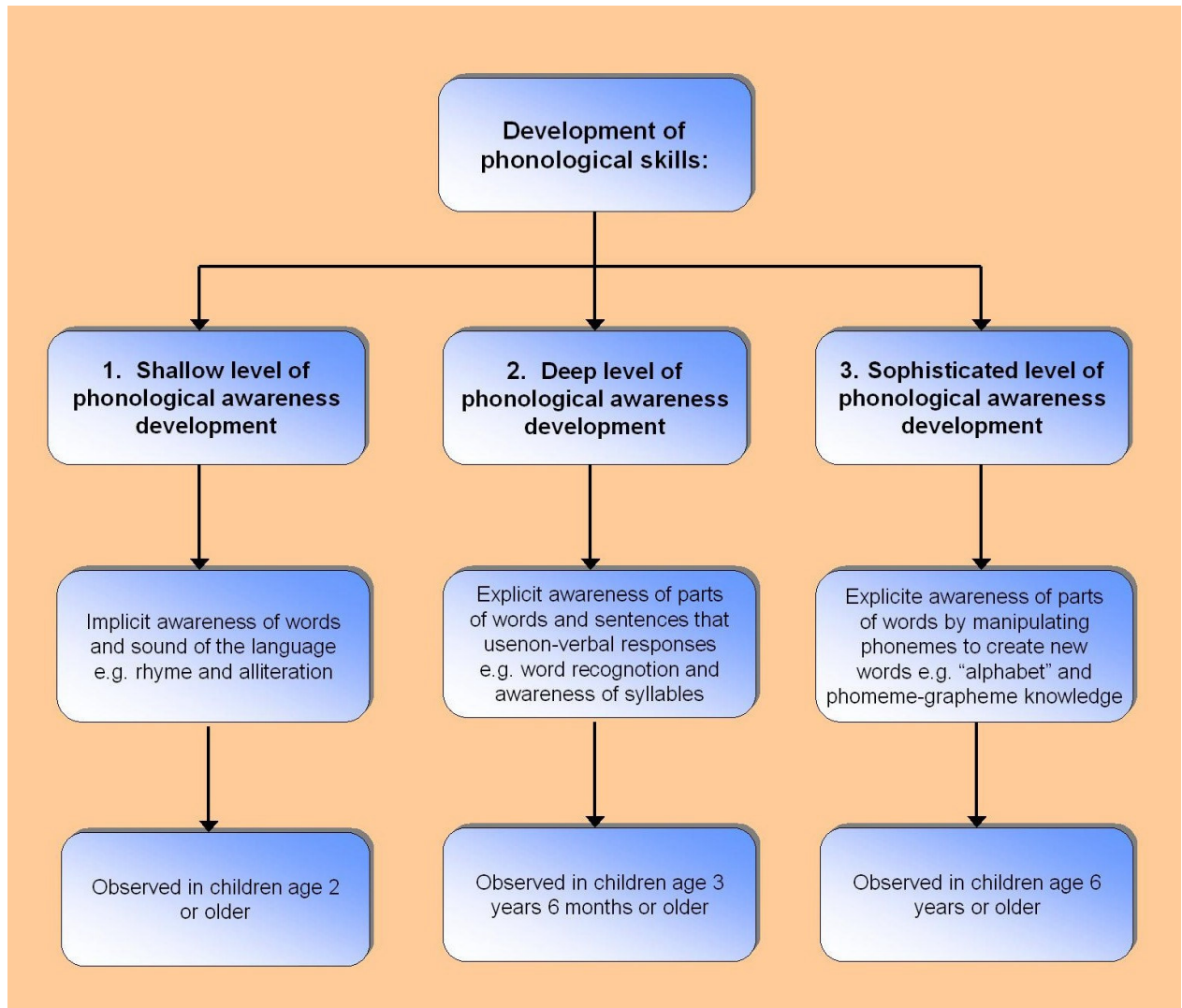
Figure 1.1:   An overview of the development of phonological awareness skills (based on Bernthal & Bankson, 2004; Justice, Invernizzi, & Meier, 2002; Goldsworthy, 2001).

According to Figure 1.1 the first stage of the development of phonological awareness skills commences at approximately two years of age and can be labelled the 'shallow level' on the continuum of phonological awareness development (Justice & Schuele as cited in Bernthal & Bankson, 2004; Goldsworthy, 2001; Invernizzi, Meier, Swank & Juel, 2000). During this stage, the child develops sensitivity for sound patterns that recur across and within words but is unable to consciously represent or reflect upon the discreet phonemic elements of words (Justice & Schuele as cited in Bernthal & Bankson, 2004). As the child's phonological awareness skills mature, a child reaches the 'deep level' of phonological awareness development where the ability to compare, contrast and manipulate phonological segments within and across syllables and words

3

develops (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004). On the final and last level, namely the 'sophisticated level', the learner is able to analyse and segment words or syllables into their constituent phonemes (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004; Goldsworthy, 2001).

The development of phonological awareness skills has been extensively investigated by research over a number of years. This research has proved that these skills were often framed within the context of the successful development of learners' reading and spelling ability (Bernthal and Bankson, 2004; Owens, 2004; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, & McFadden, 1998). Since these skills develop from an early age, the use of a 'proactive and preventative approach' (Justice, Invernizzi & Meier, 2002) is advocated to identify those children that may be at risk for future literacy problems (Justice et al., 2002). Research has indicated that additional instruction focusing on early literacy performance will enhance this performance (Invernizzi & Robey, 2001). Although Invernizzy and Robey (2001) conducted their research on monolingual populations, their findings may also apply to multi-lingual populations. Increased interest in the development of phonological awareness has given rise to an approach in which speech-language therapists can ensure, by applying the appropriate techniques and implementing well-designed programmes, effective and efficient service delivery to learners through evidence-based practice (Dollaghan, 2004).

Evidence-based practice in the management of phonological awareness disorders is being promoted (Justice, Invernizzi & Meier, 2002), but despite all these developments and their importance for the child's educational progress, limited research has been conducted on phonological awareness in multi-cultural, multi-lingual contexts. Recently, research interest in phonological awareness and multi-lingualism has been generated internationally (Ayoun, 2004; Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Courcy, Béland, Pitchford, 2000). Yet, in South Africa, in spite of the challenges facing speech-language therapists and educationalists, a dearth regarding research into phonological awareness in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual society still exists.

Speech-language therapists in South Africa have to cope with learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, these professionals have only the outcomes of international research, which does not adequately provide for the local

context, to rely on. Addressing these issues through context-appropriate research will limit the far-reaching detrimental effect that disordered phonological skills may have on the learner's successful educational progress. In order to ensure scholastic success speech-language therapists need to investigate the local context in terms of phonological awareness skills, the prevention of disorders in these skills, the assessment of these skills, and effective, ethically accountable management of these skills.

1.1.1 Language and scholastic issues associated with phonological awareness skills

It is evident from research findings that the phonological awareness skills of individual learners can have far-reaching effects on their academic success (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; McFadden, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden, 1998). In an effort to elucidate the integrated language and scholastic issues related to phonological awareness, the researcher provides a visual representation of the content of the rest of the argument underpinning the research in Figure 1.2.
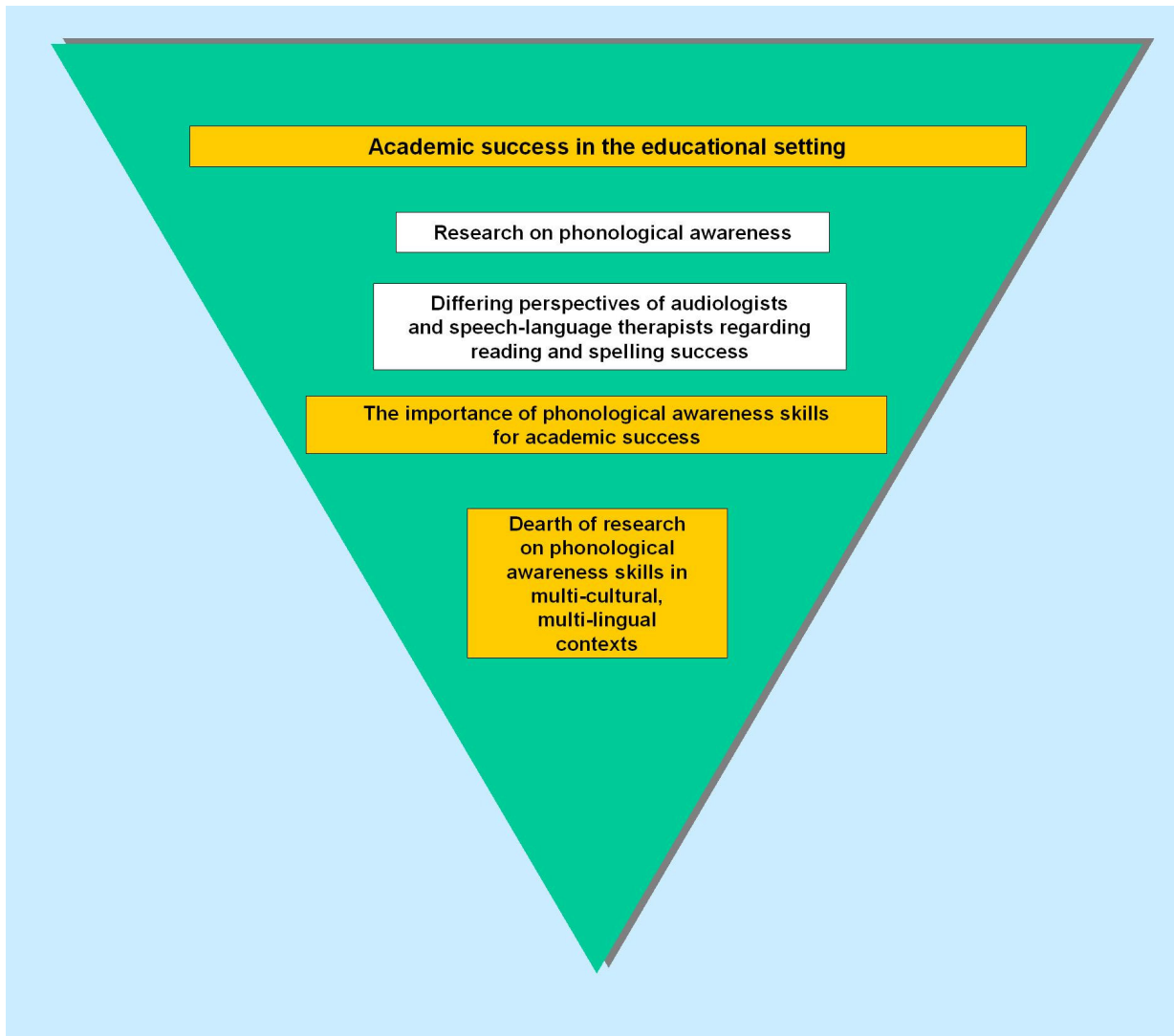
Figure 1.2:   Issues surrounding phonological awareness skills.

Figure 1.2 illustrates important issues associated with phonological awareness skills. As discussed previously, phonological awareness skills are a prerequisite for academic success, which is the primary goal of every learner who enters the educational system. Academic failure may have a negative impact on learners' socio-emotional, interpersonal and vocational development (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004). International education research (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995) strives to provide insight in the further improvement of learners' academic success and this research generally focuses on different language related areas (such as reading and spelling success); different perspectives, and on professions such as Speech-Language Therapy, Remedial Teaching and Occupational Therapy.

From the perspective of the speech-language therapist, intervention tends to focus on the learners' language development in order to provide a foundation for the development of appropriate reading and spelling skills as a basis for academic success (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; McFadden, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden, 1998). A sound language basis is required to enable the learner to cope with meta-linguistic skills such as reading and spelling (Owens, 1999), which enable a learner to reach his/her full academic potential (Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, & McFadden, 1998).

The foundation of reading and spelling success is, according to many teachers, age-appropriate phonological awareness skills, and there is consensus that this meta-linguistic ability may be the most important predictor of later reading and spelling success (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, McFadden, 1998). If a learner does not have awareness of phonemes in words, that learner will not be able to learn to use the graphemic representations of phonological structures because inadequate awareness of sound structure makes it difficult to learn phoneme-grapheme correspondence (Goldsworthy, 2001). Poor phoneme-grapheme correspondence will lead to poorly developed decoding and word recognition abilities, which are necessary for reading and spelling success (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995). Furthermore, international researchers, focusing on reading and spelling skills, agree that poor phonological skills may lead to poor academic progress (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995).

Phonological awareness skills and its effect on academic success have been thoroughly researched within the field of speech-language therapy (Roth & Baden, 2001; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden, 1998). These skills are viewed from somewhat 'different' perspectives by the professions of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. In the field of Audiology the main focus appears to be on auditory and neurological aspects associated with reading and spelling, whilst in Speech-Language Pathology the focus is primarily on the linguistic and neurological aspects associated with reading and spelling (Bellis, 2003; Goldsworthy, 2001). Auditory processing refers to a learner's ability to make sense of auditory information

(ASHA Task Force, 1996; ASHA, 2005). Although many researchers view auditory processing to be a purely auditory issue, Bellis (2003) and Medwetsky (2002) emphasise the neurological basis of auditory processing and the influence of language on this processing ability (ASHA Task Force, 1996; ASHA, 2005; McFarland & Cacace, 1997; Katz & Wilde, 1994, as cited in Visser, 2005).

When an auditory processing problem is present in combination with a language disorder, speech-language therapists regard this phenomenon as a phonological awareness disorder (ASHA, 2005). Although the two professions differentiate between an auditory processing disorder and a delay in phonological awareness skills, they do agree that these skills are the most important predictors of reading and spelling success (Visser, 2005; Bellis, 2003; Van Kleeck et al., 1998).

As stated above, phonological awareness is an extremely important skill because age-appropriate development of this skill facilitates the development of age-appropriate reading and spelling skills, and consequently academic success as well (Bellis, 2003; Van Kleeck et al., 1998). Extensive research has been conducted on school-aged populations to determine the effect of phonological awareness on reading and spelling success. However, as mentioned previously, this research was mostly conducted on monolingual populations, and a shortfall in research exists regarding the phonological awareness skills of learners who are required to function in the South African multi-cultural, multi-lingual education context (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995).

The limited research into the effect of a multi-cultural and multi-lingual setting on phonological awareness skills is of particular importance within the South African context. This unique context comprises the 'rainbow-nation' variety of cultures and 11 official languages (Broom, 2004; Chick, 2002; Mutasa, 2000). Learners in South Africa face the challenge that they are mostly taught in English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT), and not in their mother tongue (Broom, 2004). The very common use of Black South African English (BSAE), which is not characterised by a formal structure or language rules and is as yet not recognised as a standard of

English (Kavanagh, 2002), further complicates the situation (De Klerk, 1999). In the light of the above, the urgent need for extensive research into this field is evident.

1.1.2 Problem statement and rationale for the study

Based on the preceding argument, the problem statement, the rationale for this study and the formulated research question follows below.

As stated earlier, research into phonological awareness is one of the most important contributors to learning and academic success (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995). For instance, research outcomes have shown that an improvement of phonological awareness skills will lead to an improvement in reading and spelling skills. This is congruent with evidence-based practice and ensures accountable, ethical and efficient service delivery to clients (Roth & Baden, 2001; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden, 1998).

Although valuable international research has been conducted regarding monolingual populations and their phonological awareness skills (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995), limited research has been done on the phonological awareness skills of learners who have to function in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual South African education context. This situation intensifies the specific clinical challenges, namely:

- A lack of national research into phonological awareness skills in learners in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual educational context;
- The importance of phonological awareness skills for academic success and the need for research in the South African context is under-emphasized.
- Insufficient knowledge regarding African first language learners' phonological awareness skills in English; this shortcoming needs to be rectified since English is these learners' language of learning and teaching, and the language in which they must attain academic success.

- Despite the contribution of previous local research conducted by Weinmann (2004), a very limited number of culture-specific and culture-sensitive instruments to asses these learners' phonological awareness skills, exist.
- The insufficient emphasis on the importance of phonological awareness skills by speech-language therapists during intervention with language impaired learners.

Based on these challenges, an thorough investigation into the phonological awareness skills of learners functioning in the education context described above, specifically in a the setting of a primary school in South Africa, is long overdue. In order to acquire an in-depth understanding of these learners' skills in ELoLT, their phonological awareness skills, phonological abilities, language abilities, reading abilities, and spelling skills need to be determined. By correlating and comparing the results obtained in the assessment of these abilities, the researcher will be able to describe the phonological awareness skills of the participants.

Against the background outlined above, the following research question was formulated: What is the status of the phonological awareness skills of a group of South African Grade 4-learners in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual education context where English is the Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT)?

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

"Look at the world of people, and you will be overwhelmed by what you see. But select from that mass a well-chosen few, and observe them with insight, and they will tell you more than all the multitudes together."

(Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:179)

Sufficient evidence exists to indicate the necessity of addressing phonological awareness skills as part of language-learning therapy (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004). Due to the shortcoming in literature on the phonological awareness skills of learners who are educated in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual education context, it is important to

conduct a descriptive study of this phenomenon. An in-depth description of this attribute of learners will lead to a better understanding of their phonological awareness skills, and will serve as basis for further research on this topic. The results of this study should lead to clinical and theoretical recommendations to improve the classroom situation for the ELoLT learner in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual South African context.

Currently, service delivery by the majority of speech-language therapists to these ELoLT learners is based on models that are valid for English first language learners. The results of the present study may provide insight into culturally and locally appropriate clinical applications, which may benefit many Black learners in South Africa being educated through the medium of English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT), hopefully leading to an improvement in these learners' literacy, academic, and future educational prospects.

1.3   OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter	Content
1. **Introduction and orientation to the phonological awareness skills of learners in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual South African education context**	This chapter comprises the orientation and problem statement, the rationale for the study, the research question, the outline of the chapters and the definition of terms.
2. **Factors impacting upon the phonological awareness skills of young learners in South Africa**	This chapter serves as theoretical underpinning for the research project as it integrates relevant available literature findings within the field of phonological awareness of the learner (functioning in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual education context) internationally and within the South African context. The discussion focused on the current South African context, language related aspects in the teaching and learning process, phonological awareness skills, the educational context, and the role of the speech-language therapist in the South African context. The chapter provides an evaluation of these areas and limitations in current research and literature are highlighted.

Chapter	Content
3. **Method**	The research method is discussed in terms of the aims of the study, research design, ethical implications, population, sampling, materials and apparatus used during the research project, the procedures that were followed during the research project in terms of data recording, analysis, and processing of data.
4. **Results and discussion of results**	The collected and statistically processed data are presented in this chapter. The results obtained through the research protocol are discussed in accordance with the sub-aims of the research project.
5. **Conclusion and recommendations**	Based on the results obtained by the research protocol, and by referring to the previously cited theoretical underpinnings, conclusions are drawn, a critical evaluation of the study is presented, and ideas for future research are recommended.
6. **References**	A comprehensive and detailed list of all the sources of information referred to in this thesis.
7. **Appendices**	All the relevant documents pertaining to this study, but not included in the main text, is contained in this section.

1.3 TERMINOLOGY AND LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Terminology and abbreviations that were used in the current study are presented in 4.1 and 4.2 below.

1.4.1 Terminology

1.4.1.1   *Phonological awareness*

'Phonological awareness' refers to a component of meta-linguistics, which develops with language use on a higher cognitive level (Goldsworthy, 2001). It includes the knowledge that a word consists of smaller components that can be manipulated (McFadden, 1998). It also implies the understanding that words can be divided into sounds, syllables, and sub-syllabic units (Goldsworthy, 2001). This definition covers the components of phonological awareness comprehensively because it integrates

language and meta-linguistics, and therefore it was favoured over and above less comprehensive definitions.

1.4.1.2   Multi-lingual

Definitions provided by Broom (2004), Chick (2002) and Hough (2002) indicate that the term 'multi-lingual' applies where a person is competent in two or more languages (Broom, 2004; Chick, 2002; Hough, 2002). The participants in the current study were not necessarily multi-lingual, but they all functioned in a multi-lingual context, with daily exposure to more than one language.

1.4.1.3   Multi-cultural

Current texts on multi-culturalism lead to the preferred definition that the term 'multi-cultural' refers to contexts where people are exposed to a variety of cultures on a day-to-day basis (Broom, 2004; Chick, 2002; Hough, 2002). In other words, it reflects a quality of a society, not of an individual. The term 'multi-cultural' and its derivatives were often used in this study to describe the society that has become known as 'rainbow-nation' of South Africa, in which learners are exposed to a variety of cultures in the context of education.

1.4.1.4   Basic Interactive Communication Skills (BICS)

'Basic Interactive Communication Skills (BICS)' refers to a learner's informal conversational abilities and describes a universal and instinctive skill commonly associated with a learner's native language (Solarsh, 2002; Cummins, 2000; Cummins, 1996). Where Basic Interactive Communication Skills (BICS) are applied, the context provides cues to support meaningful conversations (Broom, 2004). This definition encapsulates the most important components of BICS, which is the reason for its selection.

1.4.1.5   Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

A learner's 'Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)' refers to his/her ability to manipulate language in a situation where the context is not of primary consideration and can therefore be described as the ideational aspect of language (CALP) where the learner requires a higher level of language and the appropriate sense of using it (Solarsh, 2002). Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) implies a reduced

number of cues, and gives rise to academic, de-contextualized language (Broom, 2004).

1.4.1.6   Black South African English (BSAE)

'Black South African English BSAE' generally refers to the variety of English commonly used by mother tongue speakers of South Africa's indigenous languages in areas where English is not the language of the majority (De Klerk, 1999).

1.4.1.7   English as Additional Language (EAL)

'English as Additional Language (EAL)' applies where English is not the speaker's mother tongue but is solely used as the speaker's additional language (Naudé, 2005). According to Naudé (2005) this term is used in education settings to describe the language status of the learners where English is the language of mutual understanding or language of learning and teaching. The use of this term gained popularity in the era after 1994 when an increasing number of learners are still being educated through the medium of English (Naudé, 2005).

1.4.1.8   English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT)

The expression 'English as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT)' is used when English is not the learner's mother tongue, but where it is the only language used in teaching and learning (Naudé, 2005; Broom, 2004).

1.4.2 List of abbreviations

Table 1.1 provides a list of abbreviations that were used in the current study

Table 1.1:   List of abbreviations.

Abbreviation	Term
ELoLT	English as Language of Learning and Teaching
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
BSAE	Black South African English
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
BICS	Basic Interactive Communication Skills

Abbreviation	Term
PA	Phonological Awareness
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
AAE	African American English
CELF	Clinical Evaluation of Language Functions (Semel & Wiig, 1980).
PhAB	The Phonological Awareness Battery (Frederickson, Reason & Frith, 1997).
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
dB	Decibels
Hz	Hertz
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
PV	Phonological Variation
P	Participant
ALF	African Language Family
EAL	English as Additional Language
MWT	Mann-Whitney Test
SCC	Spearman Correlation Coefficients

1.5   CONCLUSION

Post-apartheid education redressed racial segregation in South Africa and combined learners from different languages and cultures in a single multi-cultural, multi-lingual education system (Naudé, 2005). These learners face many problems arising from the fact that they are required to function in a context where the language of instruction (ELoLT) is not their first language. Against the background of severely limited literature on phonological awareness skills in multi-cultural, multi-lingual education contexts, and the importance of phonological awareness skills for academic success, the researcher emphasises the urgent need for research in the South African context. It is important to determine the phonological awareness skills in English of learners with an African language as first language, because English is their language of learning and teaching, and thus the medium through which they must attain academic success. Phonological awareness plays an important role in reading and spelling success, which forms a basis for a learner to be able to reach his/her full

academic potential. Through full realisation of his/her academic potential, the learner will be empowered to contribute more significantly to the overall development of society.

1.6   SUMMARY

In this chapter the need for research in the field of phonological awareness skills of learners functioning in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual education context were identified and described. The dearth in relevant literature (both nationally and internationally) led to the formulation of a problem statement and rationale for the study. The unique South African context emphasises the need for additional research to enable clinicians and researchers to understand the effect of this context on the phonological awareness skills of learners. Addressing this issue is of the utmost importance in order to inform clinical practice in Speech-Language Pathology in the South African context.

CHAPTER 2

FACTORS IMPACTING UPON THE PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS OF YOUNG LEARNERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Chapter aim: This chapter serves as theoretical underpinning for the research project as it integrates available literature findings which are relevant within the field of phonological awareness of the multi-lingual learner both internationally and within the South African context. The discussion focuses on the current South African context, language related aspects in the teaching and learning process, phonological awareness, the educational context, and the role of the speech-language therapist in the South African context. These areas are critically evaluated and the shortcomings in current research and literature are highlighted.

2.1   INTRODUCTION

"Bilingualism or even multilingualism is a cultural and educational reality

for children in many parts of the world."

(Muter & Diethelm, 2001:188)

In the academic development of children, the importance of skilfulness in all the components of language, including the higher meta-linguistic skill of phonological awareness, has long been recognized and stimulated research from different perspectives and in different fields of expertise (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; McFadden, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden, 1998). Despite different perspectives of different professions, language remains an integral aspect of academic success. Where a learner's language skills and/or related skills such as auditory perception are not age-appropriate, specialised intervention is called for in order to improve the individual's inadequate skills to an age-appropriate level. The significant role of language skills and of the accompanying meta-linguistic skills in mastering reading and spelling emphasises the important input of the speech-language therapist in the intervention process (Roth & Baden, 2001; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden, 1998).

In many countries where English is used as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), intervention addresses the importance of a well-established language structure for learning, because academic success depends in to a great extent on an adequate command of English (Owens, 2001). Since phonological awareness is an important component of overall language abilities, its importance in reading and spelling success cannot be ignored (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, & McFadden, 1998). Poor phonological awareness may necessitate language intervention to enhance a learner's ability to cope in the learning situation (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995). A learner's reading and spelling skills may be negatively influenced by language skills that have not developed to a stage where they are age-appropriate; this may include underdeveloped phonological awareness which, in turn, may cause inadequate application of the meta-linguistic skills that are important for academic success (Goldsworthy, 2001).

Education becomes extremely complex in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, society where often a single language (the one of mutual understanding) is used as the only language of learning and teaching. In South Africa, with its diversity of languages and cultures, the need for a language of mutual understanding is apparent – currently, English seems to be the choice for LoLT (Dawber & Jordaan, 2002; Mutasa, 2000; Naicker, 1999, Olivier, 1997). In the South African education system the majority of learners are expected to read and write in English which, in most cases, is not their first language.

To date, limited research has been conducted regarding the effect of English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT) on the phonological awareness of primary school learners in the multi-cultural, multilingual, context of South Africa. Research conducted on monolingual individuals indicated that a link existed between phonological awareness and later success in reading and spelling (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995). The above finding leads one to ask what the influence of language proficiency on phonological awareness may be in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society where learners are exposed to various languages and cultures on a day-to-day basis.

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

In an attempt to gain more insight into the influence of language proficiency on phonological awareness and to provide a framework for discussion, the aspects presented in Figure 2.1 were identified as being relevant to the topic. As shown in Figure 2.1, five main areas of importance were identified. In addition, several components of each of these main areas were also identified to serve as guidelines for the discussion. Figure 2.1 is followed by a discussion of these areas and their identified components.
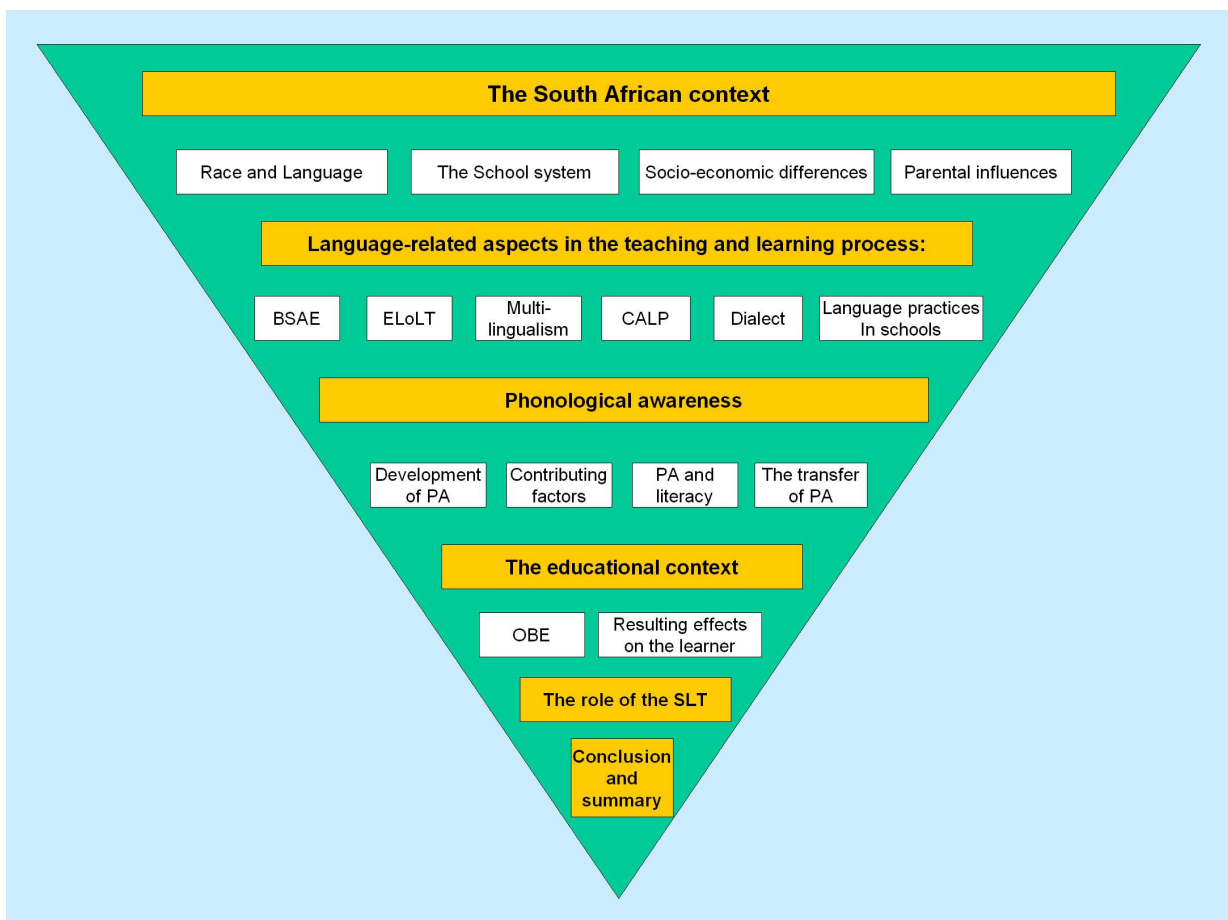

Figure 2.1: Outline of Chapter 2. *(Refer to chapter 1 for a key to the abbreviations)*

2.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The diversity of cultures and languages in South Africa inspired Archbishop Desmond Tutu's familiar phrase *the rainbow nation* that so aptly describes the nation that came into being in this country in 1994; but it is precisely this diversity that calls for meaningful research in different fields to adequately cope with and function within this unique context. In the ensuing years the importance and urgency of purposeful

research in the field of the school education of learners of this rainbow nation became increasingly apparent (Seeff & Jordaan, 2000).

The South African population consists of four major racial groups: Asians, Blacks, Coloureds, and Whites. The language spectrum of this country covers the nine indigenous languages, namely isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga which, alongside English and Afrikaans, constitute the eleven official languages of South Africa (Broom, 2004; Chick, 2002; Mutasa, 2000). Table 2.1 shows the percentage and corresponding numbers of mother tongue speakers of each of the eleven official languages in South Africa (according to the 2001-census as cited on http://www.southafrica.info.htm). In addition to the standard forms of these languages, many variants are used by the different speakers of this wide variety of languages (Makalela, 2004; Kavanagh, 2002; Wissing, 2002; De Klerk, 1999).

Table 2.1: **Percentages and corresponding numbers of mother tongue speakers of the eleven official South African languages (Census, 2001).**

Language	% of population (n=46.9 million)	Speakers
isiZulu	23,8%	11 162 200
isiXhosa	17,6%	8 254 400
Afrikaans	13,3%	6 237 700
Sepedi	9,4%	4 408 600
English	8,2%	3 845 800
Setswana	8,2%	3 845 800
Sesotho	7,9%	3 705 100
isiNdebele	< 5%	1 360 100
Siswati	< 5%	1 360 100
Tshivenda	< 5%	1 360 100
Xitsonga	< 5%	1 360 100

Prior to 1994 this diversity in languages was part of the rationale for the segregation, in the school system, of children from the different population groups. The intention was (ostensibly) to promote each individual group's cultural heritage and customs by establishing schools aimed at each group's indigenous language and race (Chick, 2002). Idealistically, this scenario would have created a sense of belonging and pride in these children, but the contrary prevailed – opportunities were more readily available to the white (minority) group, with subsequent inferior facilities being created for the other population groups (Chick, 2002).

The end of the Apartheid era led to the abolishment of this segregated education system and it was replaced by a system aimed at integrating all language groups and cultures (Goduka & Swadener, 1999; Naicker, 1999; Olivier, 1997). However, this policy resulted in a system in which the vast majority of learners are expected to read and write in a language other than their mother tongue, which may have a negative impact on their academic performance (Seeff & Jordaan, 2000).

In this regard, it must be mentioned that seven of the eleven official languages recognised in South Africa and mentioned higher up, belong to two major language groups that show major differences in overall language structure. These groups and the languages belonging to each are shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2:   **The two main indigenous language groups of South Africa and the individual languages constituting each group (Broom, 2004).**

Language group	Individual languages constituting the group
Nguni	IsiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati, isiNdebele
Sotho	Setswana, Sepedi Sesotho

Tshivenda and Xitsonga are not included in Table 2.2 because it is customary to refer to them separately. It must be assumed that they both have their origin in the Niger-Congo group of languages, but their recent genealogy is not known. These two languages do not seem to be structurally related. It is, however, widely acknowledged that the nine indigenous official languages of South Africa have their origins in original Bantu. It is important to point out that these languages bear no resemblance

21

whatsoever to the large number of languages with the same origin as English (Le Roux, 2005).

Although government of the 'new South Africa' (post-1994) addressed the segregated school system, the socio-economic situation, where a huge discrepancy exists between the affluent communities on the one hand and the desperately poor on the other, is far more difficult to rectify (Broom, 2004). In the affluent group, parents can readily afford to expose their children to learning opportunities which allow them to develop to their fullest potential. In contrast, children in the poor communities, due to the financial status of their parents, are afforded minimum opportunities and consequently struggle and often cannot cope at school (Nancollis, Lawrie & Dodd, 2005; Christie, 1991). A large number of these learners receive their school education in a language other than their mother tongue with no additional support system in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual school environment. This situation presents major challenges in terms of academic success for these learners (Broom, 2004).

The crucially important parental support of these learners is negatively influenced by the legacy of apartheid. Many of the current generation of parents was subject to poor education and a resulting high dropout rate (partly due to inadequate facilities, and partly due to the struggle against apartheid with large scale and often extended boycotts of classes) (Christie, 1991). These parents' limited literacy proficiency in English puts a further constraint on learners' academic success (Broom, 2005; Cummins et al., 2005; Christie, 1991).

Factors such as race and culture, the school system, socio-economic factors, and parental influences (as illustrated in Figure 2.1) clearly do not enhance age-appropriate development of language abilities, part of which is meta-linguistic skills such as phonological awareness. The "rainbow"-reality of South Africa is nowhere more apparent than in the school context where it is endeavoured to integrate learners from diverse language and cultural backgrounds, different socio-economic groups, and with varying degrees of parental support in *one* educational system with *one* mutual language of understanding, namely English (Seeff & Jordaan, 2000). This leads to a situation where language – and specifically the LoLT – will doubtlessly have a negative influence on the teaching and learning process.

2.3   LANGUAGE RELATED ASPECTS IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

In South Africa, South African English, a recognised standard according to the *South African Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Kavanagh, 2002) developed and became established in South Africa and is generally spoken by White South Africans with English as their mother tongue. Black South African English (BSAE) is as yet not a recognised English standard; it is however, a stark reality in the sense that it is spoken by millions of Black South Africans and is, in fact, the mutual language of understanding of this extremely diverse population (Makalela, 2004; Kavanagh, 2002; Wissing, 2002; De Klerk, 1999; Wright, 1996). According to Kavanagh (2002), BSAE is a simplified variety (not necessarily dialectical) of South African English containing typical South African words and phrases. Words from various African languages, which more accurately express concepts and ideas comprehensibly to Black South Africans, are assimilated into BSAE (Kavanagh, 2002). According to De Klerk (1999) speakers of BSAE are characterized by striking differences in competence, ranging from complete fluency to minimal levels of proficiency. It is probably due to this variety within BSAE, that a BSAE standard does not exist (Makalela, 2004). This has implications for analysis of English competency of the speakers of BSAE, and complicates research in this field.

Although it is, at this stage, not certain if BSAE is a true dialect, the variety within BSAE can best be explained in terms of dialectical variations. Dialects are mutually intelligible forms of a language that can be associated with a particular region, class and ethnicity (Goldstein & Iglesias, 2004). A dialect can be described in terms of degree of variation where the same set of peculiar features of pronunciation appears in more or less prominent forms (Owens, 2001; Lanham, 1984; Lanham, 1967). The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA, 2005), states that dialectical variety in African American English (AAE) should not be classified as a disordered or pathological form of speech, thereby pointing out the importance of distinguishing between language difference and language pathology (ASHA, 2005). This statement refers to AAE, but indigenized varieties of English exist internationally, and therefore ASHA's statement (2003) referred to above, may be generalized to include BSAE.

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Dialectical variations naturally include the prosodic (supra-segmental) characteristics of a specific language which includes patterns of stress (which determine rhythm), and intonation. Stress causes some syllables to be perceived as less or more prominent than others syllables, due to the fact that it occurs in degrees. It is an extremely complex component of speech and is, in most cases, language specific (Tesner 2005; Abercrombie, 1991). The stress pattern of the first language is often superimposed on a second or third language and these influences are part of that which is often wrongly described as 'accent' (as in *She speaks English with a German accent*). The phenomenon commonly referred to as 'accent' is an extremely complex one, involving most of the segmental and supra-segmental features of language. Taking this into account, speaking a second or third language with the stress pattern (or any of the other parameters) of the mother tongue cannot be ascribed to impeded language proficiency.

Despite the fact that the majority of learners in the majority of public schools in South Africa are proficient in BSAE, the current language of learning and teaching is the South African English standard (Broom, 2004, Van der Walt & Van Rooy, 2002). Possible explanations for this vary from local political connotations to the international status of English. Approximately one quarter of the world's population uses English as first, second or foreign language (De Klerk, 1999) and it is regarded by many African language speakers as the key to socio-economic advancement and power (De Klerk, 1999). Furthermore, due to the era of apartheid, Afrikaans is still viewed as the language of the oppressor (Broom, 2004; Hough, 2002), and many speakers of African languages are of the opinion that African languages seem to have nothing to offer except social interaction and communication between African speaking conversation partners, and therefore most parents choose schools in which English is the medium of instruction (Mutasa, 2002, De Klerk, 1999). These and other reasons for preferring for English as the LoLT do, however, not fall within the scope of this study and will not be further explored.

According to Dawber and Jordaan (2002), the child's language development commences with the communication of his/her basic needs. This early language development is of utmost importance, as it enables the child to think about and experience the world around him/her, expressing emotions and expanded needs

(Dawber & Jordaan, 2002). By the time the child enters the formal education environment, language is required to have developed to a level of awareness of language (meta-linguistic skills) that allows for commencement of reading and spelling skills (Dawber & Jordaan, 2002). Ideally, the child would have acquired language in the six years preceding school entry to ensure the use of language for purposes of learning (Dawber & Jordaan, 2002). In the South African context, the language acquired in the six years preceding formal schooling is very often one of the African languages. The mother tongue is ideally the preferred LoLT, but the majority of public schools only use African languages as medium of instruction in the foundation phase (Broom, 2004; Chick, 2002). Despite the fact that the majority of children would have been exposed to an African language as first language, many parents want their children to attend a school where the sole medium of instruction is English, resulting in these children starting their formal education with English as LoLT (Broom, 2004). The dilemma in school education in South Africa is that the majority of learners are predominantly exposed to their mother tongue in their formative (pre-school) years and English as mutual language of understanding is usually only introduced when the learner enters the formal school environment. Being able to express their basic and expanded needs in their mother tongue, learners enter the educational environment with a limited knowledge of the language of instruction which, is as explained above, more often than not English.

The situation is further complicated when, as is often the case in South Africa, an educational environment exists where the learner (whose mother tongue is not English), is taught by a teacher (facilitator) whose mother tongue is not English either (and often also not the same as that of the learner). Thus, both learner and teacher have to communicate with each other, think, read and spell in a language which is not the mother tongue of either (De Klerk, 2002). To further complicate the issue, learners starting their school education in a multi-lingual society may have varying degrees of proficiency in the LoLT (Broom, 2004).

Research has shown that a second language learner may take up to 5 years to develop to the same level of academic language proficiency as a first language speaker (Dawber & Jordaan, 2002; Mutasa, 2000). Clearly, this delay in the

acquisition of a second language will have an adverse effect on the individual's academic performance in that language.

The development of language skills in the multi-lingual individual can be explained by the *Iceberg Analogy of Bilingualism* (Baker, 1996). This analogy explains that the learner will use a common underlying proficiency system for all the languages that he/she is required to learn. This requires solid first language grounding before a second one can be introduced (Dawber & Jordaan, 2002). The implication is that the learner should have a well founded language base in either an African language or English as a first language. In reality this ideal is often not met and the child cannot be considered a proficient language speaker because of a poor language grounding (in either the African language or in English). Information will be available on the learner's LoLT but often little or no knowledge exists about the learner's first language development and proficiency.

A common occurrence in schools is that the class often consists of learners from different language groups. In addition, learners often find themselves in a class where the teacher teaches in his/her second language (Mutasa, 2000; Martin, 1997). The situation becomes even more complex when one considers that the school system use English as the LoLT, irrespective of the learners' first language basis (Dawber & Jordaan, 2002).

Where the learner's first language is any one of the African languages, major structural linguistic differences between these languages and English exist (Noble, 2002). Whilst English is of European origin, the indigenous languages in South Africa have their origin in Africa. Mutasa (2000) describes the African languages as being in their infant stage of development with regard to technical terminology, whereas English is renowned for being a language with a tradition of scientific and technical literature. The influence of the totally different grammatical and morphological structures of the indigenous African languages may add to a lower proficiency level regarding language skills in English, and subsequently to poor application of the higher meta-linguistic skills required for reading and writing. As the semantic system of the African languages differs from the semantic system of English, these structures are strongly resistant to instruction (Le Roux, 2005; Ayoun, 2004; Ishida, 2004).

Overall linguistic structure also plays an important role in meta-linguistics, which may have a negative influence on the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) of the learner with an African language as first language (Noble, 2002). The developmental process from Basic Interactive Communication Skills (BICS) towards CALP is also dependent on appropriate environmental stimulation (Cummins, 1985).

The learner's ability to manipulate language in a situation where the context is not considered can be described as the ideational aspect of language where the learner requires a higher level of language and sense of how to use it (Solarsh, 2002). When BICS is compared to CALP, major discrepancies are observed since BICS can be described as a universal and instinctive skill commonly associated with a learner's native language, whilst CALP implies higher meta-linguistic development (Broom, 2004; Dawber & Jordaan, 2002; Solarsh, 2002; Cummins, 2000; Cummins, 1996).

Ideally, the learner's English will develop to a level where the learner will have CALP, and will be able to cope with de-contextualised language in learning and teaching (Broom, 2004; Dawber & Jordaan, 2002; Solarsh, 2002; Cummins, 2000; Cummins, 1996). The problem many second language learners face in the classroom with ELoLT is that he/she quickly develops the ability to communicate in English on an interpersonal level, but the acquisition of CALP needs a protracted period of exposure (Broom, 2004; Dawber & Jordaan, 2002). The learners' ability to attain his/her maximum academic potential depends heavily on their meta-linguistic language skills in the LoLT. English as LoLT may have a negative impact on the learner's phonological awareness skills with resultant poor reading and spelling skills and inadequate language proficiency (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995; Torgeson & Wagner, 1994). Phonological awareness, viewed as an under-pinning of CALP, may be influenced by the differences in structure of the LoLT and the specific structure of each different first language.

The severity of the effect that BSAE, dialect, ELoLT, CALP, and the language practices in schools have on the language skills of learners from diverse language and cultural backgrounds (Figure 2.1) cannot be underestimated. These factors may not only adversely affect teaching and learning process, but may result in language skills

that are way below average and also in poor meta-linguistic skills, including inadequate phonological awareness.

2.4.   PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS

Goldsworthy's (2001) definition of phonological awareness was adopted because, in the consulted literature, it provided the most lucid explanation of this meta-linguistic ability. The definition states that phonological awareness is a component of meta-linguistics, which develops due to the higher cognitive level of language use (Goldsworthy, 2001). It is the knowledge that a word consists of smaller components that can be manipulated (McFadden, 1998). This leads to an understanding that words can be divided into sounds, syllables, and syllables-onset, -peaks, and -codas (Goldsworthy, 2001). Phonological awareness develops from as young as three years of age, when the child is exposed to rhyme, alliteration and stories (Roth & Baden, 2001). The learner's foundation of phonological awareness is an essential and powerful tool when embarking on the introduction to reading and spelling at the entrance level to formal schooling (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, McFadden, 1998).

Phonological awareness has a prominent function in learning because of its impact on reading and spelling (Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998). One of the aims of school education is to develop an individual's linguistic proficiency and within the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) system it is important to note that the foundation phase (Grades 1 – 3) is the most important phase in the development of reading. During these three years the development of the learner's reading decoding ability is established. After this period, the readers should be able to 'read' (decode), and reading as a language and information-processing skill is taken for granted; the assumption is that once the learners have learned to decode the words, they will be able to make sense of what they are reading. This however, is a dangerous assumption, since reading comprehension does not necessarily develop automatically for all readers (Pretorius, 2002).

The most recent research perspective on reading and spelling success focuses on the early development of phonological awareness (Hogan, Catts, & Little, 2005; Roth & Baden, 2001). Focus in research currently falls on the enhancement of phonological awareness skills at a young age. Research has already shown that the better the phonological skills are, the better the reading performance is (Hogan, Catts, & Little, 2005; Roth & Baden, 2001). Enhancing phonological skills is looked upon as a preventative measure that minimises the occurrence of reading and spelling problems (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Larrivee & Catts 1999).

Although comprehensive research has been conducted regarding phonological awareness and its importance in the development of early reading and writing skills, the bulk of this research was conducted on monolingual populations (Goldsworthy, 2001). Currently, limited research data is available on the acquisition of phonological awareness in bi- or multilingual societies as is found South Africa, this leaving speech-language therapists and teachers with few guidelines when working with these populations in the South African context.

The sequence of development of phonological awareness is often different for each language (Noble, 2002). Noble (2002) conducted a study on a limited sample in a Zulu-population and concluded that a difference exists in the sequence of development of phonological awareness skills in second language English learners as alliteration developed before rhyme in the subjects studied, compared with British Standard English speakers where rhyme developed before alliteration.

Phonological awareness is influenced by both the receptive and expressive language skills of the child as these skills can be seen as the point of departure from where phonological awareness will develop (Goldsworthy, 2001). It is important to note that, if a child's language acquisition is not at an age-appropriate level, his/her phonological awareness skills will most probably not be on that level either, because phonological awareness forms a major part of the meta-linguistic component of language (Goldsworthy, 2001). Factors contributing to language acquisition may therefore play an important role in the development of phonological awareness as well (Roth & Baden, 2001).

Normal development of phonological awareness is important, as this is one of the primary determiners of subsequent reading and spelling success. Extensive research has been conducted to determine the influence of phonological awareness on reading and spelling success (Roth & Baden, 2001; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Van Kleeck et al., 1998). Reading and spelling success was found to be directly linked to the learner's phonological awareness (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck et al., 1998). Research has shown unequivocally that phonological awareness is the single most important precursor of spelling and reading success (Roth & Baden, 2001; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998).

Paucity in knowledge about phonological awareness skills of African language speakers can be ascribed to the limited amount of research that has been conducted in this field. Reality requires these learners to be on an advanced level of phonological awareness in the language of instruction – irrespective of their first language (Noble, 2002). English as LoLT is, more often than not, these learners' second or even third language. Phonological awareness must therefore be transferred or rather shifted to their second or third language.

Controversy exists regarding whether a child's phonological awareness skills in his/her mother tongue can be used (or expanded upon) to achieve the same (or a better) degree of skills in the language that is used as LoLT (Holm & Dodd, 1996). Currently three opinions are expressed in the literature: Firstly, that phonological awareness occurs cross-linguistically (Holm & Dodd, 1996). The hypothesis was formulated that individuals learning a second or third language will transfer their literacy processing skills from their first language to their second or third (Holm & Dodd, 1996). Secondly, the opinion was voiced that cross-language transfer to a second or third language will only occur in skills that are still in development in the first language (Cisero & Royer, 1995). In the third instance, Bialystok and Herman (1999) are of the opinion that research cannot at present prove beyond doubt that phonological awareness skills are transferred from the first language to second or third (Bialystok & Herman, 1999). Due to a lack in research and disagreement between researchers, guidelines for intervention with children from diverse language and culture groups in the same education system are limited and based on knowledge gained from research involving monolinguals.

Development of phonological awareness, factors contributing to its development, its important role in literacy, and the controversy regarding transfer of phonological awareness from one language to another (as illustrated in Figure 2.1) have significant implications for the educational context and pose challenges to learners from diverse language and cultural backgrounds, but all with English as the LoLT.

2.5   EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

A paradigm shift was made in the South African educational system from a content-based curriculum to an outcomes based education (OBE) curriculum. OBE was introduced in South Africa to level the playing field in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society (Naicker, 1999). This implies that the focus falls on the organization of what is essential for all learners to succeed at the termination of a learning experience (Gultig, Lubisi, Parker & Wedekind, 1998). This would ensure that the learner will be equipped with the necessary knowledge, competencies and qualities needed for success after having left the school education system (Gultig et al., 1998).

The previous content-based curriculum was content and time driven, in contrast to the current OBE curriculum which is learner and achievement driven (Olivier, 1997). Table 2.3 illustrates the differences between the content based curriculum and the OBE system (Olivier, 1997:15).

Table 2.3:   Differences between the content based curriculum and the current OBE approach to education (Olivier, 1997:15).

Content based curriculum	OBE approach
a) Rote learning	a) Critical thinking, reasoning
b) Syllabus is content driven and broken down into subjects	b) Learning is process and outcome driven, connected to real life situations
c) Textbook / worksheet bound	c) Learner and outcome centred
d) Teacher centred	d) Teacher is facilitator
e) Syllabi are rigid and non-negotiable	e) Learning programmes are seen as guides
f) Emphasis on what teacher hopes to achieve	f) Emphasis on outcomes – what learner achieves
g) Curriculum development process not open to public input	g) Wider community involvement is encouraged

It is important to note that the new educational system is inseparable from the community's understanding of and involvement in the system (Gultig et al., 1998). The OBE curriculum consists of General and Further Education and Training bands (Gultig et al., 1998). The General Education and Training band is subdivided into three conceptual school phases, namely the foundation phase (reception year to grade 3), the intermediate phase (grades 4 to 6), and the senior phase (grades 7 to 9) (Gultig et al., 1998). In the OBE system the application focuses on different levels of learning and each learner determines his/her own pace. It is imperative for learners to achieve the outcomes as stipulated for each phase (Olivier, 1997). Unfortunately, the majority of learners in the new OBE system probably come from backgrounds where parents are not able to fulfil their educational role because they cannot provide significant input, with the result that the development of higher meta-cognitive skills is not enhanced (Christie, 1991).

It is in the intermediate phase where learners are required to begin to understand detailed relationships between materials, incidents, circumstances and people. In this phase they must be able to infer the consequences of such relationships (Gultig et al., 1998). At the level of grade 4 it is assumed that phonological awareness skills are on a level where they will enhance reading and spelling skills (Broom, 2004; Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995; Torgensen & Wagner, 1994).

These learners are required to learn to read and write in a system that is outcomes-driven, in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society, and without the necessary support from the community (Dawber & Jordaan, 2002; Christie, 1991). It is clear that a learner with poor pre-literacy skills will face enormous problems and will, in all likelihood, not thrive in the system just described. The large number of learners in higher grades that are not able to read or spell on an age-appropriate level bears evidence of this statement (Pijper, 2004).

The current educational system intends to take the learner to a higher level of meta-cognitive thinking (Olivier, 1997), but it is not optimally equipped to accommodate all the country's sub-cultures. Despite the fact that learners from various cultures and language groups are housed in one class, only English is used as language of

learning and teaching in English mainstream schools. Individual cultures and customs are mostly not catered for (Cummins et al., 2005).

Ideally, provision should be made for culturally and contextually relevant education since a learner cannot be expected to participate, compete or learn effectively in a language in which he/she is not fully proficient and literate (Cummins et al., 2005; Mutasa, 2002). At present this ideal is not feasible and is as yet an unattainable prospect (Louw, as cited in Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2004).

According to Goldstein (2000), the possible mismatch of the learner-teacher relationship, due to different linguistic and cultural experiences, may have a negative influence on the learners' academic achievement. Teachers may contribute to a culture of learning by acknowledging the value of the learners' home language and cultural heritage (Goldstein, 2000).

Another factor which may contribute to the differences in the communication skills of learners may be the Afrikaans- and African-speaking teachers that are using English as LoLT in the classrooms of mainstream English schools (Du Plessis, 2005; Broom, 2004), because they are providing instruction in a language that is not their first (Van der Walt & Van Rooy, 2002, Cummins et al., 2005). The teachers' proficiency in the language of instruction and their exposure to this language outside the classroom are considered important factors in the instruction of a second or third language, and may thus influence the stimulation provided to learners in the classroom situation (Alexander, 1999).

As is clear from Figure 2.1 and from the discussion of the OBE system, the effect of this system on learners in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual, society is that they are confronted with numerous challenges on the level of reading and spelling skills, which should be addressed by a team of professionals in which a speech-language therapist would play an important role.

2.6   THE ROLE OF THE SPEECH-LANGUAGE THERAPIST

In an effort to create a nurturing learning environment, a call has been made for the provision of intervention practices that have proven to be effective (Van Kleeck et al., 1998). The responsibility to provide conclusive proof of the effectiveness of speech-language therapy falls on the speech-language therapist (Van Kleeck et al., 1998). Overwhelming evidence exists that, where a learner's phonological awareness skills improve, the learner's reading and spelling success also improves, leading to an overall improvement in general academic achievement in school (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Roth & Baden, 2001; van Kleeck et al., 1998). It is the ethical responsibility of the speech-language therapist to address these contexts and to assist in creating optimal learning situations.

Service delivery in the form of a multi-disciplinary team approach is important in the assessment and intervention of phonological awareness skills (Weinmann, 2004; Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden; 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995). Ideally, the team should consist of teachers, remedial teachers, parents, and a speech-language therapist as core-members. This core team should collaborate to achieve the ultimate goal of ensuring reading and writing success by improving the phonological awareness skills of these learners. As the team member with an understanding and knowledge of phonological awareness, the speech-language therapist is an important role-player in the multi-disciplinary team that aims to address the problem of inadequate phonological awareness (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden; 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995). The speech-language therapist's responsibility clearly lies in close *collaboration* with teachers, *assessment* and *intervention,* and, where possible, *prevention* of reading and spelling problems (Roth & Baden, 2001). These roles of the speech-language therapist are illustrated in Figure 2.2.
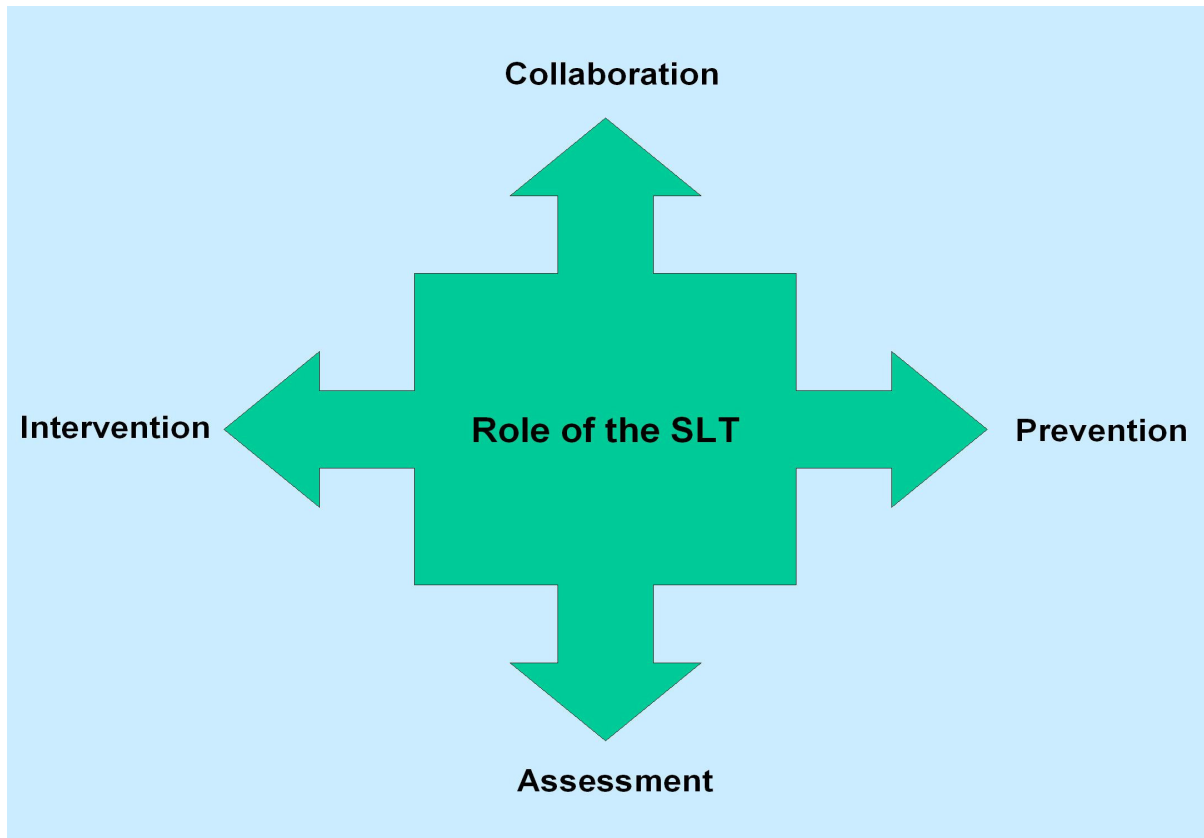
Figure 2.2: **The role of the speech language therapist as an important member of the multi-disciplinary team that focuses on phonological awareness (Based on Roth & Baden, 2001).**

The success of the *collaboration* between the speech-language therapist and teachers depends on the understanding of phonological awareness by the teachers and its pivotal role in reading and spelling (ASHA, 2001). Stoop (2002) found that the majority of teachers in Gauteng do not understand the term phonological awareness (Stoop, 2002). Many teachers may therefore not be able to apply the necessary educational principles for development of these skills in the classroom environment. Few teachers currently have the ability to integrate the unique requirements of learners in each group or class (Stoop, 2003). The present education system often results in a large number of learners in each class, further limiting individual attention to each learner. Access to the services of speech-language therapists in South Africa is limited and Stoop (2003) found that few teachers in Pretoria were even aware that the speech-language therapist can assist them in the development of programmes to enhance phonological awareness skills in the classroom setting (Noble, 2002; Stoop, 2003; Haarhof, 2001). Collaboration between teachers and speech-language

therapists is probably not optimal as far as phonological awareness skills within the multi-lingual context are concerned (Stoop, 2003; Noble, 2002; Haarhoff 2001).

Limited *prevention* of spelling and reading failure is currently a common occurrence in South Africa. This may be attributed to many different factors such as the limited number of speech-language therapists employed in public schools to assist in empowering teachers to know when to refer a learner, the lack of research on phonological awareness in the multi-cultural and multi-linguistic society of black learners in South Africa with English as LoLT, the controversy in international literature regarding phonological awareness and its transfer to an additional language, and the disparity in available resources aimed specifically at black learners (Holm & Dodd, 1996; Cisero & Royer, 1995; Bialystok & Herman, 1999).

If the prevention process in learners at risk for developing reading and spelling disorders in diverse population of South Africa does not meet its goals, *assessment* will become a necessity for the speech-language therapist before effective intervention can take place.

Assessment of the learners in question poses another major challenge to the speech-language therapist, as it can rarely take place in the learner's first language – most often assessment takes place in either English or Afrikaans. According to Weinmann (2004) this leads to a situation where the speech-language therapist in South Africa assesses the phonological awareness skills of these learners with tools that are totally inappropriate in terms of their culture and language (Weinmann, 2004). The tools presently available in South Africa were mostly developed within the American and British contexts and no adjustments were made for accommodating all individuals of the African population (Bland-Steward, 2005; Pijper, 2004). An urgent need exists for the development of culturally and linguistically relevant assessment tools for phonological awareness skills of Black learners of South Africa.

Assessment will provide the guidelines for *intervention*. In intervention there is an equally urgent need for speech-language therapists that can provide *intervention* in Black children's first language. At present, speech-language therapists have no choice other than to work on phonological awareness skills in the LoLT, and are mostly unable to assess whether the learner's language acquisition of his/her first language is completed. Intervention may be ineffective if a child has no language base upon which he/she can build his/her meta-linguistic phonological awareness skills. In South Africa few African-language speaking speech-language therapists are available – a serious shortcoming in the profession of Communication Pathology.

It is clear that the role of the speech-language therapist, namely collaboration, prevention, assessment, and intervention (as illustrated in Figure 2.2) within the multi-cultural and multi-lingual educational context pose major challenges. The importance of the role of the speech-language therapist as a team member cannot be overestimated.

2.7   CONCLUSION

Learners from backgrounds other than Afrikaans or English who are not proficient in either of these languages face enormous challenges in the South African educational system. Different races and cultures within the school system as well as socio-economic and parental influences do not provide an optimal learning environment. The learning environment is, in all probability, not conducive to the development of higher meta-linguistic skills such as phonological awareness. This situation is complicated by the effect of BSAE, dialect, ELoLT, CALP, diverse language backgrounds, and language practices in schools on the development of phonological awareness. Factors contributing to the development of phonological awareness skills, its important role in literacy, and the controversy regarding transfer of phonological awareness from one language to another language, have implications for the educational context, and pose major challenges to these learners when English is the LoLT.

Furthermore, the learners in question must function within the OBE system, which challenges them on the level of reading and spelling skills. This challenge should be addressed by a team of professionals in which a speech-language therapist plays an important role – the importance of such collaboration in prevention, assessment and intervention cannot be overemphasized.

2.8   SUMMARY

Chapter 2 addressed the phonological awareness skills of learners within the multi-cultural and multi-lingual, South African context. A review of the South African context, language-related aspects in the teaching and learning process, phonological awareness skills, the educational context and the role of the SLT was presented with the South African learner in mind. It serves as theoretical underpinning for the research and strives to draw correlations between the opinions expressed in the literature on phonological awareness.

The overview of relevant literature not only strengthens the rationale for the study, but provides a motivation for the need for immediate and urgent research in the field of phonological awareness in the South African school context. By addressing this issue the speech-language therapist will not only comply with the professional roles as proposed by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2005), but will facilitate the creation of a supportive learning environment and ultimately be an effective and ethical clinician.