

## **Comprehension and question answering of L1 bilingual Sepedi learners**

The processing of questions involves a variety of cognitive-linguistic capabilities; when comprehending and answering questions there is a coordination of numerous skills (Robertson et al, 2014; Sanders & Erickson, 2018; Singer, 1991). Additionally, the ability to answer questions about a text is the most critical demonstration of whether a text was understood or not (Beck & McKeown, 1981; Lehnert, 1977). Therefore, learners' ability to answer questions has a substantial influence on their language, literacy and academic achievement throughout their schooling (Sanders & Erickson, 2018).

This study investigates the answering of questions as means of evaluating bilingual learners' comprehension in L1 (Sepedi) and L2 (English) texts. To do this, a qualitative contrastive analysis of learners' responses in the two languages was conducted. The analysis draws on cognitive-linguistic theories of question-answering (Graesser & Franklin, 1990; Pollitt & Ahmed, 1999; Robertson, 1994; Robertson, Ullman & Mehta, 2014; Singer, 1986). In terms of the (1) extraction of the given information in the question and (2) the accuracy of the response.

Results showed that although learners were able to comprehend the questions in their L1 and L2, many of them failed to adequately understand the text. Resulting in a superficial understanding of the text in both languages, demonstrated in the accuracy of the responses (in terms of the appropriateness, completeness and presupposition of the response). This suggests that comprehending in its entirety does not only require skills that enable the learner to analyse questions into components and be able to abstract contextual cues from them. But it also requires interaction with knowledge structures that are relevant to the question. Therefore, a learner's ability to use that knowledge as a guide to understanding and analysing the connections between the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic information in the question is crucial for comprehension (Daar et al., 2015; Parnell et al., 1984; Seidl et al., 2003).

This presentation seeks to demonstrate how successful comprehension depends on the extraction of the given information in the question and the accuracy of the response. These results emphasise the need for questioning-answering techniques and a pedagogical structure that enhance learners' thinking to better scaffold their ability to comprehend and answer questions within the South African curriculum context.