Title: The Simple View of Reading: How do syntactic and morphological awareness fit in this simple model?

Authors: Rebecca Tucker, Catherine Mimeau, and Hélène Deacon

The Simple View of Reading (SVR) model postulates that reading comprehension is the product of two linguistic skills: listening comprehension and phonological decoding (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). As such, a child's reading comprehension ability should be predictable based solely on their performance on those two component skills (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). However, recent researchers have wondered whether this relatively 'simple' view is, in fact, too simple to fully account for individual differences in reading comprehension (Kirby & Savage, 2008; Language and Reading Research Consortium [LARRC], 2015). Critically, newer research has identified aspects of metalinguistic awareness that are related to reading comprehension, specifically syntactic awareness (Tunmer, Herriman, & Nesdale, 1988) and morphological awareness (Deacon, Kieffer, & Laroche, 2014). In light of this, one important question is: Do morphological and syntactic awareness offer unique contributions to reading comprehension ability beyond listening comprehension?

The current study addresses this question with a group of 85 children in Grade 4. The children completed standardized measures of reading comprehension and listening comprehension, as well as measures of syntactic awareness, morphological awareness, and a host of related control variables: phonological awareness, vocabulary, non-verbal intelligence, and word reading.

We conducted linear regression analyses to predict reading comprehension from morphological awareness, syntactic awareness, and listening comprehension controlling for age and the aforementioned control variables. The analyses showed that, on their own, morphological awareness and listening comprehension contributed to reading comprehension, but syntactic awareness did not. In examining unique contributions, only listening comprehension predicted reading comprehension beyond the controls including morphological awareness and syntactic awareness. Thus, to answer our initial research question, our results suggest the possibility there is no additional contribution to reading comprehension by these metalinguistic awareness skills beyond that of listening comprehension; such findings support the SVR model.

In our view, these results raise an additional possibility; the metalinguistic skills evaluated here might contribute to reading comprehension through their effect on language comprehension more generally (see LARRC, 2015). Therefore, we conducted additional linear regression analyses to investigate the role of morphological awareness and syntactic awareness on listening comprehension. We found that morphological awareness, but not syntactic awareness, could predict listening comprehension beyond the same set of controls. These results support the suggestion that morphological awareness impacts reading comprehension indirectly through its influence on language comprehension more generally. However, it is also possible that the similarities in the format of the tasks used to assess reading comprehension and listening comprehension may be partly responsible for the strong relationship, with similar skills being required to complete both tasks.

We will discuss the implications of our findings, as well as future directions for this line of research.

References

Deacon, S. H., Kieffer, M. J., & Laroche, A. (2014). The relation between morphological awareness and reading comprehension: Evidence from mediation and longitudinal models. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, *18*(6), 432-451. doi:10.1080/10888438.2014.926907

Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *RASE: Remedial & Special Education*, *7*(1), 6-10. doi:10.1177/074193258600700104

Language and Reading Research Consortium (LARRC) (2015). Learning to read: Should we keep things simple? *Reading Research Quarterly, 50*(2), 151-169. doi: 10.1002/rrq.99

Tunmer, W. E., Herriman, M. L., & Nesdale, A. R. (1988). Metalinguistic abilities and beginning reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *23*(2), 134-158. doi:10.2307/747799