

Reading comprehension is the ultimate goal of all models of reading development and programs of reading instruction. Understanding what one reads is at the heart of the connections between literacy and the ability to fully participate in the workforce and society. Given this importance, a comprehensive understanding of the skills that children need to comprehend what they read is necessary. Increasing evidence shows that awareness of syntax or sentence structure is central to reading comprehension. And yet, little is known of how children's awareness of sentence structures supports their reading comprehension, especially for Chinese-English bilingual children who learn the typologically distinctive languages of Chinese and English.

The proposed study aims to examine: 1) the within- and across-language relationships between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension in Chinese-English bilingual children, 2) whether the similarities and differences in syntactic structures between L1 and L2 lead to different contributions of each to reading comprehension, and 3) whether the growth/failure of syntactic awareness causes the growth/failure of reading comprehension either in L1, L2, or both.

Participants will be Hong Kong Chinese-English bilingual children. The word order and syntactic judgment and correction tasks will be used to assess children's syntactic awareness in both L1 and L2. Those children will also be administered a battery of tasks on phonological awareness, morphological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension in both L1 and L2 as well as nonverbal reasoning and working memory. These measures will be administered to all participants over three consecutive years (i.e., from grade 3 to grade 5).

This longitudinal study will clarify the potential causal relationship between syntactic awareness in one language and reading comprehension in another language in bilingual children, thereby advancing the theoretical understanding of the mechanism underlying reading comprehension in bilingual children. Our results will also shed light on how similarities and differences in syntax between L1 and L2 influence the relationship between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension within and across languages. The results will inform teachers and educators on L2 syntactic knowledge teaching by explicitly drawing students' attention to similarities and differences between L1 and L2 and reinforcing learning strategies in a coordinated way across languages. Furthermore, this study will demonstrate the link between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension difficulties in bilingual children. This will be informative on designing and implementing more effective intervention programs by incorporating syntactic skills with other language- and cognitive-related skills to screen for at-risk readers.