

Language-Related Skills that Affect Reading Comprehension

- Vocabulary/Semantic Knowledge
- Grammar and syntax
- Background knowledge
- Construction of a mental model
- Working memory
- Attention
- Inferencing
- Comprehension monitoring
- Nonverbal visual-spatial skills

Vocabulary Knowledge

- Includes words and idiomatic expressions
- Verbal portion of traditional IQ tests or VIQ subtests
 - Used in countless studies in the reading research as an index of language skills
- Speech-language batteries are better sources
- Assessed informally and the problem of the two lexicons
 - Every day-usage lexicon
 - Broader semantic lexicon
- For EL students-longer trajectory

Grammar and Syntax

- Essential for language comprehension
- Typically, not a separate language issue
 - Usually co-occurs with vocabulary concerns
- Can be assessed by a speech-language pathologist

Background Knowledge

- Two general types
 - General background knowledge
 - A few tests available on normed test batteries
 - Specific topical knowledge
 - Not as easy to assess

Creating a Mental Model

- Situation model
- Central to language comprehension and thus to reading comprehension
- Based on vocabulary, grammar and syntax, and background knowledge
- Requires inferencing
- There are not many direct tests for this
 - Assess indirectly via testing the necessary components

Working memory

- Seems to correlate with all types of learning
- The temporary store of information while that information is being integrated into meaningful units of receptive understanding
- Can negatively affect language comprehension among those with strong vocabulary
- Many subtests available

Attention

- Also seems to influence all types of learning
- May influence listening comprehension differently than reading comprehension
 - Distinguish between listening comprehension and language comprehension
- There are many assessments/rating scales for attention

Inferencing

- Central to language comprehension
 - Much information in communication is assumed and not explicitly supplied
- Is necessary for developing a mental model
- Requires vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge
- Some subtests from speech-language batteries

Comprehension Monitoring

- Awareness of one's understanding
- Not much by way of formalized assessment
- Assessed informally
 - Stop and ask
 - Deliberately include something nonsensical

Nonverbal Visual-Spatial-Perceptual Skills (VSP)

- Least studied area
- However, studies have trickled into the research literature from the 1950s to today
- Correlational data
- Prediction data
- Training data
- Several tests available

English Learners

- Often function like hyperlexics
- Word-level reading grows faster than reading comprehension
- Their difficulties with many language-related elements mentioned above are due to their status as English Learners

Considering Language Comprehension Difficulties

- The above elements are all potential contributors to language difficulties
- Most of these can be directly assessed
- Such assessment should accompany reading comprehension tests in students with reading comprehension difficulties
 - Focus instructional and intervention efforts