

Abstract for thesis entitled:

Syntax in reading comprehension and writing composition
in Chinese children

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the role of syntactic awareness in text reading comprehension and writing composition in Hong Kong Chinese children. Three studies were included. In Study 1, the question of whether syntactic awareness uniquely correlated with text reading comprehension in Hong Kong Chinese fifth graders was examined. A total of 89 fifth graders from two primary schools were recruited (45 boys, and 44 girls, mean age = 9.15 years, $SD = .43$). These children were administered a set of cognitive and linguistic measures including two tasks on syntactic awareness, i.e. syntactic judgment/correction task and conjunction cloze task. The results of Study 1 indicated that syntactic skills, especially knowledge of conjunctive word usage, accounted for unique variance in text reading comprehension in Chinese children even when age, nonverbal IQ, phonological awareness, morphological awareness, semantic knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, morphosyntactic knowledge and working memory as well as word reading were statistically controlled.

The purpose of Study 2 was twofold. First, it aimed to investigate the longitudinal predictive effect of syntactic awareness on text reading comprehension

in Hong Kong Chinese children. Second, the bidirectional relationship between syntactic awareness and text reading comprehension was explored. A total of 129 children (50 boys and 79 girls), from a ten-year longitudinal study, were sampled. They were tested on a set of cognitive and linguistic measures including the same two syntactic tasks used as those in Study 1. Results showed that syntactic awareness was longitudinally predictive of text reading comprehension, even when the contributions of children's age, nonverbal and verbal abilities, phonological awareness, and morphological awareness were taken into account. In addition, children's early reading comprehension was significantly correlated with their growth in syntactic awareness, suggesting a bidirectional relationship between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension.

In Study 3, the relationship between syntactic awareness and writing composition was examined in Hong Kong Chinese children. The participants and measures were the same as those in Study 2. In addition, those children were administered a writing composition task both at age 11 and 12. Results revealed that syntactic awareness was significantly predictive of children's writing, controlling for the contribution of age, nonverbal and verbal abilities, phonological awareness and morphological awareness. Children's performance in early writing compositions was also significantly associated with their later syntactic skills. This may suggest a reciprocal relationship between syntactic awareness and writing. In addition, syntactic error analyses revealed that children made certain syntactic errors in sentence construction and these errors were not random.

Findings in this study not only help us unravel the relations between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension and writing composition, contributing to a fuller understanding of the foundation of Chinese reading

comprehension and writing composition, but also provide a potentially useful direction for the diagnosis of reading and writing difficulties for Chinese children.

Key Words: syntactic awareness, reading comprehension, writing composition, Chinese children

摘要

本研究主要探討句法意識在香港兒童篇章閱讀理解及篇章寫作中的作用，包括三個研究。研究一主要探討句法意識是否能夠獨立預測香港兒童的篇章閱讀理解能力。受試者為89名母語為粵語的香港五年級兒童。實驗中，受試者接受一系列認知及語言相關的個別測試。主要包括智力測驗、中文篇章閱讀理解測驗、語音意識測驗、語素意識測驗、語義知識測驗、句法意識測驗、記憶能力測驗及詞彙能力測驗。相關分析表明兩種句法意識測驗顯著與兒童中文閱讀理解能力相關。回歸分析表明即使在控制了兒童在智力水平，語音意識，語義意識，語素意識，詞彙能力及工作記憶能力的差異的情況下，句法意識，尤其是連詞應能力，仍能夠顯著地預測兒童在中文篇章理解的成绩。

研究二應用追蹤研究探討句法意識在中文閱讀中的重要作用及中文篇章理解與句法意識是否是雙向相關。即兒童在低一年級的句法意識是否可以用來預測兒童在高一年的篇章閱讀理解成績及兒童在低一年級的閱讀理解成績是否可以用來預測兒童在高一年級的句法能力。相關分析表明兒童在五年級的句法能力顯著與兒童六年級的閱讀理解能力相關，五年級的閱讀理解能力显著与儿童六年级的句法能力相关。回歸分析表明，兒童在五年級的句法能力能夠顯著預測兒童在六年級的篇章閱讀理解成绩。路徑分析表明兒童的句法能力與篇章閱讀理解能力是相互影響的關係。即兒童的句法能力可以用來預測兒童的篇章閱讀理解成绩，同時兒童的篇章閱讀理解成绩同樣可以用來測兒童的句法能力。

研究三主要探討句法意識在兒童篇章寫作中的重要作用。研究三主要採用追蹤研究的方法。受試者與測量任務同研究二相同，這些兒童同時接受了寫作能力測驗。句法任務包括句法判斷和連詞填寫任務。同時，我們還採用了句法錯誤分析的方法來探討兒童寫

作中句法能力的发展。相關分析表明兩種句法能力測驗顯著與兒童的寫作能力相關。回歸分析表明，兒童的句法能力是兒童寫作能力的一個顯著預測因子。路徑分析表明兒童的句法能力與兒童的寫作能力是相互影響的關係。即兒童的句法能力可以用來預測兒童的寫作能力，同時兒童的寫作能力同樣可以用來測兒童的句法能力。句法錯誤分析表明兒童在語序，詞性，成份完整性及標點符號的使用上表現出規律性的語法錯誤。本研究揭示了句法能力在兒童篇章閱讀理解及篇章寫作中的重要作用，為中文篇章閱讀及篇章寫作的困難兒童的診斷提供了重要參考。