

## **Abstract**

This thesis investigated the differences between reading Chinese characters and Chinese words. To look at characters and words in a comparative way, a total of 973 Hong Kong children (893 in Study 1; 80 in Study 2) in Grades 0-5 were asked to complete tasks tapping on single character reading, word reading and cognitive-linguistic skills. Study 1 considered reading accuracies of target characters in isolation and when embedded in two-character words. Results showed that children performed significantly better in character-alone contexts, which were inconsistent with previous findings. Several experimental limitations were found accountable. Study 2 examined the roles of character reading and word reading in predicting dyslexia. Results showed that character reading was significantly better for predicting dyslexia. Moreover, morphological awareness, among other cognitive-linguistic variables, was found to have the greatest correlation with character reading. When both were entered into logistic regression model, dyslexia prediction accuracy was improved. This thesis provided clinical and educational implications. Theoretically, results supported the importance of having Chinese reading models depending on both character and word units. Practically, results suggested that character and word reading, while sharing some cognitive mechanisms, were different reading units and had to be considered separately under the context of cognitive-linguistic processes.

*Keywords:* Chinese reading, characters, words, dyslexia, morphological awareness