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Predicting Reading Comprehension in Spanish: The Evidence for the Simple View Model

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Abstract : Spanish is a more transparent language than English given that it has more direct correspondences between sounds and letters. It has become important to understand how decoding and linguistic comprehension contribute to reading comprehension in the framework of the widely known Simple View Model. This study aimed to identify the level of prediction by these two components in a sample of 1st to 4th grade children attending two schools in central Mexico (one public and one private). Within each school, ten children were randomly selected in each grade level, and their parents were asked about reading habits and socioeconomic information. In total, 79 children completed three standardized tests measuring decoding (pseudo-word reading), linguistic comprehension (understanding of paragraphs) and reading comprehension using subtests from the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-Spanish, Fourth Edition, and the Test de Lectura y Escritura en Español (LEE). The data were analyzed using hierarchical regression, with decoding as a first step and linguistic comprehension as a second step. Results showed that decoding accounted for 19.2% of the variance in reading comprehension, while linguistic comprehension accounted for an additional 10%, adding up to 29.2% of variance explained: F (2, 75)= 15.45, p <.001. Socioeconomic status derived from parental questionnaires showed a statistically significant association with the type of school attended, X2 (3, N= 79) = 14.33, p =.002. Nonetheless when analyzing the Simple View components, only decoding differences were statistically significant (t = -6.92, df = 76.81, p < .001, two-tailed); reading comprehension differences were also significant (t = -3.44, df = 76, p = .001, two-tailed). When socioeconomic status was included in the model, it predicted a 5.9% unique variance, even when already accounting for Simple View components, adding to a 35.1% total variance explained. This three-predictor model was also significant: F (3, 72)= 12.99, p <.001. In addition, socioeconomic status was significantly correlated with the amount of non-textbook books parents reported to have at home for both adults (rho = .61, p<.001) and children (rho= .47, p<.001). Results converge with a large body of literature finding socioeconomic differences in reading comprehension; in addition this study suggests that these differences were also present in decoding skills. Although linguistic comprehension differences between schools were expected, it is argued that the test used to collect this variable was not sensitive to linguistic differences, since it came from a test to diagnose clinical language disabilities. Even with this caveat, results show that the components of the Simple View Model can predict less than a third of the variance in reading comprehension in Spanish. However, the results also suggest that a fuller model of reading comprehension is obtained when considering the family's socioeconomic status, given the potential differences shown by the socioeconomic status association with books at home, factors that are particularly important in countries where inequality gaps are relatively large.

Keywords : decoding, linguistic comprehension, reading comprehension, simple view model, socioeconomic status, Spanish
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