

# For English learners, reading isn't always

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(PhysOrg.com) -- An influential model for teaching reading and comprehension to English learners doesn't work well for Cantonese-speaking children, according to new research from the University of California, Davis, School of Education.

Yuuko Uchikoshi, an assistant professor of education at UC Davis, will present her findings on Monday, April 11, at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans.

Uchikoshi studied the "Simple View of Reading" model, which posits that reading comprehension depends on an understanding of the meaning of spoken words and, more importantly, an ability to "decode," or sound out, written words.

The model is used successfully to teach Spanish speakers to read English, probably because Spanish and English share a common writing system and many similar words.

But the system fell short for [children](#) who speak Cantonese as their first language.

"For Cantonese speakers, we also need to focus on vocabulary – and the earlier, the better," she said.

This vocabulary-building should begin as early as preschool, so that English learners have similar vocabularies to native English speakers by the time they begin to learn to read, according to Uchikoshi.

The findings have important implications for practice and policy, according to Uchikoshi. “In multicultural societies such as the U.S., having a research-based model of second-language reading comprehension is vital to developing curricula that can address the needs of children from different backgrounds,” she said.

“We need more research on English learners. The bulk of what we have is on Spanish-speaking kids, but we need to focus on some of the others as well.”

Provided by UC Davis

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