Myths of Foreign Language Learning and Learning Disabilities

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Boston University
Boston, MA
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Outline of Presentation

• I. Setting the stage for considering FL learning problems
• II. Some history about FL learning problems
• III. Is there a “disability” for FL learning?
  The problem with LD/Discrepancy definitions
• IV. Research about course waivers and substitutions
• V. Myths of FL Learning and LDs
• VI. FL Reading “Disability”: The Simple View
• VII. Best Practices—Dos and Don’ts
Contact information

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• I will send you copies of any study mentioned today

• I encourage you to read the papers published on this topic


• Sparks, R. (2009). If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll wind up somewhere else: The case of “foreign language learning disability.” *Foreign Language Annals, 42*, 7-26.
Before I begin

• Be patient with me

• In order to understand why there are “Myths (beliefs) about FL Learning and LDs,” one has to be aware of the facts (evidence) about FL learning and LDs

• The first parts of my talk present the evidence (facts)

• The last parts of my talk present the myths (beliefs) and the best practices
Themes of my presentation based on the Evidence

• 1. Language learning runs along a continuum from superior to average to poor oral and written language skills (no “cut point” for a “disability”)

• 2. To have problems with FL learning, one must have substantial impairments in oral/written L1 skills (not math skills)

• 3. To have a LD in L1, one must have substantial impairments (below average) L1 skills (next slide)
Substantial Impairment = Below average academic skills
Themes of my presentation based on the Evidence

• 4. If you do not exhibit substantial impairments in L1 skills, you will likely pass FL courses (assuming effort, attendance, completing the work, etc.)

• 5. There is no empirical evidence for the idea of a “disability” for FL learning

• 6. Likewise, there is no valid diagnostic procedure to identify who will exhibit inordinate problems with FL learning prior to enrolling in FL classes
Themes of my presentation based on the Evidence

• 7. There is no empirical (scientific) basis on which an individual classified as LD should be provided with a FL waiver/substitution but a low-achieving (non-LD) FL learner should be denied a FL waiver/substitution

• Why not?

• Because evidence has found no cognitive, L1 academic skills, FL aptitude, and FL outcome differences between students classified as LD enrolled in FL courses vs. low achieving, non-LD students in FL courses
I. Setting the Stage for Consideration of FL Learning Problems
Setting the stage

- Questions we have investigated over 30+ years
- Why do students exhibit FL learning problems?
- What are the primary differences between good, average, and poor FL learners?
- Are there native language (L1) differences between LD/low achieving students enrolled in FL courses?
- Which students most likely exhibit FL learning problems?
- What are best predictors of FL learning?
- Are there other factors (anxiety, motivation) that play a causal role in FL problems?
Setting the stage

• Can we define and diagnose a disability for FL learning?
• Are there different FL outcomes (grades, proficiency) between LD and low-achieving, non-LD FL learners?
• Is there cross-linguistic transfer of L1 to L2 skills?
• Is learning to read a FL similar to learning to read L1? (Simple View of Reading)
• Does aptitude for language learning play an important role in learning a FL?
• How well do U.S. students achieve in FL courses compared to native speakers of the target language?
Setting the stage

- What is a Learning Disability (LD)?
- LD refers to academic impairment
- There are only 3 types of LDs (DSM-5)
  - Reading Disorder (often referred to as dyslexia)
  - Written Language Disorder (not just spelling problems)
  - Mathematics Disorder (unrelated to FL learning)
- There must be a “substantial impairment” (below average skills) to be classified as LD (next slide)
Substantial Impairment = Below average academic skills
Setting the stage

- What LD is NOT?
- Reversals of letters and numbers
- “Slow” reader, writer, etc.
- Poor handwriting (“dysgraphia”)
- Speech and language impairments
- AD/HD (our research)
- “Processing” problems” (auditory, visual processing)
- Sensory deficits
- Nonverbal learning problems (NVLD)
- Eye movements (tracking, scanning, focusing)
II. Some History about Research into FL Learning Problems
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• The notion of a continuum of language skills underlies all of our work
• At first, we viewed FL learning problems as a conceptually distinct disorder
• But, we were wrong—Why?
• 1. By 1993-94, our studies found FL learning problems resulted from L1 problems (oral, written language)
• 2. There were no differences in the language skills of low-achieving and LD students in FL courses
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• **All** skills, including FL learning and FL aptitude, run along a **continuum** from very good (99th percentile) to average (25-75th percentile) to very poor (1st percentile)

• Individuals can achieve at difference places along the continuum in different skills

• **Individual differences are normal and expected**

• Next slide
Academic achievement skills continuum

Standard Score

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<th>70</th>
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SD

Reading/Math-Katie
Reading/Math-Sally
Reading/Math-Bobby
Reading/Math-Susie
Reading/Math-John

Average Range

- Average Range
Standard Scores: 70
SD: -2
Percentile Ranks: 2

\[ M = 100, \ SD = 15 \]
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

- Why is **continuum notion** of language skills important?
- Many educators believe that all individuals have same language learning (FL) aptitude (potential)
- If so, then the reasons for FL learning problems are not language learning skill differences
- Instead, hypothesize that poor FL learning is due to low motivation, high anxiety, lack of effort, etc.
- These variables are related to language learning skills, but have not been found to be causal
- Next slide
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• In the early 90s, new term, “foreign language learning disability” (FLLD), appeared in the LD literature.
• In the U.S., it very quickly became popular to associate FL learning problems with LD.
• Some suggested FLLD is a conceptually distinct disorder (Arries, Shaw, Smith), similar to reading or math disability.
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

- By mid-1990s, universities explicitly linked LD and FL learning by:
  - assuming students classified as LD will have FL problems
  - making substitutions/waivers of FL requirement available
  - awarding course substitutions only to students w/ LD label

- In US, students receive waiver/course substitution not for excelling in FL, but because they are classified as LD

- By late 1990s, LD label for college students became valuable because as students were waived from FL courses, LD diagnoses increased, number of waivers increased
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• **Late 80s and early 90s**, we were conducting research with students, both LD and non-LD, who had FL learning problems.

• **By 1993**, our findings revealed *no* differences in IQ, L1 skills, FL aptitude, L2 course outcomes between LD and low-achieving, non-LD students in FL courses.

• **From 1991-2018**, *no* studies have found differences on cognitive, L1 achievement, FL aptitude, and FL outcome measures between secondary/postsecondary students classified as LD enrolled in FL courses vs. low-achieving students with FL learning problems not classified as LD.
As a result of our empirical findings, we hypothesized that FL learning occurs along a continuum of very good to very poor FL learners.

Likewise, because the evidence showed that FL learning exists along a continuum of language learning, any diagnosis of a FL “disability” will be arbitrary and depend entirely on where the line ("cut point") is drawn.

To date, no studies have refuted this hypothesis and the empirical evidence has supported the hypothesis.

Next slides as examples of “arbitrary” cut point.
Arbitrary cut point for “FL disability”—30th percentile

MLAT
WJ-III Written Lang
WJ-III Vocabulary
WJ-III Reading

Standard Score
SD

70
85
100
115
130

-2
-1
+1
+2

Average Range

X

Arbitrary cut point for “FL disability”—30th percentile
Arbitrary cut point for “FL disability”—20th percentile

MLAT
WJ-III Written Lang
WJ-III Vocabulary
WJ-III Reading

Standard Score
70
85
100
115
130

SD
-2
-1
0
+1
+2

Average Range

X

Arbitrary cut point for “FL disability”—20th percentile
Arbitrary cut point for “FL disability”—40\textsuperscript{th} percentile
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• So, which “cut point” is the correct one?
• There is *no* empirical evidence that *any* “cut point” is correct, i.e., below $X^{th}$ percentile, all fail FL courses
• Likewise, there is *no* evidence that only students classified as LD will have FL learning problems
• *Lots* of students have FL learning problems, *most not LD*
• Evidence shows that students *without substantial impairments* in L1 skills—LD and not LD—pass FL courses
Summary-History @ FL Learning Problems

• What were the important lessons we learned from our research with students who had FL learning problems?
• 1. That L1 problems were related to FL learning problems
• 2. That a diagnosis of LD is not important for explaining who has FL learning problems
• 3. Students who fail FLs display substantial impairments in L1 skills (reading, writing, oral language) (not math)
III. Is there a “Disability” for FL learning? (The Problem with LDs and Discrepancy)
Is there a “disability” for FL learning?

- In 2006, Sparks reviewed the empirical evidence and found that evidence does not support the notion of a FL “disability”
- He expanded on the paper in 2009
- Sparks, R. (2009). If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll wind up somewhere else: The case of FLLD. *Foreign Language Annals, 42*, 7-26.
Is there a “disability”?

- The problem with “FL learning disability” is the term, Learning Disability (LD)
- The primary problem with the LD concept is (and continues to be) its ambiguity
- The term LD has never had a logically consistent, easily operationalized, and empirically valid definition and classification (diagnostic) system
- Researchers, diagnosticians, and practitioners have never agreed on definition and diagnostic criteria
Learning Disabilities as a Subset Of School Failure: The OverSophistication of a Concept

BOBALGOZZINE
JAMES YSSELDYKE

Exceptional Children
The Futile Search for a Theory of Learning Disabilities

Benita A. Blachman

Swanson has written a provocative paper that raises important issues for both the researcher and practitioner. It would be hard to argue with the basic assumptions on which the paper is built—specifically, that theo-

quently, supporting the development of theory within that context. Readers with limited knowledge of the research in this area are referred to the excellent topical review series developed by Swanson (1987a, 1987b) on
THE POLITICS OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

The field of learning disabilities (LD) is inherently political. That politics is integral to the LD field should not be surprising since LD was, to a significant extent, a political creation. The development and implementation of LD programs and services required significant political action and commitment.

THE SCIENTIFIC SIDE OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

The LD Concept
We have argued that the problems in the LD field are primarily intellectual in nature and are evidenced in a failure to achieve a real understanding of LD (see Kavale & Forness, 1985, 1995). This failure is not the result of a lack of the
THE FUTURE OF A MISTAKE: WILL DISCREPANCY MEASUREMENT CONTINUE TO MAKE THE LEARNING DISABILITIES FIELD A PSEUDOSCIENCE?

Keith E. Stanovich

KEITH E. STANOvICH, Ph.D., is professor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Over the past two decades I have written several articles about assessment procedures in the field of learning disabilities (LD) (Stanovich, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1996, 1999a, 2000). Many of those articles were centered around the issue of aptitude-achievement discrepancy as a defining feature of a learning disability. In dealing with this issue again here and talking about its future, I was drawn to the title of this essay. The title advertises my frustration with the field on this issue.

intelligence test performance. In the following, I confine my comments to reading disability, the most common type of learning disability, and the one where my expertise is concentrated.

In the October 2004 issue of the APA Monitor, a leading figure in LD diagnosis is quoted as saying that “the intelligence test is our stethoscope, like it or not” (Kersting, 2004, p. 54), even though there is no research consensus that LD diagnosis using intelligence as a
Learning Disability: What the Heck Is It?

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By Emerson Dickman

May 2017
So, what is a LD?

• Because LD field could not agree on what a LD is, **discrepancy** became operational definition of LD in 1978
• Discrepancy (**IQ vs. achievement**) between one’s IQ score and one’s achievement on standardized tests
• Thus, if achievement was not consistent with intellectual ability on a standardized IQ test, LD was often diagnosed
• In U.S., states used different discrepancy criteria (15, 20, 22.5, 30 standard score points) that resulted in **mass confusion** (move from state to state, LD or not LD)
Example of student with IQ-achievement discrepancy

IQ 120
Writing 96
Reading 95
Math 115
Example of same student without reference to IQ

Writing 96
Reading 95
Math 115

Standard Score
70 85 100 115 130

SD
-2 -1 +1 +2

Average Range

So, what is a LD?

- By late 90s, researchers had falsified discrepancy as the marker for diagnosing LD for several reasons....
- 1. Discrepancies are normal/expected in everyone
- 2. IQ not good predictor of learning to read and write
- 3. Diagnoses of LD are arbitrary, based on judgment
- 4. Diagnoses of LD ignored the assessment data
- 5. Many (most) individuals classified as LD exhibit average achievement in reading, spelling, writing
Consequences of ignoring research

- Despite evidence, use of IQ-achievement discrepancy as the primary diagnostic marker has persisted even after DSM-5 discontinued discrepancy as criterion
Summary-Is there a FL disability?

• To know whether there might be a FL disability, we must agree on the definition and diagnostic criteria for LD

• But, the LD field does not agree on the definition and diagnostic criteria for LD

• IQ/achievement discrepancy still used even though DSM-5 eliminated its use in 2015

• If we don’t agree on definition and diagnostic criteria for LD, e.g., for L1 reading and writing disabilities, we will have great difficulty with a definition of and diagnostic criteria for a FL “disability”
IV. Research with students classified as LD who received waivers and substitutions
IV. Research with students classified as LD

- From 1991-2008, our studies asked whether students classified as LD in FL classes......
- 1. exhibit weaker cognitive, L1 achievement skills, and FL aptitude than low-achieving (non-LD) FL learners?
- 2. with varying degrees of IQ-achievement discrepancy exhibit lower scores on IQ and L1 skill measures than LD students who do not have IQ-ach disc?
- 3. who w/draw from/do not pass FL courses exhibit cognitive, L1 achievement, or demographic differences when compared to LD students who pass FL courses?
- 4. display worse FL outcomes (grades, proficiency in the FL) than low-achieving students not classified as LD?
Research with students classified as LD

• In all of our studies, we found that students classified as LD in FL courses…….
• 1. Exhibited no differences in L1 skills and L2 aptitude when compared to low-achieving, non-LD students
• 2. With/without IQ-achievement discrepancies exhibited no differences in L1 achievement and FL aptitude
• 3. who withdrew from or did not pass FL courses exhibited no L1 achievement differences compared to students classified as LD who passed FL courses
• 4. displayed no differences in FL outcomes (course grades, FL proficiency) to low-achieving, non-LD FL learners
L1 and L2 skills, L2 aptitude of high-achieving, low-achieving, and LD students in FL classes
Research with students classified as LD

• In addition, we conducted a number of studies with postsecondary students classified as LD who received waivers and course substitutions for FL requirement.

• We also compared students who had received waivers and substitutions with students classified as LD who had fulfilled the FL requirement by passing FL courses.

• *Journal of Learning Disabilities, Foreign Language Annals, Language Learning, Annals of Dyslexia*
Research with students classified as LD

• Findings showed LD students with waivers/substitutions:
  • 1. Did not generally have problems w/FL learning prior to granting of waiver/substitution
  • 2. Had passed FL courses in high school and college with average to above average grades
  • 3. Did not exhibit different learning profiles or more severe FL problems than LD students who had fulfilled LD requirement
  • 4. Did not exhibit achievement profiles distinct from those with less severe or no IQ-achievement discrepancy
  • 5. Achieved WP grades if they withdrew from FL courses
Research with students classified as LD

• 6. Passed FL courses to fulfill FL requirement if waiver or substitution request was denied
• 7. Most did not exhibit substantial impairments (below average) in L1 skills
• 8. Were not diagnosed as LD until college when confronted with fulfilling FL requirement (60-65%)
• 9. Displayed NO significant differences on testing measures (IQ, L1 academics, GPA, ACT/SAT) when compared to LD students who passed FL courses
LD who received waivers vs. LD who did not receive waivers

LDs no waivers MLAT
LDs with waivers MLAT
LDs no waivers
LDs with waivers

Standard Score
70
85
100
115
130

SD
-2
-1
+1
+2

Average Range
LD who received waivers—varying degrees of IQ-achievement discrepancies

- >2.0 SD discrepancy
- 1.5-2.0 SD discrepancy
- 1.0-1.5 SD discrepancy
- < 1.0 SD discrepancy

Average Range
Summary of research with students classified as LD

• In sum, studies’ results suggested LD students who received waivers and substitutions....

• 1. Did not have unique cognitive and L1 achievement profiles on measures of oral/written language

• 2. Did not exhibit FL learning problems different from LD students who passed FL courses

• 3. Did not exhibit substantial impairments in L1 skills
Summary of research with students classified as LD

- 4. In most cases, had no documented history of FL learning problems
- 5. Had passed all previous FL courses
- 6. Had withdrawn with passing grades from FL courses
- So, why did these students receive a waiver/substitution?
- Were provided with waivers and substitutions based: a) requested the waiver, and b) had a LD diagnosis
V. Myths about FL learning and LDs
V. Myths about FL learning and LDs

• Despite the evidence, U.S. universities and high schools:
  --- continue to use the term FLLD
  --- associate FL learning problems with LDs
  --- grant course waivers and substitutions

• Recent papers by Wight (2014), Lys et al. (2014), Difino and Lombardino (2004) highlight extent of this practice

• Random search of websites of 50 U.S. colleges found that all allowed waivers and substitutions but only for students classified as LD (in contradiction of all evidence)
Myths about FL learning and LDs

• Why is evidence on FL and LDs ignored? (2006, 2009)
• Misunderstanding and misuse of LD concept (discrepancy)
• Students gain access to course accommodations and modifications, thus pleasing parents (and students)
• Diagnosticians benefit from increased referrals
• Attorneys benefit from larger client base for lawsuits
• High schools/colleges benefit from avoiding lawsuits
• High schools /colleges benefit from increased enrollment
• Schools save inordinate number of hours on meetings and conferences to discuss students’ issues with FLs
• Professional organizations benefit from increased visibility and funding as a result of advocacy
What are the Myths about FL learning and LD?

• I was inspired to write this paper after reading Julian Elliott’s paper in *LD Australia*: “The Dyslexia Debate : Some Key Myths” (Vol. 46, Nos. 1 and 2, May 2014)

• Elliott is co-author of new book, *The Dyslexia Debate*, with Elena Grigorenko

What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- **Myth #1**
  - Students who are classified as LD will exhibit FL learning problems and either fail or withdraw from FL courses
  - Most LD students pass FL courses without accommodations
  - Students classified as LD pass/fail/struggle with FL courses at **same rates** as low-achieving FL students
  - LD should **not** be used as the *sine qua non (absolutely needed)* to determine who will have FL learning problems
  - Student’s language skills should be examined (more later)
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• **Myth #2**
  
  *Withdrawal from FL courses is evidence of an undiagnosed LD, problems with FL learning, and/or a “disability” for FL learning*
  
  • Students classified as LD who withdraw have WP-passing
  
  • Most who are assigned WP grades have *passed* previous FL courses with A, B, C grades
  
  • No differences in language skills, cognitive ability, college entrance exam scores, and FL aptitude between LD classified students and low-achieving FL learners who withdrew from FL courses
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- **Myth #3**

  - Students classified as LD in FL courses exhibit weaker language learning skills and lower FL aptitude than low-achieving, non-LD students

  - There are no significant differences in L1 reading, spelling, writing, vocabulary, memory, phonological processing skills between students classified as LD and low-achieving FL learners

  - LD students are *supposed* to be different from low-achieving, non-LD students—hallmark of LD—but are not
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• **Myth #4**

• *Students classified as LD who are granted course substitutions or waivers exhibit low (below average) levels of language learning ability and are different from students classified as LD who pass FL courses*

• Students classified as LD with waivers/substitutions exhibit *average (or better)* native language skills

• **No differences** between L1 skills, cognitive ability, college entrance scores (SAT, ACT) between students classified as LD who were granted waivers and LD students who passed FL courses (important finding—why?)
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• **Myth #5**

• A low score on a FL aptitude test and/or discrepancy between IQ and FL aptitude scores are evidence of a LD and/or potential FL learning problems

• Low score on a FL aptitude test (MLAT) does **not** predict failure in FL courses, or whether student will need accommodations to pass FL course

• Students with low FL aptitude scores generally pass FL courses

• Students classified as LD and low-achieving FL learners do **equally well** on FL aptitude tests and achieve **similar outcomes** in FL courses and FL proficiency
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- **Myth #6** (most problematic myth--old habits die hard, or like zombies, don’t die at all!)

- Discrepancy between IQ and academic achievement is evidence of a LD as well as a “disability” for FL learning

- Students classified as LD with/w-out discrepancies in FL courses exhibited no differences in L1 skills, FL aptitude, FL grades, and FL proficiency

- Discrepancy is irrelevant in predicting who will experience problems with FL learning

- Most students with discrepancies do well in FL courses
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- What about the gifted/LD (G/LD) concept?
- High IQ (120-130) and average achievement (95-105)
- Have discrepancy but no academic impairment
- Lovett & Sparks (2010, 2013) have examined G/LD notion
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• Despite its intuitively appealing nature, very little research on the G/LD concept
• In our literature review, only 46 empirical studies over 30-35 years
• Numerous theoretical and psychometric problems
• Wide variability in Gifted and LD criteria
• Dubious methods of LD diagnoses
• Lack of academic impairment in G/LD participants, most of whom had average academic skills
• No studies regarding G/LD students and FL learning
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- So, is there such a person who is Gifted and LD?
- Yes, but not in the way that is traditionally thought
- If IQ is not used, then the use of the Gifted term is not necessary—either LD or not LD (substantial impairments)
- But, let’s use IQ and do a thought experiment
- We will use IQ-achievement discrepancy to illustrate the problems with the G/LD concept
Gifted, but not LD (why not?)

R.L., Age 18-5

WAIS-III

FSIQ = 136
VIQ = 120
PIQ = 133

WJ-III Ach

Broad Rdg. = 102
Reading Fluency = 95
Letter-Word Rdg. = 99
Passage Comprehension = 105
Broad Math = 110
Broad Written Language = 98
Gifted and LD (why?)

J.S., Age 18-5

**WAIS-III**
- FSIQ = 136
- VIQ = 120
- PIQ = 133

**WJ-III Ach**
- Broad Rdg. = 80
- Reading Fluency = 73
- Letter-Word Rdg. = 82
- Passage Comprehension = 83
- Broad Math = 110
- Broad Written Language = 85
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- Myth #7 (second most problematic myth—occurs because of the lack of an agreed upon definition of LD and lack of empirical criteria for diagnosing LD)
- Students in FL classes who are classified as LD meet criteria for the LD diagnosis
- Sparks, Ganschow, and colleagues have conducted a number of studies on this topic
- Here is a summary of a few studies
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• We used absolute minimum (very loose) criterion for IQ-achievement discrepancy (1.0 SD)

• Of students classified as LD who received FL waivers, substitutions, accommodations.......

• 1. Only 40% met criterion, and only 24% had academic impairment—Sparks, Philips, & Ganschow (1996)

• 2. Only 43% met criterion, and only 16% had academic impairment—Sparks & Javorsky (1999)

• 3. Only 44% met criterion, and only 16% had academic impairment (Sparks, Philips, & Javorsky, 2002)
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• In studies investigating college students receiving accommodations in colleges and universities......
• 1. 65% did not meet minimum criterion for LD, few had academic impairments (Sparks & Lovett, 2009)
• 2. 60 % did not meet minimum criterion for LD (Sparks & Lovett, 2013)
• 3. 80+% did not meet minimum criterion for LD (Weis, Sykes, & Unadkat, 2012; Weis, Speridakos, 2014, Weis et al., 2017)
• 4. 70+% did not meet minimum criterion for LD (Harrison & Larochette, 2008)
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• In the U.S., large numbers of students classified as LD do not meet any criteria for LD diagnosis

• In the U.S., many students classified as LD do not have academic impairments, i.e., deficits in L1 reading, writing, spelling

• In the U.S., most students with high IQs (> 115) classified as LD (or “dyslexic”) do not have L1 reading, spelling, and writing impairments

• But in U.S., the LD (or “dyslexic”) label is valuable because it leads to FL accommodations, waivers, etc.
Which students merits concern for FL learning? (Scores are $M = 100$, $SD = 15$)

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<td>102</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Academic achievement skills continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Score</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>115</th>
<th>130</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average Range
VI. FL Reading “Disability: The Simple View
(Or, Who has a FL “Disability”? )
FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View


• Sparks, R., Patton, J., & Luebbers, J. (2018). For US students, L2 reading comprehension is hard because L2 listening comprehension is hard, too. Hispania, 101 (2), 183-210

FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

- Random sample of US students completing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year Spanish courses in high school
- Spanish I (n = 293), Spanish II (n = 268), Spanish III (n = 51)
- 50% males and 50% females
- Middle SES public, suburban district, 4 high schools
- All monolingual English speakers
- 5 days per week, 180 days per year, 160 total hours
- This study is part of a much larger study in which all students administered large battery of L1 tests, L2 aptitude test, Spanish achievement and proficiency tests
Figure 1
Simple View of Reading Model
### Types of Readers Proposed by the SVR Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decoding</th>
<th>Language Comprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dyslexia</strong></td>
<td>Specific decoding deficit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Garden Variety</strong></td>
<td>Decoding and comprehension deficits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hyperlexia</strong></td>
<td>Specific language comprehension deficit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

- Instrument- *Bateria III Woodcock-Munoz Pruebas de aprovechamiento* standardized on native Spanish speakers
- Measures of word decoding and reading comprehension administered at end of each year of Spanish I, II, and III
- Spanish word decoding
- Spanish pseudoword decoding
- Spanish reading comprehension
- Spanish vocabulary and listening comprehension
FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

- Participants compared to monolingual Spanish norms ranging from 1st-9th/10th/11th grades
- Participants grouped into 4 types of readers proposed by the SVR model (Decoding and Reading Comprehension)
  - **Good reader** (Decoding SS ≥ 85, Comprehension SS ≥ 85)
  - **Mixed** (Decoding SS < 85, Comprehension < 85)
  - **Hyperlexic** (Decoding ≥ 1.5 SD than Comprehension)
  - **Dyslexic** (Comprehension ≥ 1.5 SD than Decoding)
- Did same with Listening comprehension
### $M, SD$ on Spanish measures for US High School Students completing Spanish II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish subtest</th>
<th>9th grade</th>
<th>6th grade</th>
<th>3rd grade</th>
<th>1st grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word decoding</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>103.9</td>
<td>127.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>79.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening Comprehension</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>56.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>18.3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Types of Readers at End of Spanish II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Garden Variety</th>
<th>Dyslexic</th>
<th>Hyperlexic</th>
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</thead>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>260</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>257</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
9th Grade Norms

Standard Score

Vocabulary X
Reading Comp X
Listen Comp X
Word Decoding X

Average Range

Standard Score

70  85  100  115  130

SD

-2  -1  +1  +2
FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

- **Results**

- Most US high school FL learners are classified as hyperlexic after 1, 2, 3 years of high school Spanish.

- Spanish decoding skills *much* stronger than Spanish reading comprehension and listening comprehension.

- Primary problem hindering Spanish comprehension is *very* low levels of Spanish vocabulary.

- All U.S. high school students meet criteria for a FL reading “disability”, at least until compared to 1st and 2nd grade monolingual Spanish learners.
Question: Who has a FL Reading “Disability”? 
Answer: All U.S. high school FL learners have a reading “disability”
VII. Best Practices:
Do’s and Don’ts Based on the Evidence
Best Practices-Do’s

• Adopt policies for LD diagnosis that include verifiable histories of L1 learning problems and substantial impairment in language skills on standardized testing measures

• Examine student’s history for evidence of academic impairment in native language (L1) skills

• Employ a rigorous process to show that the student has a history of serious problems (failure) in FL courses

• Refer students for tutoring before beginning a FL course or during the FL course
Best Practices-Do’s

• View only FL grades of F as evidence of course failure
• Examine a student’s history of performance in high school and college FL courses
• Examine a student’s current performance in FL courses (i.e., consult with the FL instructors)
• Teach directly and explicitly the language skills that are necessary for communication and success in the FL course
• Allow students with L1 learning “problems” to participate in FLs
Best Practices-Don’ts

• Allow students’ self-reports as evidence of LD or inability to pass FL courses

• Treat grades of withdrawal (W) in FL courses as evidence of inability to pass FL courses or fulfill FL requirement

• Use MLAT as the sole criterion to determine whether students can pass FL courses or fulfill FL requirement

• Use a student’s MLAT score to calculate a discrepancy with a student’s IQ
Best Practices-Don’ts

• Use classification as LD or the presence of IQ-achievement discrepancies as a criterion for FL course substitution or waiver

• Assume that students classified as LD or those with IQ-achievement discrepancies cannot pass FL courses

• Assume that students classified as LD are different from low-achieving, non-LD students in FL courses

• Assume that a student with average to above-average cognitive ability and low FL grades must have a LD

• Diagnose students with a FL “disability”
In closing

“With regard to....FL course substitutions and waivers, Sparks (2006, 2009) has recommended that if an educational institution allows substitutions or waivers for the FL requirement, there are only two empirically defensible positions the institution can adopt: Either all students, not just those classified as LD, should be eligible on the basis of predetermined, and strict, criteria, or no students should be eligible for course substitutions and waivers. To do otherwise is to ignore the empirical research on this issue and, in all likelihood, discriminate against students without a disability diagnosis.”
Thank you!

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