Myths of Foreign Language Learning and Learning Disabilities

Dr. Richard L. Sparks

Boston University Boston, MA April 4, 2019

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

richard.sparks@msj.edu

- I will send you copies of any study mentioned today
- I encourage you to read the papers published on this topic
- Sparks, R. (2016). Myths about foreign language learning and learning disabilities. *Foreign Language Annals*, 49 (2), 252-270.
- 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 "<u>Myths</u> (beliefs) about FL Learning and LDs, " one has to be aware of the <u>facts</u> (evidence) about FL learning and LDs
- The first parts of my talk present the evidence (<u>facts</u>)
- The last parts of my talk present the myths (<u>beliefs</u>) and the best practices

Themes of my presentation based on the Evidence

- Language learning runs along a <u>continuum</u> 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 <u>substantial impairments</u> in oral/written L1 skills (<u>not</u> math skills)
- 3. To have a LD in L1, one must have <u>substantial</u> <u>impairments</u> (below average) L1 skills (<u>next</u> <u>slide</u>)

Substantial Impairment = Below average academic skills Math X Written Language Х Spelling Χ Х Reading 100 Standard Score 70 115 130 85 -2 - Average Range →+1 +2 SD.

Themes of my presentation based on the Evidence

- 4. If you do not exhibit <u>substantial impairments</u> in L1 skills, you will likely pass FL courses (assuming effort, attendance, completing the work, etc.)
- 5. There is <u>no</u> empirical evidence for the idea of a "disability" for FL learning
- 6. Likewise, there is <u>no</u> valid diagnostic procedure to identify who will exhibit inordinate problems with FL learning <u>prior to</u> enrolling in FL classes

Themes of my presentation based on the Evidence

- 7. There is <u>no</u> 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 <u>no</u> cognitive, L1 academic skills, FL aptitude, and FL outcome differences between students classified as LD enrolled in FL courses <u>vs.</u> low achieving, non-LD students in FL courses

I. Setting the Stage for Consideration of FL Learning Problems

- <u>Questions we have investigated over 30+ years</u>
- 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?

- 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?

- What is a Learning Disability (LD)?
- LD refers to <u>academic</u> impairment
- There are only 3 types of LDs (DSM-5)
- <u>Reading Disorder (often referred to as dyslexia)</u>
- Written Language Disorder (not just spelling problems)
- <u>Mathematics Disorder (unrelated to FL learning)</u>
- There must be a "substantial impairment" (below average skills) to be classified as LD (next slide)

Substantial Impairment = Below average academic skills Math Х Written Language Х Spelling Χ Х Reading 100 Standard Score 70 85 115 130 -2 - Average Range → + +2 SD.

- 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

- <u>The notion of a continuum of language skills underlies all</u> <u>of our work</u>
- 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 <u>no differences</u> in the language skills of lowachieving and LD students in FL courses

- <u>All</u> skills, including FL learning and FL aptitude, run along a <u>continuum</u> 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



	Contraction of the second				High Achileving	
Sparks, Ganschow Sparks, Artzer, et a Sparks & Ganscho Ganschow & Spark Sparks, Ganschow Ganschow, Sparks	, et al. 1998 L. 1998 w 1996 s, 1995 , et al. 1992 , et al. 1991	x x x x x x x x x x x xx xxx xxx	x xxx x x xx x oo x xx x 0 00 x xx 0 00 x xx xx 0 0 x xx xx 0 0 x xx xx 0 0		1,	
Standard Scores ^a	70	85	100	115	130	
SD	-2	-1 -	Average Rar	nge→+1	+2	
Percentile Ranks * M = 100, SD = 15	2	16	50	84	98	



- 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



- In the early 90s, new term, "foreign language learning disability" (FLLD), appeared in the LD literature
- In the U.S., it <u>very</u> quickly became popular to associate FL learning problems with LD
- Gajar (1987), Keeney & Smith (1994), Barr (1993), Mabbott (1994), Pompian & Thum (1984)
- Some suggested FLLD is a conceptually distinct disorder (Arries, Shaw, Smith), similar to reading or math disability

- By mid-1990s, universities <u>explicitly</u> 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 <u>valuable</u> because as students were waived from FL courses, LD diagnoses <u>increased</u>, number of waivers <u>increased</u>

- <u>Late 80s and early 90s</u>, we were conducting research with students, both LD and non-LD, who had FL learning problems
- <u>By 1993</u>, our findings revealed <u>no</u> 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 <u>continuum</u> of very good to very poor FL learners
- Likewise, because the evidence showed that FL learning exists along a <u>continuum</u> of language learning, any diagnosis of a FL "disability" will be <u>arbitrary</u> and depend entirely on where the line ("cut point") is drawn
- To date, <u>no</u> 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



Arbitrary cut point for "FL disability"—20th percentile



Arbitrary cut point for "FL disability"—40th percentile



- So, which "cut point" is the correct one?
- There is <u>no</u> empirical evidence that <u>any</u> "cut point" is correct, i.e., below <u>X</u>th percentile, all fail FL courses
- Likewise, there is <u>no</u> 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 <u>without substantial</u> <u>impairments</u> in L1 skills—LD and not LD—pass FL courses

Summary-History @ FL Learning Problems

- <u>What were the important lessons we learned from our</u> <u>research with students who had FL learning problems?</u>
- 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. (2006). Is there a "disability" for FL learning? Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39, 544-557
- 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" <u>is</u> the term, Learning Disability (LD)
- <u>The</u> primary problem with the LD concept is (and continues to be) its ambiguity
- The term LD has <u>never</u> had a logically consistent, easily operationalized, and empirically valid definition and classification (diagnostic) system
- Researchers, diagnosticians, and practitioners have <u>never</u> agreed on definition and diagnostic criteria

1983

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

S wanson 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

Kenneth A. Kavale and Steven R. Forness

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 signifi-

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

May 2017

Learning Disability: What the Heck Is It?

Share This: **f 1** in

By Emerson Dickman

So, what is a LD?

- Because LD field could not agree on what a LD is, <u>discrepancy</u> became operational definition of LD in 1978
- Discrepancy (<u>IQ vs. achievement</u>) 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 <u>mass</u> <u>confusion</u> (move from state to state, LD or not LD)





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 <u>average</u> 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
- Stanovich, K. (2005). The future of a mistake: Will discrepancy continue to make learning disabilities a pseudoscience? *Learning Disability Quarterly, 28,* 103-106.
- Dombrowski, S. et al. (2004). After the demise of discrepancy. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 35, 364-372.
- Weis, R. et al. (2016). When average is not good enough: Students with learning disabilities at selective, private colleges. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *48*, 1-17.
- Sparks, R., & Lovett, B. (2009). Objective criteria for classification of postsecondary students as LD. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42, 230-239.

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 <u>not</u> agree on the definition and diagnostic criteria for LD
- IQ/achievement discrepancy still used even though <u>DSM-</u> <u>5 eliminated</u> 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

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

- In all of our studies, we found that students classified as LD in FL courses......
- 1. Exhibited <u>no</u> differences in L1 skills and L2 aptitude when compared to low-achieving, non-LD students
- 2. With/without IQ-achievement discrepancies exhibited <u>no</u> differences in L1 achievement and FL aptitude
 - 3. who w/drew from or did not pass FL courses exhibited <u>no</u> 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



- In addition, we conducted a number of studies with postsecondary students classified as LD who received <u>waivers and course substitutions</u> for FL requirement
- We also compared students who had <u>received waivers</u> and substitutions with students classified as LD who had fulfilled the FL requirement by <u>passing</u> FL courses
- Journal of Learning Disabilities, Foreign Language Annals, Language Learning, Annals of Dyslexia

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

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



LD who received waivers-varying degrees of IQ-achievement discrepancies



Summary of research with students classified as LD

- In sum, studies' results suggested LD students who received waivers and substitutions....
- 1. Did <u>not</u> have unique cognitive and L1 achievement profiles on measures of oral/written language
- Did <u>not</u> exhibit FL learning problems different from LD students who passed FL courses
- 3. Did <u>not</u> exhibit substantial impairments in L1 skills

Summary of research with students classified as LD

- 4. In most cases, had <u>no</u> documented history of FL learning problems
- 5. Had <u>passed</u> all previous FL courses
- 6. Had withdrawn with <u>passing grades</u> 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 <u>LD diagnosis</u>

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

- 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
- Sparks, R. (2016). Myths about foreign language learning and learning disabilities. *Foreign Language Annals, 49*, 252-270.

• <u>Myth #1</u>

- Students who are classified as LD <u>will</u> exhibit FL learning problems and either fail or withdraw from FL courses
- Most LD students pass FL courses <u>without</u> accommodations
- Students classified as LD pass/fail/struggle with FL courses at <u>same rates</u> as low-achieving FL students
- LD should <u>not</u> 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)

• <u>Myth #2</u>

- 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 <u>passed</u> previous FL courses with A, B, C grades
- <u>No</u> 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

• <u>Myth #3</u>

- Students classified as LD in FL courses exhibit weaker language learning skills and lower FL aptitude than lowachieving, non-LD students
- There are <u>no</u> 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 lowachieving, non-LD students—hallmark of LD—but are not

• <u>Myth #4</u>

- 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 <u>average (or better)</u> native language skills
- <u>No differences</u> 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?)

- 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 <u>not</u> 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 <u>equally well</u> on FL aptitude tests and achieve <u>similar</u> <u>outcomes</u> in FL courses and FL proficiency

- 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 <u>irrelevant</u> in predicting who will experience problems with FL learning
 - Most students with discrepancies do well in FL courses

- 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
- Lovett, B., & Sparks, R. (2013). The identification and performance of gifted students with learning disability diagnoses: A quantitative synthesis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 37, 169-178.

- 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

- So, is there such a person who is Gifted <u>and</u> 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


- 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

- We used absolute minimum (very loose) criterion for IQachievement 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)

- 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)

- In the U.S., large numbers of students classified as LD do not meet <u>any</u> criteria for LD diagnosis
- In the U.S., many students classified as LD do <u>not</u> 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 <u>not</u> have L1 reading, spelling, and writing impairments
- <u>But</u> in U.S., the LD (or "dyslexic") label is <u>valuable</u> because it leads to FL accommodations, waivers, etc.

Which students merits concern for FL learning? (Scores are *M* = 100, *SD* = 15)

Standardized Testing Measure	Α	В	С	D	Е	F
Intelligence Full Scale IQ	130	120	115	100	100	90
Academic Achievement Reading Spelling Writing Vocabulary Listen Comp Oral Express Verbal memory Mathematics	100 100 100 126 123 120 111 135	100 100 100 116 129 111 109 103	100 100 100 112 119 129 114 80	94 94 96 98 96 100 98	81 81 101 106 102 100 105	81 81 81 81 81 81 81 95
FL Aptitude (MLAT)	102	102	102	95	80	80

Sparks, R., & Javorsky, J. (2005). IQ, LD, ADHD, and foreign language learning problems: An Update. *ADFL Bulletin*, *36* (2), 43-50.

Academic achievement skills continuum



VI. FL Reading "Disability: The Simple View (Or, Who has a FL "Disability"?)

- Sparks, R. (2015). Language deficits in poor L2 comprehenders: The Simple View. *Foreign Language Annals, 48,* 635-658.
- Sparks, R., & Patton, J. (2016). Examining the Simple View of Reading (SVR) Model for U.S. high school Spanish students. *Hispania*, 99, 17-33.
- Sparks, R., Luebbers, J., & Castañeda, M. (2017). How well do U.S. high school students achieve in Spanish when compared to native Spanish speakers? *Foreign Language Annals*, *50* (2), 339-366.
- 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
- Sparks, R., & Luebbers, J. (2108). How many U.S. high school students have a foreign language reading "disability"? Reading without meaning and the Simple View. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 51 (2), 194-208

- 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

	Deco	Decoding			
г	Poor	Good			
Good	Dyslexia Specific decoding deficit	Good No deficits			
sion Poor	Garden Variety Decoding and comprehension deficits	Hyperlexia Specific language comprehension deficit			
	Sood Poor	Decor Poor Scood Dyslexia Specific decoding deficit Garden Variety Decoding and comprehension deficits			

- 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

- 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)
- <u>Good reader (Decoding $SS \ge 85$, Comprehension $SS \ge 85$ </u>
- <u>Mixed</u> (Decoding SS < 85, Comprehension < 85
- <u>Hyperlexic</u> (Decoding \geq 1.5 *SD* than Comprehension)
- <u>Dyslexic</u> (Comprehension ≥ 1.5 *SD* than Decoding)
- Did same with Listening comprehension

M, SD on Spanish measures for US High School Students completing Spanish II

Spanish subtest	9 th grade	6 th grade	3rd grade	1 st grade
Word decoding	65.3	84.7	103.9	127.7
Reading Comprehension	6.8	28.6	50.5	79.8
Listening Comprehension	27.2	31.2	38.5	56.1
Vocabulary	13.1	14.3	14.4	18.3

Types of Readers at End of Spanish II

Grade	Good	Garden Variety	Dyslexic	Hyperlexic
10	0	8	0	262
9	0	14	0	256
8	0	9	0	260
7	0	9	0	260
6	0	12	0	256
5	0	25	0	244
4	0	33	0	236
3	0	15	0	253
2	11	48	0	209
1	2	9	0	257









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
 - <u>All U.S. high school students meet criteria for a FL</u> reading "disability", at least until compared to 1st and 2nd grade monolingual Spanish learners

- Question: Who has a FL Reading "Disability"?
- Answer: <u>All</u> 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 <u>histories of L1 learning problems</u> and <u>substantial</u> <u>impairment</u> 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 <u>history of serious problems (failure) in FL courses</u>
- Refer students for <u>tutoring</u> before beginning a FL course or during the FL course

Best Practices-Do's

- View only <u>FL grades of F</u> as evidence of course failure
- Examine a student's <u>history of performance</u> in high school and college FL courses
- Examine a student's <u>current performance</u> in FL courses (i.e., consult with the FL instructors)
- <u>Teach directly and expl</u>icitly the language skills that are necessary for communication and success in the FL course
- Allow students with L1 learning "problems" to <u>participate</u> 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 IQachievement discrepancies as a criterion for FL course substitution or waiver
- Assume that students classified as LD or those with IQachievement 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."

