

Vocabulary depth, inferences and reading comprehension

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Various theories have outlined factors that contribute to successful reading comprehension (RC). The ability to make inferences is among the crucial ones. However, the role of vocabulary depth (VD) is relatively underexplored from a developmental perspective, not to mention its relations and the directionality of relation to inferences and RC. I will first conduct a brief literature review then present data from a three year study by adopting a combination of cross sectional and longitudinal design to examine the contribution of VD on RC from grade 4 to 6. Both types of developmental analysis suggest that VD make unique contribution to RC over and above vocabulary breadth and inference and the patterns are quite consistent for all 3 cohorts across grade levels. An additional comprehension-age match (CAM) analysis reveals that older less-skilled comprehenders score lower than their younger skilled counterparts only in global but not local level of inference, and in synonym aspect of VD but neither in antonym nor polysemy aspects. Our results not only determine the role of VD on comprehension but also point to likely sources and directionality of relation.