

# Help in reading foreign languages

March 6 2013

---

Recent research into how we learn is set to help people in their efforts to read a second or foreign language (SFL) more effectively. This will be good news for those struggling to develop linguistic skills in preparation for a move abroad, or to help in understanding foreign language forms, reports, contracts and instructions.

The ability to read a second or [foreign language](#) can be of great benefit to academics, business people, politicians, professionals and [migrants](#) trying to master an unfamiliar language. Surprisingly, little is known about how an ability to read in another language develops.

To address this, the research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), led by Professor Charles Alderson at Lancaster University, set out to identify the factors that determine how this skill develops in a number of [different languages](#) and what factors in people's first language influence progress in reading.

"Research into the diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses of learners in SFL reading was virtually non-existent, making this research highly innovative. We've followed SFL [reading ability](#) development over several years and studied which cognitive and linguistic tasks are most promising for predicting [literacy skills](#) in several languages", says Alderson.

"Progress has already been made in understanding first language reading problems – so we co-operated with psychologists who studied a group of [dyslexic readers](#) over many years. We used their instruments to see if the

things that predict first-language dyslexia can help in understanding SFL reading and its problems", Alderson continues.

Contrary to much belief, the researchers found that ability to read in a first language is less important in SFL reading than proficiency in the new language being learned. It was concluded that the size of SFL vocabulary and understanding of text influence one another: vocabulary growth promotes comprehension and comprehension helps a reader to learn new words.

Findings will help language teachers devise more effective strategies for assisting learners and influence the accuracy of tests that predict SFL reading abilities. From data gathered from many countries and languages, the research suggests that reading well in one language has little bearing on the development of reading abilities in another.

Linguist, Professor Scott Jarvis, Ohio University, USA, says, "This study was perhaps the most impressive yet on SFL reading abilities. A remarkable job was done of identifying and measuring a range of cognitive and linguistic abilities, and also of tracking these variables over time and linking them to improvements in learners' second-language reading proficiency. The findings are valuable for language teachers, and the research design is likely to serve as a model for many future SFL studies."

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

Citation: Help in reading foreign languages (2013, March 6) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-03-foreign-languages.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is

provided for information purposes only.