

New insights into how young and developing readers make sense of words

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Skilled readers are often able to make sense of words suffering from 'typos' and jumbled up letter orders as long as the beginning and end letters of the words are correct.

But a study at the University of Leicester suggests that young developing readers also have a similar understanding of how these outside letters can help make sense of words.

The study found that while developing young readers and skilled adult readers had similar difficulty correctly recognising anagrams that can form another word by switching the order of only the inside letters, both age groups found it equally easy to recognise anagrams when the outside letters also had to be switched around to form another word.

This is because the brain has difficulty keeping track of the position of inside letters when recognising words but assigns special importance to the outside letters.

Dr Kevin Paterson, a senior lecturer from the University of Leicester's School of Psychology, explained: "The fact that developing young readers in the study behaved similarly to skilled adult readers suggests both groups treated the position of inside letters with similar flexibility and are equally sensitive to the special importance of the outside letters when reading words.

"These findings for anagram reading show for the first time that

sensitivity to [letter](#) position, and the privileged status of the exterior letters in words, is well established in readers as young as 8 to 10 years old."

The research team consisted of Dr Kevin Paterson, PhD student Victoria McGowan, who recently obtained a 'Future Research Leaders' Postdoctoral Fellowship, undergraduate student Josephine Read from the University of Leicester's School of Psychology and Professor Tim Jordan from the Department of Psychology at Zayed University in Dubai.

The findings are important for understanding the role of letter position in children's [word recognition](#), including in dyslexia.

Professor Tim Jordan added: "Our present findings indicate considerable stability rather than developmental change in the use of letter position in word recognition, and further work is now required to see how this fits in with the general process of reading."

The study entitled 'Children and adults both see 'pirates' in 'parties': letter-position effects for developing readers and skilled adult readers' has been published in the prestigious academic journal *Developmental Science* and is available at the following link:

onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/desc.12222/pdf

Provided by University of Leicester

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