

How Chinese Changed My (Research) Life

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Abstract

Models of word recognition have been strongly influenced by native English-speaking theorists, who have tended to embrace relatively fixed notions of various important concepts, such as “word” and “morpheme.” While there are many “universals” of basic literacy learning, there are also a number of differences between Chinese and English in how to learn to read and to write words, and, indeed, in whether “word” is the most appropriate unit of focus in literacy learning at all. In this talk, I will highlight research that changed my notions of cross-cultural literacy learning with a special emphasis on Chinese. For example, I will discuss the centrality of lexical-compounding, characters (vs. words), and copying for early literacy-learning in Chinese, as well as how phonological aspects of literacy learning are more ambiguous but in some ways better marked in Chinese as compared to English. This Chinese-English contrast has both theoretical and practical implications for understanding how children learn to read and write across languages, scripts, and cultures.

About the speaker

Catherine (Cammie) McBride is currently Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Science and Associate Dean for Research for the College of Health and Human Sciences at Purdue University. She was previously a Choh-Ming Li Professor of Psychology at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. In 2022, she and her team received approximately USD4 million in grant money to study literacy development and impairment across both Chinese and English in Chinese children. Professor McBride previously served as President of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading (SSSR) and Founding President of the Association for Reading and Writing in Asia (ARWA). McBride currently serves on the Board of The Reading League—Indiana and is co-leading a USD1.5 million dollar grant from the Lilly Foundation to improve teacher training in the science of reading in Indiana at Purdue University. A Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science (APS), she was selected to be a 2024 winner of the APS Mentorship Award. Much of Professor McBride’s current research is devoted to improving online assessment and training of literacy and mathematics skills. The author of more than 250 peer-reviewed journal articles and editor of six books, McBride wrote both *Children’s Literacy Development: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Learning to Read and Write* (2016) and *Coping with Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and ADHD: A Global Perspective* (2019). Her most recent (as co-editor) book (2023) is entitled the *Routledge International Handbook of Visual-Motor Skills, Handwriting, and Spelling: Theory, Research, and Practice*.

