

## **PROSODY BEYOND L1 BOUNDARY: CANTONESE TONE SENSITIVITY PREDICTS ENGLISH TEXT READING COMPREHENSION IN CANTONESE-ENGLISH BILINGUAL CHILDREN**

**PURPOSE:** Prosodic sensitivity refers to an individual's ability to perceive and manipulate phonetic distinctions realized through pitch, duration, or amplitude, such as Cantonese lexical tone and English lexical stress. A growing number of studies consistently report that prosodic sensitivity appears to transfer to reading across languages; Cantonese tone sensitivity has been found to be related to English word reading in Cantonese-English bilingual children. However, the cross-linguistic effect of Cantonese tone sensitivity on English reading comprehension has been less explored in Cantonese-English bilingual children. In addressing this issue, this 2-year longitudinal study evaluated the relative contribution of Cantonese tone sensitivity to both Chinese and English reading comprehension in Hong Kong Cantonese-English bilingual children.

**METHOD:** We tested 91 Cantonese-English bilingual children (mean age 7 years 6 months) on multiple measures of Cantonese lexical tone sensitivity, English stress sensitivity, segmental phonological awareness and reading comprehension, in both Chinese and English.

**RESULTS:** Structural equation modeling analysis revealed that Cantonese tone sensitivity longitudinally predicted a unique variance of Cantonese reading comprehension even after controlling for Cantonese segmental phonological awareness. Cantonese tone sensitivity significantly predicted English stress sensitivity, and English stress sensitivity, in turn uniquely predicted English reading comprehension even after controlling for English segmental phonological awareness.

**CONCLUSION:** Our findings underscore the importance of Cantonese tone sensitivity in Cantonese-English bilingual children's reading comprehension development, suggesting the cross-linguistic effect of prosodic sensitivity on L2 English text reading comprehension.