

A landscape photograph of a mountain range in Tucson, Arizona. The mountains are dark and rugged, with some green vegetation on the slopes. In the foreground, there is a multi-lane highway with a few cars driving. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The text is overlaid on the image in a bright yellow color.

Linguistic Coding Difference: 2023

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In 2015 researcher Richard Sparks, one of those whom originally coined the term “linguistic coding difference (LCD)” published the results of a series of studies took 165 first and second year high school students whom were native English speakers taking Spanish 1 and 2 and assessed their Spanish word decoding, pseudoword decoding, vocabulary, and reading comprehension using standardized measures. Then he compared their score to native Spanish speakers using the same measure in grades 1 through 9. He found the native English speakers had good word decoding, but miserable comprehension. None of the native English speaker had good word decoding, or comprehension when compared to the native Spanish speaker. In fact, the best the native only the best native English speakers could read on the second grade level when compared to the native Spanish speakers.

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Sparks, R.L. (November 24, 2015). Language Deficits in Poor L2 Comprehenders: The Simple View. Foreign Language Annuals. DOI: [10.1111/flan.12163](https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12163).

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In 2017 Sparks concluded after subsequent studies produced similar results, “...Findings call into question the practice of diagnosing an FL “disability” before a student engages in FL study.

Sparks, R.L. et al. (April 5, 2017). How Many U.S. High School Students Have a Foreign Language Reading “Disability”? Reading Without Meaning and the Simple View. Journal of Learning Disabilities. DOI: [10.1177/0022219417704168](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219417704168).

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What does this mean?

- The Linguistic Coding Difference (LCD) theory of “foreign language disability” does not hold water.
- Using Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery, and/or Defense Language Aptitude Battery are no way to assess for “foreign Language disability”, because each of them are aptitude tests not tests for disability.
- The current methods of teaching foreign language are such that everyone would be considered to have a “foreign language disability” after taking only 3 years of a second language.

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- **We do not know how to diagnose disability in foreign language learning prior to attempting training.**
- **Repeated failure in foreign language course may be the only way to “diagnose” a foreign language disability.**
- **If someone has such a disability, multisensory phonics may be the way to go; assuming the second language is phonemic.**
- **Perhaps all languages should be taught using multisensory phonics if possible.**