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# **It's not so simple: morphosyntactically simpler languages are not always easier to learn**

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## **Abstract**

Are morphosyntactically simpler languages easier to learn? In theory building and empirical work alike, researchers often assume so. While plausible, this assumption nevertheless requires empirical confirmation. To test it, we manipulate form-to-meaning transparency (FtMT) and morphophonemic cohesion (MC) in three large-scale artificial language learning experiments with English and Mandarin participants. We find that (a) FtMT doesn't affect learnability for all semantic domains (for English speakers, the more transparent marking of plural number in a separate morpheme increases learnability with nouns, but not with pronouns); (b) MC similarly affects learnability in a domain dependent fashion (expressing subjects and verbs in two words, as opposed to one concatenated word, increases learnability with nouns, but not with pronouns); (c) the effects are L1 dependent (pronouns behave like English nouns in regards to plural marking for Mandarin speakers). Taken together, the results falsify the strong hypothesis that simpler languages are necessarily easier to learn.