Understanding Chinese Developmental Dyslexia:

Meta-linguistics Awareness in both Chinese Reading and Writing

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Abstract

Learning to read Chinese requires rather different insights from young readers than does an alphabetical system. Chinese readers with dyslexia are best distinguished from age-matched controls with tasks in morphological awareness, speeded number naming, and vocabulary skills; performance of visual skills or phonological awareness fail to distinguish the group.

Chinese morphological awareness is comprised of the understanding of pictographic characters, ideographic characters, semantic phonetic compound characters, homophones, homographs, and different radical elements. In this study, a group of Chinese dyslexic primary school students were recruited to receive assessments and training in morphological awareness. The training included instruction in pictographic, simple ideographic, compound ideographic and semantic phonetic compound characters, homophones and homographs differentiation, orthographic awareness, radical element, reading and writing. The assessment tools used in this study include tests in morpheme production, pseudo-word identification, morphological radical selection, sentence comprehension, word identification, and word meaning differentiation.

The findings of this study indicate that morphological awareness training helps Chinese children with dyslexia in Hong Kong and Beijing master the structural rules of different types of characters and to apply the rules analytically when learning to read and write Chinese.

The results suggest that morphological awareness may be a core theoretical construct necessary for explaining variability in reading and writing Chinese.