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What do morphological awareness tests really measure ?

The ability to localize and to manipulate the morphological structure of words contributes to vocabulary development (Muse, 2005) as well as to reading (Carlisle, 2000) and writing performance (Green et al., 2003). Despite the importance of morphological awareness and of morphological sensitivity (Colé, Royer, Leuwers, & Casalis, 2004; Roy & Labelle, 2007) for the development of higher-order abilities which contribute to academic success, there is confusion in the literature surrounding the measurement of these different constructs, especially with regard to the tasks used to measure them and what types of abilities these tasks mobilize.

In fact, the different tasks measure different kinds of *units* (flexional or derivational), *operations* (production of derived words, identification of morphemes of the same family, substitution, deletion, or addition of morphemes, grammaticality judgement) and *levels of control* (explicit or implicit) (Casalis, Mathiot, Bécavin, & Colé, 2002). In order to move beyond the confusions caused by this methodological issue, we propose to experimentally test what unites and differentiates these confounded measures in a population of 50 francophone primary students. Participants were subjected to 8 different tests which purport to measure morphological awareness.

Results of confirmatory factor analyses show the way in which the different tasks group together and allow us to paint a clearer picture of the abilities which are mobilized during tasks traditionally used to measure morphological awareness. Our analysis allows us to highlight not only the type of mental operations which underlie performance on these tasks, but also the morphological unit as factors which can differentiate the tasks from each other.