

# Examining the Research

Below are links and summaries for some of the research articles referenced in the miniseries on phonemes and phoneme awareness.

READING  
MEETINGS

with Mark and Molly  
Conversations Bridging

Science & Practice



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## Part 1: *Phonemes, Speech, and Reading*

### [Does awareness of speech as a sequence of phones arise spontaneously?](#) (Morais et al., 1979)

This paper includes the research with illiterates that was covered in the presentation. Illiterates and late literates (adults who had similar backgrounds as the illiterates but learned to read beyond the usual age) were asked to complete phoneme deletion and addition tasks. Illiterates had great trouble deleting or adding a phoneme at the beginning of a non-word, while the late literates had little difficulty with the task. The results of the study indicate that the ability to manipulate phonemes is not acquired spontaneously and instead depends on experience with print and learning to read.

### [Levels of phonological awareness in three cultures](#) (McBride-Chang et al., 2004)

This study looked at syllable and phoneme onset awareness in kindergartners and first graders who were native Chinese and/or English speakers. In Chinese characters are represented at the syllable level and only some children are taught to read using pinyin (an alphabetic system). They examined the effects of early literacy instruction on the development of phonological awareness and the differences in syllable awareness across children. The children who were learning to read Chinese without pinyin had very low phoneme onset deletion scores but were still good readers. Without explicit phoneme instruction they did not develop the awareness but this did not prevent reading development. Awareness of syllables was a better predictor of Chinese reading than phoneme awareness. The results of this study demonstrate that the aspects of phonological awareness that are important for reading development differ across language and instructional conditions.

### [The ability to manipulate speech sounds depends on knowing alphabetic writing](#) (Read et al., 1986)

This study compared the performance of Chinese adults who were taught to read with pinyin (an alphabetic system) to those who were taught to read without it, on phoneme deletion and addition tasks. The results are very similar to those of Morais et al. (1979). The adults who had learned to read with an alphabet performed like the late literates and the group that had learned without an alphabet performed like the illiterates. These results suggest that it is not literacy in general which leads to segmentation skill, but alphabetic literacy in particular and for many people requires explicit instruction.