

## Morphological skills in developmental dyslexia

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Although phonological deficits are unanimously recognized as one of the key manifestations of developmental dyslexia, a growing body of research has reported impairments in morphological abilities as well. Deficits have been found in tasks assessing the abilities to isolate and blend morphemes (Casalis et al. 2004), in gender and number agreement (Jiménez et al. 2004; Rispens et al. 2008), and in several other domains of inflectional morphology (Joanisse et al. 2000, Vender et al 2017). Less research, however, has explored derivational morphology, especially in languages with rich morphology and transparent orthographies.

In this talk, I will discuss the results of recent studies on Italian (a language with transparent orthography and rich morphology), which cast light on the dyslexic disadvantage across domains of inflectional and derivational morphology. The focus will be on verb-based derivation and on the role of conjugation classes across word formation phenomena, but inflection in the nominal domain will be explored too, so as to provide a thorough assessment of the morphological skills of children with typical development and with dyslexia.

Specifically, a recent study (Melloni & Vender, to appear) investigated the morphological skills of 21 children with dyslexia (mean age 9.10 years old) and 24 children with typical development (mean age 10.3 years old). All children were monolingual speakers of Italian. We developed an experimental protocol inspired by Berko's Wug test and composed of 11 tasks addressing inflectional and derivational processes. Participants were asked to manipulate nonwords of various lexical categories, modeled after the phonotactic structure of Italian, and manipulation involved both word formation and base retrieval. The conditions of the experiments were based on verb conjugation classes differing in frequency, productivity, regularity, and formal transparency.

Results confirmed that morphological skills are impaired in dyslexic children, who performed significantly more poorly than their age-matched peers in all tasks. Children with dyslexia were especially challenged by tasks and conditions requiring advanced morphological awareness skills, such as the retrieval of infinitives of infrequent and irregular conjugation classes.

Our findings will be discussed in light of previous research on Italian in both monolingual and bilingual children with or without dyslexia, which focused on noun inflection (Vender et al. 2017, Melloni et al. 2019, Vender et al. 2021). Further discussion will target morphological skills in L2 Italian children, searching for commonalities and differences between the profiles of children with dyslexia and typical children in the process of acquiring a second language. Finally, the educational and clinical implications of our findings will be discussed.

### References

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