

## **In a search of the missing link: The phonemic awareness in transparent and opaque languages explored by visual codes.**

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A number of studies have shown the importance of phonemic awareness in the process of acquiring a language as a building block or a strong foundation for reading skill and communication overall. Other studies described various kinds of languages such as transparent or opaque language. This research draws attention to exploration of the relationship between a transparent language (e.g. Polish ) and an opaque language (e.g.English) and its letter- sounds relationships focusing on the similarities, but mostly differences of the sound of vowels in both languages by using a visual code specifically designed for this study. The inspiration for this study was a Stroop test where participants had to read text and colors using two different systems of communication. The same principles were compared to reading in two kinds of languages. The Stroop test also included work with text and color which inspired and successfully led to creating visual codes for the vowels. Participants were 56 students studying English as a foreign language for 10 to 16 years. They were ranging from an age of 13 to 19 and there were 28 boys and 28 girls. All students were tested on 15 common words and 5 short sentences in American English. Later, the same students were presented with the color code for English vowels ( a, i, e, o, u) The code divided each vowel into four categories: short, long, silent, and shwa. Results showed that the color code helped the students to improve their phonemic awareness changing the scores from 65% to 97% reading accuracy. Moreover, the results pointed out the challenges that students face while acquiring an opaque language: incorrect reading, applying old knowledge to a new situation, problems with short and long vowels, confusion with silent vowels and schwa, inconsistencies in reading.

Lastly, this work questions design and structure of educational system in foreign countries who teach English as a second language to overthink the curriculum and ways of teaching English as an opaque language from the beginning introducing the basics such as ' the sound the letter makes' because the study shows that the lack of phonemic awareness has cripple the process of learning. The study reveals that none of the participants up to age 19, after 16 years or acquiring English have nighter heard of nor had an explanation of long and short vowels.

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