Syllable Identification in Kannada Among Literates and Illiterates

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Previous work on the mental representation of spoken language in illiterate adults has dealt with metalinguistic abilities more than with perceptual processing. However, the possibility of an influence of literacy on speech perception should not be neglected. Learning to read and write in an alphabetic system entails the ability to analyze speech intentionally into phonemic units. It also contributes to the elaboration of new processing strategies. The phonemic representation that is required in reading and writing provides the basis for processes of spoken word recognition, consisting of finding the best match between a sequence of discrete segment and a lexical entry.

The present study was condemed with the representation of syllable s rather than that of phonemes in Kannada among literates and illiterates. A total of 12 pairs of common words sharing the same three inital phonemes (CVC) were selected. These words were then put in six blocks with 8 sentences in each block. For one of these blocks, 10 subjects in each group were to detect the target CV and 10 were to detect the corresponding CVC Target. In addition, for each subject with a CV-CVC target order, there was another CVC-CV target order. The target was presented orally to the subjects before each block. Their task was to tap on the table whenever they heard the target and to pronounce the word containing it. The responses were then recorded in a Three Factor Table and was subjected to analysis. The aalysis concluded that:

1. Literacy did surely have an effect on syllable identification.
2. CVC targets were more frequently detected than CV targets - as CVC targets provide more clues.
3. Phonemic segmentation demads are much greater in the situation where the CVC target has to be found in a word initiated by a CV syllable.