

The Literacy Factor in Syntactic Judgement & Comprehension in Adults

Aparna Vijayan

Student, A.I.I.S.H, Mysore.

The present study was undertaken to investigate the qualitative differences among normal literate and illiterate individuals on linguistic and metalinguistic tasks by evaluating their performance on simple comprehension and expression tasks as well as on a grammaticality judgement task. A group of sixty healthy subjects - thirty literates and thirty illiterates - in the ages range of 22 to 40 years were selected for the study. The subjects were required to be native - Kannada speakers with no speech or hearing problems. The two groups were studied for their performance on three tasks utilizing two tests, namely the Syntactic Section of the LPT and that of the RRTC Battery aiming to evaluate the subjects' syntactic judgement ability, their comprehension and expression. A qualitative, statistical and quantitative analysis of the results was carried out.

The results have indicated that the illiterates perform poorly when compared to the literates in all the three tasks, the difference being most pronounced in the syntactic judgement task. Although the illiterates perform as well as the literates in some of the sub-sections of the comprehension task, they do experience difficulties with some specific syntactic structures, such as conjunctives, quotatives and participial constructions. Furthermore, a qualitative analysis of the expressive output of the subjects revealed that the verbal output was better in literates in terms of sentence completeness, structural complexity and elaborateness.

A statistical analysis using the t-test showed the differences on the syntactic judgement task and specific sub-sections of the comprehension task to be highly significant at the 0.001 level.

Given the above findings, it is concluded that literacy not only contributes to the development of metalinguistic abilities, such as the syntactic judgement ability, in an individual, but also affects the comprehension and quality of expression of the individual under consideration.