Oral Language and Learning to Read

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The next generation of reading interventions: The importance of assessing & teaching oral language skills in L1

Global Literacy SIG Highlighted Session
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In this presentation

- Quick overview on the interlinkages
- Kannada literacy acquisition as a case study
- Language instruction for literacy learning
A linguistically diverse landscape

- OL1 is RL1
- OL1 is not RL1

- Dialect speakers
- Monolinguals
- Diglossia
- Bilinguals
- Multilinguals
- Biscriptals
Reading acquisition processes straddle two systems

- **the orthographic system**
  - the symbol repertoire
  - the mapping principles

- **the linguistic system**
  - phonological representations
  - lexical identities
  - meta-linguistic skills
Predictors of individual differences

• Phonological Awareness
• Symbol knowledge
• Vocabulary knowledge

Nag, Chiat, Torgerson & Snowling (2014)

_Literacy, Foundation Learning and Assessment in Developing Countries_
How does oral language support reading?

• Improves speed

• Reduces ambiguities

• Deepens meaning making
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The Extensive – Contained Continuum
(the orthographic breadth hypothesis)

- Alphabet languages
  (e.g., Arabic, Kiswahili, Spanish)
  (24 – 35 units)

- 
  Akshara languages
  (e.g., Bengali, Hindi, Tamil)
  (400+ units)

- Chinese
  (e.g., Mandarin)
  (1200+ units)

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Exception words

Irregular words

Words with unfamiliar symbols

Morphologically dense words

Nag, 2007; 2011; in press
A simple sentence in Kannada

ondu kallu raja-na tale-ge taak-it-u.
det. stone nom. king gen. head dat. touch pst.3nsg.

‘A stone hit the king’s head.’
Predictors of individual differences

- Phonological Awareness ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
- Symbol knowledge ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
- Vocabulary knowledge ✓ ✓ ✓
- Inflection knowledge ✓
Key messages from Kannada research

• Strengths in oral language foster visual word recognition and safeguard meaning making with connected texts.

• The influence of oral language is more widespread in some languages & orthographies.
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## Evidence map

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Evidence from economically developed countries</th>
<th>Large and consistent</th>
<th>Oral language inputs</th>
<th>Dialogic Reading</th>
<th>Supporting emergent literacy</th>
<th>Drawing on home experiences</th>
<th>Systematic Phonics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large but not consistent</td>
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<td>Small or mixed</td>
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### Key
- Size of evidence from low-income contexts in developing countries:
  - ✓ Very small (<3 studies)
  - ✓ ✓ Small (4-6 studies)
  - ✓ ✓ ✓ Moderate (7-12 studies)

Nag, Chiat, Torgerson & Snowling (2014)

*Literacy, Foundation Learning and Assessment in Developing Countries*
Challenges

• Demands high proficiency in the language of instruction from teachers

• Demands a conception of the child as an active participant who can express herself and with skills for questioning, inferring and problem solving

• Demands sensitivity so that the language of instruction does not unwittingly stamp out home languages
Thank you!