Conclusion

The process of reading acquisition in children learning Oriya can be assumed to pass through three phases. During the early phase (Grades 1-2), children focus on learning grapheme-phoneme correspondence rules and are engaged in effortful decoding. The middle phase (grades 3-4) is marked by sharp improvement in comprehension skill. During late phase (Grades 5-6) children attend to larger orthographic units which enable them to attend to unfamiliar words. Comprehension being a complex process however, continues to improve. It requires automatic access to larger number of words. The time saved in processing information helps in comprehension. Comprehension, thus, is facilitated when less effort is needed for simple decoding of orthographic information.

A continuous development in all the measures of metalinguistic awareness was observed along with the process of reading acquisition. From the pattern of result it appears that low levels of metalinguistic skills are present before a child starts learning to read. But for development of higher levels of metalinguistic operations, reading experience is significant input. It was further noticed that children with good metalinguistic skill excelled in reading proficiency. The relationship between metalinguistic skill and reading seems to be interactive in nature, each helping the development of the other. For example, reading acquisition requires the discovery of the syllabic principles, understanding the rules of language which however, do not develop except through reading experience. As such metalinguistic awareness seems to be the cause and
consequence of reading acquisition.

Results further indicate that basic verbal processing skills are present prior to reading experience and reading helps in developing various sophisticated rehearsal strategies. For example, retrieving a word on the basis of a semantic cue may be associated with a richer fund of semantic information about single words. Minimal short term memory capacity is essential for the act of reading. Processing deficits observed in disabled readers may be due to their failure in developing sophisticated reading skills (Deutsch, 1978). The results indicate that the three skills, verbal processing, metalinguistic awareness and reading acquisition in Oriya literacy are interrelated. Manipulation of verbal material, mastery of symbol-sound correspondence rules, understanding of the rules in language use and reading are dependent on one another. Children have some preliterate experiences with speech sounds in the process of their linguistic interactions. This preliterate knowledge remains largely implicit and helps the child during his early encounters with print. With reading experience children gain more controlled and reflective knowledge of the structure of language. Thus, a circular relationship exists between verbal processing skill, metalinguistic awareness and reading acquisition.

Comparison of poor and good readers revealed that both the reading groups differed on various reading, metalinguistic and verbal processing measures except that of automatic word processing task. The gap between the poor and good readers increased over the grades barring a few cases in which the
difference did not increase. Over the grades, one would have expected a cumulative deficiency of poor readers compared to the good readers. However, for some of the measures such cumulative deficit was not quite clear. This may be due to the fact that the children in this longitudinal study were assessed only during the primary grades i.e, Grades 1 to 5. Perhaps, a clear cumulative deficit effect of early reading failure is found only in later phase of scholastic experience. However, the poor readers performed consistently below the good readers on different measures, thereby supporting the verbal deficit hypothesis of Vellutino(1977).

To sum up, the findings of the present study indicate the significant role of metalinguistic skill, verbal processing skill and, above all, awareness about reading in the acquisition of Oriya reading. Children who are poor initially in reading skill continue to remain poor. It is suggested that specific training in metalinguistic and verbal processing skill as well as reading awareness might help such readers overcome their reading disability.