ABSTRACT

The present longitudinal investigation was designed to study the relationship between reading achievement, metalinguistic awareness and verbal processing skill in an Indian orthographic context and to examine the development of these skills over the grades. The sample for the study comprised of 78 primary school children, 39 each from Grades 1 and 2 from two Oriya medium schools. The mean age of Grade 1 children was 5 years and 5 months and that of Grade 2 children was 6 years and 4 months. There were a few cases of dropouts and the final sample of 78 children comprised of 20 boys and 19 girls in the younger group and 26 boys and 13 girls in the older group. These children were studied over a period of three school years with repeated administration of measures of reading (Graded reading comprehension test and reading awareness test); metalinguistic awareness tasks (Verbal similarity, Strip-a-letter, Symbol substitution, Word creation, Sentence Synonymy judgement, Sentence acceptability judgement, Referential communication and Message Inconsistency), Verbal processing tasks (Verbal opposites, Associative learning and Automatic word processing); and RCPM. Thus, children who were initially in Grade 1 were subsequently retested in Grades 2, 3, 4 and Grade 2 children were retested each year up to Grade 5. The data were collected between November, 1985 and January, 1989.

The data were analysed by one way ANOVA, Scheffe Comparison, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, Principal component analysis, stepwise multiple regression. Results indicated significant
developmental trends in metalinguistic awareness and verbal processing skills over the grades. Both the skills were related to reading in all the five grades but the pattern of relationship varied. The skills and abilities measured in the present study became increasingly interrelated as the age and grade of children increased, thereby suggesting mutual facilitation among the subskills of reading. Stepwise multiple regression revealed the importance of phonological awareness at Grades 1 and 3. Thus, phonological awareness can still be said to be an important factor in early stages of reading acquisition despite the nature of Oriya orthography as pointed out in earlier studies. At higher grades syntactic and pragmatic awareness and the task of supplying antonyms play significant role in reading achievement. From the pattern of relationship among the measures a possible shifting in strategy is indicated to be involved from simple decoding to higher order comprehension. Good and poor readers differed in their performance on various metalinguistic and verbal processing measures except in the automatic word processing measure. The differences between good and poor readers among the same grade peers seem to continue over the grades barring a few cases in which a cumulative deficit trend was observed. The findings have been analysed in terms of Some script specific features of reading acquisition. Limitations of the study and implications for educational practice are also briefly discussed.