

**LITERACY AND SECOND LANGUAGE ORACY BY E. TARONE, M. BIGELOW, &
K. HANSEN**

Tarone, E., Bigelow, M. & Hansen, K. (2009). *Literacy and second language oracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. List price: \$32.75.

**Reviewed by
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The authors of *Literacy and Second Language Oracy* examine the connection between alphabetic print literacy and second language (L2) oral proficiency, specifically phonological awareness, of adult second language learners. Their findings suggest that literate populations use their literacy skills in recognizing oral language (of alphabetic script languages).

Chapter 1 chronicles research of both literate and illiterate adult learners in their acquisition of L2 oracy and suggests that decoding skills precede the skills necessary to identify linguistic segments. Next, the authors discuss the importance for (and the absence of) SLA research that carefully examines learners' educational experiences and literacy level(s), urging linguists to consider how "Our own literacy may bias our perception as researchers" (p. 31).

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for this three-part study, followed by chapters 4-6 which explain each of the three analyses: recast, elicited-imitation, and narrative, respectively. In this study, literacy affects a learner's performance on certain phonological tasks more than others. Tasks that involve individual phonemes, syllables or words, matching, deletion and reversal of phonemes, phonological fluency, semantic fluency, and pseudo-word recognition seem to be easier for literate adults. The performance of tasks that involve rhyming and general phonetic discrimination seem to be unaffected by literacy.

The ultimate chapter, 7, discusses several implications for future research in SLA and the instruction of second language learners. Here the authors impart a list of potential research questions to encourage readers to examine issues involving literacy and oracy whilst reminding researchers of the importance of including participants of traditionally more-excluded populations in their studies.

There are many possible implications for second language literacy instruction. First, second language learners process oral language differently, in part due to their literacy level, and will require differentiated instruction. Second, phonemic awareness and word analysis should be taught to adult learners in a systematic way and should be part of a balanced literacy approach. Third, strong oral skills might lead to strong literacy skills if instructors can bridge the two.

In a presentation at the 2009 MinneTESOL Conference, the authors shared PET scan images of brain activity of literate versus illiterate adults, during linguistic-segment analysis, that revealed much higher brain activity of individuals who are literate. This may suggest that literate individuals have more neurological "resources" to employ during phonological awareness activities. The researchers note these results are also specific to alphabetic scripts for which there is grapheme-phoneme correspondence.

This information may be particularly useful to teachers of middle school, high school, and adult second language learners who have low literacy skills. The book may also represent a turning point in the field of SLA in which researchers will begin to include a broader repre-

sentation of second language learners in their studies. If this is the case, then *Literacy and Second Language Oracy* will become a must-read for all language professionals.

This book is one of the first of its kind to suggest and explain the connection between oral language and literacy. The findings are useful because they address the exact scenario many second language literacy instructors face in their classroom: how to teach adults who are illiterate in their first language. Another mentionable point of this research is that the authors solicited participation from their local community. It serves as a reminder of the potential research waiting for us in our own community, school, and classroom. The bottom line: Literacy matters in some oral language processing and this book is a foundation for further research on the topic.

REVIEWER

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