The Relation between Metalinguistic Awareness and Reading Comprehension: The Case of the Prelingually Deaf Reader

Paul Miller,
University of Haifa, Israel.
E-mail: mpaul@edu.haifa.ac.il

Abstract

This study presented seeks to provide new insight into the meta-linguistic abilities of readers with prelingual deafness and the way those contribute to their comprehension of written text. Data was gathered through two tests: one designed to assess orthographic awareness (OA) and phonemic awareness (PA), and another allowing reading comprehension (RC) to be examined in contexts where prior knowledge was either helpful or not. Participants were 83 prelingually deafened individuals from three levels of education: 21 primary school students (third and fourth graders), 36 high school students (tenth and eleventh graders) and 26 university students. The control group consisted of 85 hearing individuals from parallel education levels (29 primary school, 29 high school, 27 university). Findings imply that the failure of prelingually deafened individuals to develop adequate sensitivity to the phonological properties of words may not underlie their apparent difficulties in making sense of written text. Rather, this weakness seems to reflect a processing deficit at the supra-lexical (sentence) level where the final meaning of single words is elaborated by its integration based upon structural (syntactic) knowledge. Findings are discussed with reference to potential factors underlying the development of proficient reading skills in individuals with prelingual deafness.