



LLCd Symposium.
SPEAKERS AND PRESENTATIONS.

Name: Shruti Sircar

Affiliation: The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India

Brief Bio: Dr. Shruti Sircar is a Reader in Linguistics at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Her research is concerned with language and literacy development in children, with the aim of identifying sites of potential difficulty for beginning readers. *She is also interested in spelling development, reading research, second language acquisition especially in the area of verb semantics, and cognitive linguistics. Apart from publishing in journals in her areas of interest, she has also authored textbooks at the school level for NCERT and other agencies, and distance learning lessons for IGNOU, BRAOU, the EFL University and the University of Hyderabad. She is currently one of the editors of the EFL Journal.*

and

Name: Sonali Nag

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Brief Bio: Dr. Sonali Nag is a clinical psychologist trained at the National Institute for Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in India. She is one of the founders of The Promise Foundation, an Indian charity that works, among other areas, in the field of literacy interventions and serves the Foundation as its Associate Director. She is presently based in the University of York as a Newton International Fellow and is leading two large scale language and reading programmes in Kannada, a language of South India and English. Her work in the area of Learning Disabilities and Dyslexia, has focused on understanding dyslexia, particularly taking into account the unique features of the Indian languages. Her research interest is particularly in contexts where there are interactions between multiple scripts and multiple languages. Sonali has participated in assignments with the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), India; The Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security, Republic of Maldives; the Shulamit, Principality of Leichtenstein and the Ministry of Education, Rwanda.

Further information: www.thepromisefoundation.org
www.york.ac.uk/psychology/staff/postdocs/sn527/

Theme: Literacy Development in the Alphasyllabaries

Title of Presentation: Spelling development in young Bengali readers

Abstract:

Bengali is an alphasyllabic orthography with complex syllable structure and inconsistent akshara-syllable mappings. We examine spelling development in Bengali children in the present paper. A number of predictions about spelling development and types of errors are made based on previous research on other orthographies, and the Bengali language and its orthography. (1) Children learning Bengali have to learn the primary and secondary forms of consonants and vowels, and younger children find it difficult to spell words with complex akshara that require the use of secondary forms of consonants. (2) Bengali vowels are graphemically complex in their expression but have fairly consistent phoneme-to-grapheme mapping. In contrast, Bengali consonants are less consistent in their mapping and the same phoneme may have alternative spellings, and hence is a potential source for spelling errors in children. (3) Bengali complex akshara (consonant clusters) in word medial and final positions do not often correspond to their spoken syllables, and the orthographic information necessary for representing these spellings has to be rote learnt. We again expect this to be potentially problematic for young learners. (4) Characteristics of the Bengali phonology-orthography mappings leads to a dissociation in spelling and reading attainments.

Spelling of words and reading accuracy (word and nonword reading) were assessed in 94 typically developing Bengali readers ranging in age from 7 to 9.7 years from Grades 2, and 3-4, and a group of 15 poor readers from Grade 3-4 whose reading level was matched with younger Grade 2 readers. Spelling skills for words of varying length, orthographic complexity (simple and complex akshara), and consistency in akshara-syllable mapping were investigated. Children's spelling errors were predominantly phonological and they tended to substitute an akshara with another that could stand for a similar phonological segment. Children made mistakes in expressing the length of the vowel (e.g., for *বুশ* /ru:p/, children wrote *বুশ* /rup/ 'beauty') and in spelling words with consonant clusters which had orthography- phonology mapping inconsistencies (e.g., for *স্বতন্ত্র* swatantra /ʃɪtɒntro/ 'free', children wrote *সতন্ত্র* satantra /ʃɪtɒntro/). Also, inconsistencies in orthography affected poor readers' spelling more than reading, and their error profiles were similar in percentage and quality to a younger group with an equivalent reading level. In general, consonant clusters, visually and phonologically similar letters, vowel length, and other irregularities in the orthography posed significant challenges to young learners, which highlight the contribution of orthography-specific features to spelling difficulties in Bengali.