Across the world, more than 757 million people over the age of 15 are non-literate, 63% of them women (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015). However, literacy level is not necessarily related to the ability to acquire new languages as oral skills in many languages are informally acquired worldwide by non-literate people. More than one language is often needed to survive in the daily life because most of the countries in the world are multilingual. In some societies education and literacy skills are not required or even necessary for everybody to live a satisfactory life in that environment. But when these people move in their adulthood to a society based on written language, they obviously encounter many kinds of challenges.

The relationship between L2 learning and literacy skills in an adult learner’s L1 is little known because, to date, most of the knowledge on L2 acquisition has been based on research describing the learning processes of educated language learners (see also Tarone, Bigelow, & Hansen, 2009). This gap between reality and research interest has been noticed and addressed only fairly recently. In my talk at the Language Learning Roundtable, I will focus on the following themes: i) What makes non-literate learners different in L2 learning from the learners with reading and writing skills? and ii) What (e.g., socio-cultural) resources these learners bring to the classroom that could be utilized in literacy programs?

Keywords: