

## The morphological distance in Arabic diglossia: Insights from a longitudinal study (K – G3)

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When the written language that children learn to read and write is distinct from the oral language they acquired as their mother tongue, they may encounter substantial challenges. The linguistic distance between two varieties of the same language could have an impact on the literacy acquisition journey. The present study focuses on Arabic, a prototypical case of diglossia, where the distance between spoken and standard varieties exists in semantics, phonology, morphology, and syntax. However, a paucity of studies has addressed their morphological distance. This study takes two steps in this direction: First, it maps the distance from spoken Palestinian dialect (SPD) to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) by form and function in the three predominant systems: derivation, inflection, and clitics in nouns and verbs. Second, it examined the longitudinal effect of the morphological distance on morphological awareness development in the inflectional system. The mapping showed that most morphemes between SPD and MSA are non-identical, comprising 81.4% of the total. Most of these non-identical morphemes were assembled to the high-diglossic level, appearing mainly in the verb inflection category. Following the latter finding, 62 children were followed longitudinally at three-time points: K, G1, and G3. Each child completed SPD and MSA pseudo-verb inflectional tasks, categorized into two main morphological distance levels: low-diglossic and high-diglossic. The main findings indicated a higher level of performance in the low-diglossic morphological structures compared to the high-diglossic structures, throughout the three grade levels. Furthermore, different morphological awareness developmental trajectories have been obtained between the morphological distance levels in SPD relative to MSA: In SPD, the distance had disappeared towards G3, whereas in MSA the distance significantly increased from kindergarten to G1 and G3 with no significant change between G1 and G3. Implications for the possible impact of morphological distance on reading acquisition are discussed.