

How does morphological awareness before and after the onset of formal reading instruction affect later reading outcomes in a rich morphological language?

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Contemporary theories and models acknowledge the significant role of morphological awareness (MA) in reading (Levesque et al., 2021; Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). However, the relationship between MA and reading may differ before and after the onset of reading instruction, owing to their reciprocal relationship. The present longitudinal study investigated the early contribution of spoken MA before and after the onset of formal reading instruction to later reading outcomes in Arabic, a rich morphological language with transparent orthography. A sample of 427 Arabic-speaking children was assessed on oral language measures (MA, phonological awareness, and vocabulary) in K and G1, reading measures (accuracy, rate, and fluency) in G1 and G3, and reading comprehension in G3. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted after accounting for earlier word reading skills as autoregressive controls in Grade 1. Our preliminary findings have shown a high correlation between MA and vocabulary. Consequently, both constructs were integrated under the term *morpho-lexical knowledge* (MLK). Findings from SEM revealed that the nature of the spoken MLK effects differed as a function of time-point and reading outcomes. MLK in kindergarten contributed only *indirectly* to word reading accuracy and reading comprehension in Grade 3, whereas MLK in Grade 1 contributed both *directly* to word reading accuracy and reading comprehension in G3 and *indirectly* to reading comprehension. These findings suggest an early involvement of MLK that begins to emerge *before* the onset of formal reading instruction and continues to evolve, contributing more profoundly *after* the commencement of formal reading acquisition. The findings are discussed in light of the unique characteristics of the Arabic language and its orthographic system, underscoring the importance of integrating MLK in the early acquisition of reading Arabic.

Levesque, K. C., Breadmore, H. L., & Deacon, S. H. (2021). How morphology impacts reading and spelling: Advancing the role of morphology in models of literacy development. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 44(1), 10–26.

Perfetti, C., & Stafura, J. (2014). Word knowledge in a theory of reading comprehension. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 18(1), 22–37.