

The role of morphological awareness in early reading and spelling acquisition in Arabic.

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Specific research questions:

- 1) What is the association (concurrent and predictive) between morphological awareness (MA) and reading (in terms of accuracy, rate/fluency, and word meaning) and spelling (accuracy and rate/fluency) before and after the onset of formal reading instruction (kindergarten-2nd grade), across the full range of ability in the general population, and among designated groups of children at risk for developing reading/spelling difficulties, relative to matched typically developing children?
- 2) What are the differences in linguistic distance between the spoken Palestinian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in inflectional and derivational morphological structures?
- 3) To what extent do the linguistic differences (identified in question 2) in spoken Palestinian Arabic/MSA morphology affect reading abilities in terms of accuracy, rate/fluency, word meaning, and spelling?

Why is this study unique? The present study is the first to examine the role of Arabic MA at the very onset of literacy learning in a large unselected sample of Arabic-speaking children, in a longitudinal study. The current study examines the association of MA and literacy skills before and after the onset of formal reading instruction. In addition, it compares children identified in kindergarten as at risk for developing reading/spelling difficulties to non-at-risk children. The current study also maps the morphological distance between spoken Palestinian Arabic and MSA in both inflectional and derivational systems, and its impact on early reading abilities will be tested.

Analyses: Over 1000 unselected children who are being followed from kindergarten to 2nd grade will be assessed with a comprehensive battery of measures evaluating their language and literacy abilities (morphological, early literacy, reading and spelling measures). Correlation, regression, and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) will be employed to examine developmental changes in MA and their predictors. Structural Equation Modeling will be employed to test the hypothesis of a growing effect of MA on literacy skills.

Significance of this study and relevance for education: The outcomes of this study are likely to shed light on enhancing literacy skills before and after the onset of formal reading instruction, and

on developing suitable intervention programs for at-risk children, as well as on the diagnosis of reading disability (by taking into consideration the association between MA and literacy abilities).