

# Reading Development in Diglossic Contexts: Insights from Arabic and Haitian Creole

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Abstract ID: 281

Event: Linguistics 2026 Athens

Subject: 19. Language education

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## Abstract

Recent research on reading development has underscored the positive relationship between oral language skills and reading development (Saiegh-Haddad & Spolsky, 2014). Therefore, the goal of this paper is to illuminate the dependency of reading on linguistic knowledge in diglossic societies, where the language or language variety that is employed for daily interaction is not the formal written one (see e.g., Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1967; Saiegh-Haddad, 2012). Such linguistic discrepancies between what is mainly acquired as the mother tongue and used on a daily basis, and what is learned later through formal schooling, pose noteworthy challenges to literacy development for learners in these societies. Consequently, this paper sheds light on insights from two special contexts that have been commonly described as diglossic in the sociolinguistic literature: (1) the Arab region, where multiple spoken varieties of Arabic coexist along with Modern Standard Arabic (the formal written variety); and (2) Haiti, where the majority of the population speaks Haitian Creole on a daily basis and where schooling, especially literacy instruction, occurs primarily in French. To this end, based on our empirical data from both contexts, we compare and describe differences and similarities in the findings regarding the relationship between linguistic knowledge and reading ability in the two diglossic contexts in the paper, identify potential factors (linguistic, cognitive, and social/contextual) that alter the way in which linguistic knowledge promotes reading ability and vice versa, and conclude with proposing a multilingual translanguaging perspective (MacSwan, 2022) to support literacy development in such multilingual and multidialectal contexts.