**The Influence of Diglossia on Syntactic Proficiency in Standard Arabic among Regular and Struggling Readers**

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## Abstract

This study examines the influence of diglossia on syntactic proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) among fourth-graders. For the purpose of the study, sixty-three pupils at a school in central Israel were sampled and divided into two groups: regular and struggling.

The participants were given three examinations that were constructed especially for this study. In the first, they were asked to translate sentences from spoken Arabic into MSA. The second examination was a cloze test in which the participants had to fill in the blanks with appropriate words. The third was an oral exam in which the pupils were asked to describe pictures in MSA.

The findings revealed errors in four syntactic elements: (a) failure to use connectives, (b) misuse of prepositions, (c) sentences with missing content, and (d) errors in verb conjugation. Both groups of students showed similar levels of success; no significant differences were found between the group of regular pupils and that of struggling pupils in the average test scores in terms of errors in syntactic elements. In only one syntactic element, misuse of prepositions, did the group of regular pupils make more errors than did the group of struggling pupils. This was because the latter did not answer the questions relating to this element.

Thorough discussion of these findings elicits several reasons for this phenomenon: (a) the similarity of the two languages, the spoken and MSA, (b) the influence of the surroundings, (c) scanty reading of books, (d) the teaching methods used in the Arab schools, (e) the influence of Hebrew on the Arab student, and (f) dearth of encouragement by the establishment and the education system. Future research in this field is needed; it should investigate this influence on a sample that is broader both in number of participants and in their socioeconomic status, in order to obtain more representative outcomes.

**Keywords:** diglossia, spoken Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, struggling pupils, regular pupils, syntactic proficiency