

Should I tell you  
the story or  
read it to you?



**Between Spoken and Written Language  
in a Diglossic Context**  
Implications for Literacy Acquisition in Arabic

**Report from  
the Seminar**



**Applied Research in Education**

**Spoken and Written Language in a  
Diglossic Context:  
Implications for Literacy Acquisition  
in Arabic**

**Jerusalem  
February 21, 2008**

**The Professional Advisory Committee on Language  
and Literacy**

**The Initiative for Applied Research in Education**

The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities

Ministry of Education

Rothschild Foundation (Yad Hanadiv)

**Spoken and Written Language in a  
Diglossic Context:  
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**Seminar Report**

**Professional Advisory Committee on  
Language and Literacy**

Jerusalem, 2008  
The Initiative for Applied Research in Education  
The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities

Conference organizer: Elinor Saiegh-Haddad, Bar Ilan University,  
Member of the Committee

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The National Academy of Sciences and Humanities  
[www.academy.ac.il](http://www.academy.ac.il)

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Cover design: Shimon Schneider Studio

**The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities** was founded in 1959. Its membership currently comprises ninety-four top Israeli scientists and scholars. According to the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities Law, 1961, its principal objectives are to foster and promote scientific activity; to advise the Government on research activities and scientific planning of national importance; to maintain ties with equivalent bodies abroad; to represent the Israeli scientific world at international institutes and conferences; and to publish articles that can further scholarship.

**The Ministry of Education was** founded in 1948, when Israel became an independent, sovereign state. Under the State Education Law, 1953, the Ministry is responsible for the education of Israeli children from preschool through high school, up to and including the twelfth grade. In addition, the Ministry is in charge of teacher-training in colleges of education. The Ministry sets both pedagogical policy (e.g., development of curricula, teaching methods, and standards) and organizational policy (e.g., budgeting for the education system, logistical planning, attention to special population groups, and inspection of educational institutions).

**The Rothschild Foundation (Yad Hanadiv)** is continuing the Rothschild family's philanthropic activity in Israel, which Baron Edmond de Rothschild began in the late nineteenth century. The Rothschild Foundation works on improving educational achievement, especially by increasing opportunities for all Israeli pupils to receive a high-quality education. The Rothschild Foundation makes cutting-edge knowledge and expertise available to education workers, thereby spurring innovation, which can improve vital components of the Israeli education system.

**The Initiative for Applied Research in Education** was founded in late 2003 as a joint project of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the Ministry of Education, and the Rothschild Foundation, in order to develop applied research on issues of concern to decision-makers in the field of education. Its aim is to help decision-makers improve educational achievement by providing them with the latest peer-reviewed knowledge. The Initiative is based on the experience of the United States and Europe, where national academies have undertaken to advance the education systems by learning from both research and practice. In these regions, an improvement in student achievements has been related, under certain conditions, to the systematic use by teachers, principals, and policymakers of knowledge and evidence derived from scientific research.

Three working assumptions guided the establishment of the Initiative:

- New knowledge in various fields of research, from brain science to performance, may contribute to research and practice in education. In Israel there are research capabilities—in education and other fields—that can be encouraged to focus on improving educational achievement.
- Asking research questions derived from decision-makers' agenda may encourage education researchers, in collaboration with scholars in other fields, to expand their activity aimed at creating knowledge that can benefit education practitioners. The effort to answer these questions may lead to new theories and research tools for advancing the education system and education.

- Decision-makers in education, from teachers to the Education Ministry administration, will seek to derive benefit from carefully reviewed and established knowledge that is made available to them and to contribute to the development of such knowledge based on their own professional experience.

### **Professional Advisory Committee on Language and Literacy**

The Initiative for Applied Research in Education periodically consults with decision makers in the field of education – from teachers and principals to policy makers – to learn from them how reliable research information and real data would benefit their decision making processes and assist them in their work. In the course of these consultations as well as in discussions with researchers in Israel and abroad, the Initiative's steering committee learned of the importance of 'language and literacy' as a key to educational achievement. The complexity of the vast field of language and literacy, the innovative research in various disciplines and the numerous field and research questions were the impetus for the Initiative's Steering Committee's creation of a dedicated "Discipline Committee" – i.e., the *Professional Advisory Committee on Language and Literacy* - a group of leading experts with a long-term commitment to the field. These experts study the discipline from a variety of research and field perspectives and assist in the continuing advancement of research and application.

The Committee comprises a small group of scholars that represent various fields of knowledge and expertise and reflect a range of professional approaches to education. Committee members volunteer their time and professional expertise to study and recommend solutions that meet existing needs and to advance research in the field through informed selection of relevant topic areas and their prioritization. With time, it is expected that the Professional Advisory Committee will serve as a resource of first choice where decision makers in the field can turn for consultation and for reliable, objective information. At the same time, growing familiarity with the relevant research areas as well as consultations with local and foreign colleagues will enable Committee members to anticipate challenges on the horizon as well as spheres of research useful to educational endeavors.

The Committee has the mandate to engage in a variety of activities that will further their aims including commissioning field and literature surveys and making them available to the public, consulting with experts, convening seminars and workshops for researchers and decision makers, proposing topics and programs for needed research and recommending the formation of experts committees. The Committee considers proposals and issues it deems important with the aim of promoting effective action that will advance research and make the most up-to-date information available to benefit practitioners in their work.

### **Guidelines for Committee Activities**

The Professional Advisory Committee's first meeting was held on May 25, 2006 at the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Following discussion with both Ministry of Education and National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education executives, the Committee was asked to initially relate to specific issues within the vast field of language and literacy. They are:

- Hebrew as a native language and as a second language, critical evaluation of the educational system's expectations of its graduates including native born and immigrants in the areas of language, knowledge and gaps in knowledge, methods of attaining desired literacy results during children's years at school.
- Arabic language - the transition from the language spoken at home to standard language used at school.

During the 2007-08 academic year, the Committee held two seminars in which local and foreign policy makers and researchers participated. A report summarizing the first seminar is available on the Initiative's website. In parallel, the Initiative set in motion a project headed by Committee member, Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad, which will cultivate conditions to promote research and develop Arabic language instruction for native speakers.

### **Committee Members<sup>1</sup>**

Prof. (Emeritus) Elite Olshtain, Chair, Hebrew University School of Education

Prof. (Emeritus) Ruth Berman, Department of Linguistics Tel Aviv University; served as Chair of the committee from its formation until June 2008

Prof. Shaul Hochstein, Department of Neurobiology, the Institute of Life Sciences and the Interdisciplinary Center for Neural Computation at the Hebrew University

Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad, Department of English, Bar-Ilan University

Prof. Joseph Tzelgov, Achva Academic College; Department of Behavioral Sciences, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Dr. Tammy Katzir, School of Education, Haifa University

Ruvik Rosenthal, *Maariv* newspaper; Department of Sociology and Political Science, Open University

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<sup>1</sup> Brief background information about the Committee members and Seminar participants appears in Appendix C.

## **Spoken and Written Language in a Diglossic Context: Implications for Literacy Acquisition in Arabic**

### **Seminar Report**

The present report summarizes the lectures as well as the issues the lecturers, the panel participants and the audience raised during the seminar discussions. It is being made available to the public with the view that professionals, in particular and the public in general, will find interest in its subject matter. The report does not include findings or recommendations discussed within the Professional Advisory Committee on Language and Literacy nor are they brought in its name. This report was subject to the customary process of independent peer review. The Committee is grateful for the review as it helped ensure the quality of reporting, its reliability and independence.

### **Background and Goals**

The seminar was the fruit of cooperation between the Professional Advisory Committee on Language and Literacy and the Project to Enhance Research and Development Capacity with Respect to Teaching Arabic to Native Speakers in Israel. The seminar took place in Jerusalem on February 21, 2008.

For the first time in Israel, and possibly the world, an academic seminar was held concerning the linguistic distance between spoken and written language in a diglossic context and its implications for teaching Arabic as a native language, literacy acquisition in Arabic, teaching reading, and the language policy in Arabic-speaking schools in Israel. The seminar's participants also reflected its uniqueness – with well-known researchers from Israel and abroad and top echelon professionals from the Ministry of Education.

The seminar's goal was to deepen the level of knowledge regarding the challenges faced by children in a diglossic context. The requirement to be literate and to acquire reading skills in a language that is not identical with their spoken language presents these children with a formidable challenge. The aim of the seminar was to learn, study, consider and discuss the relevant issues with colleagues – and not necessarily to arrive at decisions, present recommendations or provide answers.

The seminar was divided into two parts: the theoretical-academic and the practical-educational-pedagogical. Three researchers participated in the first part. The opening lecture was delivered by Prof. Julie Washington of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She presented findings from her research, conducted over a five-year period during which she investigated language and reading development among African-American children in the United States. There are obviously sociological as well as socio-linguistic, language and cultural differences between the African-American language context and the Arabic diglossic context. One common characteristic of both however, is the linguistic distance of spoken language from standard language. Both African-American and Arab children are faced with a situation in which they learn to read a language that is quite far from the language they speak. As mentioned above, this distance challenges the required skills transfer from understanding and expressing oneself in the spoken language or dialect to the desired and requisite literacy in the standard language.

The second lecture was delivered by Prof. Bernard Spolsky of Bar Ilan University. He presented the linguistic, conceptual and cultural difficulties of acquiring reading skills as well as teaching them in a diglossic context; he also surveyed various conceptions of literacy.

In the third lecture delivered by Prof. John Myhill of Haifa University, a scientific survey of diglossic contexts in different parts of the world was presented. Prof. Myhill described methods employed by educational systems for teaching language and reading in countries and societies where diglossic contexts exist and explained the connection between an educational system's language policy and its achievements in literacy.

The second part of the seminar focused on lessons learned from the three lectures with respect to Arabic language acquisition as a mother tongue, teaching language and reading as well as language policies in Arabic-language schools in Israel. A panel discussion took place in which Dr. Muhammad Amara of Bar-Ilan University, Prof. Sulaiman Jubran of Tel Aviv University and Mr. Abdalla Khatib, director of the Ministry of Education's Department of Arab Education participated.

## **Lecture Abstracts**

### **Literacy Skills Dialectal Variation: The Case of the African American Child**

Prof. Julie Washington

Most African-American children in the United States speak a dialect of English called "African-American English" (AAE)<sup>2</sup>. The lecture discussed the history of the dialect, its characteristics and long-standing questions surrounding its use among African American children of school-age in the US. AAE is distinguished from standard American English in all aspects of language: morphology, syntax, semantics, pronunciation and pragmatics. While there is disagreement as to the roots of the AAE dialect, its existence as a legitimate dialectal variation of the English language has gained broad acceptance.

During the past several years, the academic language and education communities have begun to show an interest in the role the African American dialect plays in the differences in educational achievement between African American and white children. On average, African American children lag behind their white counterparts in all school subjects including math, sciences, social studies and language. One hypothesis places the source of under-achievement in the paucity of African American children's literacy skills. For many years now, there has been an ongoing

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2. These sources provide background for the lecture:

Craig, H.K., Thompson, C.A., Washington, J.A., & Potter, S.L. (2004). Performance of elementary-grade African American students on the Gray Oral Reading Tests. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 35*, 141-154.

Thompson, C.A., Craig, H.K., & Washington, J.A. (2004). Variable production of African American English across oracy and literacy contexts. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 35*, 269-282.

Washington, J. A., & Thomas-Tate, S. (in press). Cultural-linguistic differences in the classroom: The bi-dialectal African American child. in V.W. Berninger & S. Rosenfeld (Eds.) *Implementing Evidenced-based Interventions in Schools*. Oxford University Press

debate concerning which variables determine the gap in reading skills between these two populations of children.

African American English is an important feature of the African American community and transcends socio-economic and geographic boundaries throughout the US. When African American children enter school, they find the value associated with their dialect within the school environment diminished due to the fact that it is inconsistent with the Standard English written in textbooks and used for instruction in the classroom. Many teachers view it as "poor English" whose use acts as an obstacle to literacy as well as to other types of learning in the classroom.

Prof. Washington presented research results showing that reading skills of children who continue to speak AAE in the higher grades lag behind those of their peers. She presented several intervention methods for teaching language, which according to her research, help attain literacy.

### **Three Aspects of Literacy in the Vernacular**

Prof. Bernard Spolsky

The lecture discussed three aspects of frequently encountered problems in teaching reading in a classical or a standard language to children who speak a local vernacular or dialect: the pedagogical argument, the idea of readiness for literacy and the power of the standard language. These features are also found in the diglossic context, as in the case of the Arabic language. In many settings, children are expected to learn to read a language different from the one they speak. Most empirical studies however, support the pedagogic policy of teaching literacy in the language children speak at home.

Aside from the technical aspects of learning to read and write, there is clear evidence that conditions of readiness for literacy, i.e., pre-literate practices which influence reading acquisition, should be present. When policy and actions that oppose teaching literacy in the spoken language exist or when the authority and status of the standard/classical language is so great, they obstruct the successful acquisition of literacy skills. Throughout his lecture, Prof. Spolsky presented examples from various countries and societies.

### **Situations in which a Child's First Spoken Language and First Written Language are Related but Linguistically Distant: A Cross-Language Survey**

Prof. John Myhill

The large body of research on spoken languages around the world<sup>3</sup> has demonstrated that children learn to read faster and with greater comprehension when the language they are learning to read is closer to their spoken language in terms of phonology, syntax and lexicon. This finding is reflected in national literacy rates. For example, the former Soviet Union had a policy of developing written languages that were direct reproductions of spoken languages. Thus, even speakers of Central-Asian languages such as Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik, which prior to the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, research conducted by UNESCO (1953), Dutcher and Tucker (1997) and Moehrotra (1998)

Soviet era did not have a written form, reached literacy rates of 96% in 1959<sup>4</sup> and stand at greater than 99% today. In contrast, the British and the French who ruled the Indian sub-continent and Africa did not have a policy of developing written languages based on local spoken languages; literacy rates in these areas today reach just 60%, on average. Similarly, literacy rates in Maltese - which from a linguistic standpoint is a dialect of Arabic but has a writing system based on the spoken language - stand at 92.5%, the highest literacy rate of all Arabic-speaking countries that use Modern Standard Arabic as their written language and significantly higher than the general rate of literacy in these countries, which stands at 71.5%. At the same time, the accepted policy in many countries is to teach children to read and write primarily in languages or dialects that are very different from the one they speak. Additional examples from other countries were presented.

Prof. Myhill gave a historical perspective to the situation. Until approximately 1100 CE the only written language in Western Europe was Latin. Spoken languages deviated considerably from Latin as well as from one another. During that period, literacy rates in Western Europe were very low. During the next few hundred years, Western Europeans developed written versions of spoken languages which eventually became known as French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. In the mid-1600's, the introduction of a new technology - the printing press - served mainly those who were writing in the newly developed written languages, while Latin writers made lesser use of it. As a result, use of the newer languages intensified and brought about a major increase in literacy.

During the past ten years, a technological innovation of similar proportions has taken place. More and more people - especially the young - are using electronic writing forms (blogs, e-mails, text messages, etc.) instead of print forms in which writing almost always conforms to the spoken language.

### **Panel and Discussion: The Linguistic Distance in Teaching Arabic as the Mother Tongue**

Moderator: Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad, Department of English, Bar-Ilan University

Participants: Dr. Dr. Muhammad Amara, Bar-Ilan University; Dr. Sulaiman Jubran, Tel Aviv University; Mr. Abdalla Khatib, Ministry of Education

The panel discussion centered on the question of what can be learned and inferred from the situation in different parts of the world today regarding: acquisition of standard language and reading in Arabic, language policy in schools in the Arab sector, and the place of spoken language.

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<sup>4</sup> Refers to reading and writing.

## **Summary Remarks – Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad**

Prof. Julie Washington discussed the research in the field of African American language and its implications for getting the educational system to recognize it as a legitimate language despite the fact that it has for hundreds of years been viewed as an inferior version of the standard language. Linguists who have studied the structure of African American English showed it possesses the structure of a linguistic system; its rules are consistent and no less complex than many other written languages. In light of these findings, the American educational system has begun to recognize AAE as a language in the full sense of the word and has started thinking about ways of leveraging AAE and incorporating it into the system so that it can aid in standard language acquisition.

This supports the research approach with respect to the question of whether the specific linguistic code is a legitimate language and is a major determining factor influencing the Ministry of Education's educational approach. The answer will determine whether spoken language will be accepted as a legitimate code at least at the beginning of the path, if only to help children make the transition from home language to school language.

The advantage researchers studying the African American context have at their disposal is relatively rich linguistic research results on AAE's language structure and an in-depth description of the dialect's characteristics. A basic descriptive study such as this is necessary for research to develop in other educational spheres.

No sufficiently comprehensive, basic descriptive linguistic or developmental research has been conducted with respect to Arabic and it is therefore hard to know what is characteristic of typical development of spoken language in Arabic; as a corollary, it is difficult to characterize atypical language development. The paucity of research findings makes it difficult to understand problems in the development of the spoken language and the problems associated with acquisition of written language in the school setting and the reciprocal relationship between them. All this is essential information for understanding the challenges and developing the methodologies to resolve them.

Another issue arising from Prof. Washington's lecture relates to the linguistic distance between the two versions of the language and how this affects children's reading and writing. Washington noted that children "translate into writing" their spoken language and teachers are uncertain whether to accept this as legitimate or to try to change this practice owing to their awareness of the "source of the mistake" or, to relate to them neutrally, simply as errors which must be corrected. These are important questions and we must think about them in connection to Arabic as well: how should the educational system relate to the obvious influence spoken language has on children's reading and writing and what is the best way to deal with this issue?

The question relates to our perception of spoken language. This topic was also raised in Prof. Myhill's lecture via the questions of what constitutes a language and or a dialect. He presented the conception according to which, linguistic structure is not the sole factor that determines whether two linguistic codes are two different

languages or two dialects of the same language. At times, the distance between language or dialect versions, as with spoken and written Arabic, is greater than the distance between what is classified as two separate languages such as Russian and Ukrainian. In actuality, the decision is of a socio-political nature. This is an important point because it influences what we, as adults and as teachers, assume children know about language and what they are capable of doing in it. It is likely that adults have a hidden assumption in this regard: just as adults are familiar with the linguistic structures of both the spoken dialect and the written language and the relationship between them – children are also capable of understanding the relationship. This assumption however, is erroneous at its core.

The study<sup>5</sup> I conducted showed that the linguistic connection between words common to both languages is not clear to young children. If they have not been informed otherwise, children think that words with a different syllabic structure or different phonemes are different. They need to be specifically told that a certain word in the written language has the same meaning as the word they already know from the spoken language, which is indeed similar in structure.

We must understand the psychology of the child and take into consideration the way he thinks about language. It is also very important that teachers know that there are two linguistic systems, two language structures that are divided – in pragmatics as well. The transition from spoken language to written is connected to another issue raised in the discussion on the African American situation, namely, code switching. Teachers and children must understand what spoken language is and what standard language is and when it is appropriate to use one as opposed to the other. It is important for the children to understand what characterizes spoken language, what does not constitute spoken language and when to use which; they must also learn the rules relevant to code-switching. The crucial role teachers have is helping to get children to the point where they themselves can distinguish when and where to use each one of the languages and to actually engage in code switching.

In his lecture, Prof Spolsky emphasized the enormous challenge inherent in cultivating literacy in diglossic situations. There appears to be a general consensus that it is easier for a child to acquire reading skills in a language which is closer to his spoken language (a conclusion that also can be reached by way of logic and intuition), although the problem in acquiring reading skills in a diglossic context is the lack of appropriate materials since the spoken language is not written. Even if such a written text were to be created, it is doubtful whether society is ready to accept new roles for spoken language. Society must have its say regarding these important issues as this is a socio-cultural rather than a language-related decision.

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<sup>5</sup> Saiegh-Haddad, E. (2008). The effect of exposure to Standard Arabic and linguistic distance from Spoken Arabic on lexical processing in Standard Arabic. *To appear in Aram, D. & O. Korat, (Eds.), Literacy Development, Learning and Teaching at Home and School. Magnes Press (in Hebrew)*

## Appendix A: Seminar Agenda

### 9:30 – 10:00 **Gathering and Registration**

- 10:00–11:50 **First Session** – Opening Lecture, Chair: Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad
- 10:00–10:05 Greetings - Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad, Dept. of English, Bar-Ilan University
- 10:05–10:10 Opening remarks – Prof. Ruth Berman, Dept. of Linguistics, Tel Aviv University
- 10:10–10:20 Opening remarks - Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad
- 10:20–11:50 Prof. Julie Washington, Head, Dept. of Communicative Disorders, University of Wisconsin

#### **Literacy Skills Dialectal Variation: The Case of the African American Child**

### 11:50 – 12:00 **Coffee Break**

- 11:45–13:15 **Second Session** – Lectures, Chair: Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad
- 12:00–12:30 Prof. (Emeritus) Bernard Spolsky, Dept. of English, Bar-Ilan University

#### **Three Aspects of Literacy in the Vernacular**

- 12:30–13:00 Prof. John Myhill, Dept. of English Language and Literature, Haifa University

#### **Situations in which a Child's First Spoken Language and First Written Language are Related but Linguistically Distant: A Cross-Language Survey**

- 13:00–13:15 Ms. Eman Gara\*, Dept. of English Language and Literature, Haifa University

#### **Script-mixing and Multilingualism in the Representation of Dialectal Arabic in CMC and SMS Communication**

### 13:15 – 14:00 **Lunch Break**

- 14:00–15:45 **Third Session** – Panel and Discussion, Chair: Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad
- 14:00–15:00 Panel Discussion: **The Linguistic Distance in Teaching Arabic as the Mother Tongue**
- What can be learned and deduced from the situation in different parts of the world today regarding:
- Standard language and reading acquisition in Arabic
  - Language policy in Arab sector schools and the place of spoken language
- Participants:
- Dr. Dr. Muhammad Amara, Bar-Ilan University  
Prof. Sulaiman Jubran, Tel Aviv University  
Mr. Abdalla Khatib, Ministry of Education  
Mr. Salach Taha, Ministry of Education
- 15:00–15:30 Discussion with audience participation
- 15:30–15:45 Summary Remarks - Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad

(\* ) As Ms. Eman Gara was absent from the seminar, Prof. Myhill described her findings in his own lecture (see Appendix B)

## **Appendix B: Notes from the Lectures and Panel Discussion**

### **A. Lecture: Literacy Skills Dialectal Variation: The Case of the African American Child**

Prof. Julie Washington, Dept. of Communication Disorders, University of Wisconsin, USA

During the past several years, academic language and education communities have begun to show an interest in the role the African American dialect plays in the differences in educational achievement between African American and white children in the US. For many years a disproportionate number of African American children were placed in special education; academicians recently began to understand that solutions to their learning difficulties and underachievement in the area of reading skills must be sought: their goals were to understand the impact of the dialect on the children, to bring teachers round to accepting African American English as a legitimate spoken language and to find methods for helping children adopt standard English in the best possible way.

In order to understand the problems and proposed solutions, some background on the history of African American English (AAE) is needed, its status in the white population and its status among those who speak it. The dialect's roots are in the period of slavery when people taken from different parts of Africa arrived in and needed a common language that would enable them to communicate with one another as well as with their masters. The language that developed then was meant for speaking only and had no written equivalent. With time, the language has clearly evolved to a degree as it continues to be spoken by the majority of African Americans to this day. Due to its origins, AAE is perceived as non-legitimate English – low status, inferior, and employing faulty grammar. It is associated with a low level of education, low status employment, poverty and ignorance.

Over the years, the argument that a dialect spoken by an entire community cannot be dismissed as illegitimate and incorrect gained in strength. A number of academic researchers (Walt Wolfram, William Labov, Roger Shuy, Joan Baratz and Ralph Fasold) began to study and describe African American English as a language with defined characteristics, rules and structure.

The researchers pointed to the systematic omission of the possessive pronoun as well as plural markers, to the elimination of "s" in the third person or "ed" in the past, to the use of double negatives, to deviations in pronunciation (phonological variations of vocal and non-vocal "th") and more. They found that even after children enter school, the use of AAE continues and develops. Although these studies helped change the view of African American English in the academic community, among the general population, including teachers, acceptance of the dialect as legitimate is painstakingly slow and encounters difficulties. For African Americans however, AAE is an important component of their culture which transcends social and geographic boundaries throughout the US.

Other than a small minority of approximately five percent that speak only Standard American English, the majority of African American children entering school in the US speak the dialect; they then need to learn to read and write Standard English and bridge the gap between their dialect and another linguistic system. Standard

American English differs from African American English in all aspects of language: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. In the school system's educational environment, the positive value attributed to the dialect diminishes and many teachers view it as "poor English" whose use acts as a barrier to literacy as well as to other types of learning in the classroom.

The attempt to involve the legal system (The Ann Arbor Black English decision, 1979) led the court to issue a declarative decision which required schools to educate their teachers with reference to the dialect so that they could improve their teaching methods. Teachers had been accused of referring children to special education without reason. In fact, it became clear that despite the importance of the court decision, it served to put the cart before the horse – since it was now mandatory for teachers to perform certain functions without having been given the tools to do so. Moreover, the decision aggravated the situation as it deterred teachers from identifying children whose problems could be successfully addressed through special education.

In addition, the controversial Oakland court decision handed down 17 years later in 1996 that recognizes "Ebonics", the "Black Dialect" as a language did not lead to a practical breakthrough on a national scale and in fact, deteriorated into a well-publicized political debate.

Another attempt to integrate the dialect into the school system and bridge the gap between the child's home and school languages included producing school books and stories written in African American English. The effort was a dismal failure: AAE is a spoken language and therefore it is insufficient to decipher its rules; implementing its pragmatics in writing is not at all simple. The resulting texts were not authentic and teachers disliked them. Although the children liked seeing their language in print, it cannot be shown that it contributed to an improvement in their reading skill acquisition and general literacy. The white community believed that AAE was simply sub-standard language and insisted its legitimacy would not be recognized in the classroom whereas, the African American community themselves did not see how this process would help their children integrate into society.

At the same time, both teachers and parents are becoming more aware of the influence the dialect has on education. Shining the spotlight on the achievement gap between African American and white and Asian children did not lead to any satisfactory solutions and occasionally even led to a situation where schools with poor achievement scores were punished. The single positive impact of these efforts was the willingness to hear AAE spoken in the classroom. The question that remains is how to leverage greater acceptance of AAE so that it will help advance African American children?

Experts all agree that phonological awareness plays an important role in the acquisition of reading skills however, phonological awareness comes at the expense of comprehension. Pupils end up investing all their cognitive resources in mechanical reading and do not understand the meaning of the text. Scores from achievement tests administered in 2003 across the United States found that only 12% of African American fourth graders achieved the grade appropriate reading level (among eighth graders, it falls to 7%). Approximately 60% of the children did not reach the level of

grade appropriate achievement. As a rule, African American children, not only those from low socio-economic levels, lag behind in all school subjects. The fundamental mismatch between the language African American children speak at home and the language they are required to use at school manifests itself in difficulties with all aspects of language: not only phonology but also in writing and reading and its consequent results – poor literacy skills. Research has shown that even those children who have a command of complex syntax and a wide vocabulary in their own dialect do not retain any long-term advantage in school.

Another stage in the attempt to increase comprehension was the introduction of the GORT (Gray Oral Reading Test), which in contrast to many other standardized tests used nationally, was developed especially to assess the literacy skills of African American children.

To encourage literacy, parents were asked to read stories to their children. The African American parents were given books written in Standard English and they read them to their children in African American English. Children tested using the GORT were asked to read aloud so that the examiners could follow how they read Standard English texts and count the number of times they deviated from the written text.

The test was administered to third through fifth grade boys and girls and included 13 passages about different subjects written at varying levels of difficulty, length, syntax and vocabulary. Thirty percent of the children tested were from low-income families. Self-correction was also scored as these are meant to reveal how children deal with their home language.

All of the texts were written in Standard English so that none of the children should have used AAE however, 92% of the 65 children tested did at times read in their dialect. No significant differences in this respect were found between boys and girls<sup>6</sup>. Of the 17,000 recorded differences or deviations from the text, 21% stemmed from the influence of AAE. It was found that children who speak a dialect that is different from the one used in school, first read the text in the dialect with which they feel comfortable. Afterwards, they corrected themselves to the language used in school. As the difficulty of the text increased, so did dialect use during reading and this is due to the cognitive resources directed towards another purpose. For these children, the language of the community is the most stabilizing element. Reading comprehension was lower and as AAE use increased, so did speed and accuracy.<sup>7</sup>

Analysis of the test results showed that a decrease in dialect use already begins in kindergarten though it is still in frequent use until second grade. By the third grade, its use declines significantly and stabilizes; from this point onward there is no significant difference between African American and other children. The critical and major conclusion is that most African American children (roughly two-thirds) learn to spontaneously switch between the AAE and standard language (code switching).

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<sup>6</sup> In general, boys tend to use the AAE dialect more than girls.

<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the GORT (now in its fourth edition) found that at times, children read the Standard English text accurately but more slowly. From one point of view this is a good result however, it leads to a lower score on reading rate, which is based on speed. This scoring aspect may need to be re-evaluated.

Children who by third grade are not able to spontaneously switch between languages have a lower probability of improving on their own. Thus, a third of pupils fail to spontaneously switch from standard language even though they attend school, are exposed to texts in Standard English and study in an environment where Standard English is spoken.

What prevents these children from switching from the dialect used at home to standard language? In most cases, the problem is not cognitive in nature (only 10% of these children suffer from language disabilities). It is unclear whether the problem lies in their language system, in linguistic flexibility or perhaps, in the relationship between the school and home languages.

There is no expectation that children from low income families will cease using the dialect once they start school. Rather, the more likely occurrence is a decline in the frequency of its use until third grade (decreasing from one dialectical feature per every 20 words to one per every 50 words). In contrast, children from middle and higher income families do succeed in using each language separately – mainly because their parents do. These parents set clear boundaries for use of each of the languages and their children correctly learn the codes for proper use not only in school but at home as well.

As we have seen, many children do learn standard language and the settings in which it is used. Children who write Standard English also speak it while those children who do not spontaneously switch between the spoken languages certainly cannot do so in the written form - African American children who use AAE in school also write in the dialect. On the one hand, the written form mirrors the children's language and on the other, it acts as a bridge between the languages. In written English, we expect pupils' written texts to be similar to one another as they use the same grammatical rules and lexical range. Variation in writing may point to the fact that the rules of standard language are not being followed but rather, spoken language rules are used. Analysis of mistakes made can teach us about the children's weak points and skills that need improvement. Analysis of self-editing is instructive regarding the problematic areas children can overcome on their own.

The school's role here is to bridge the gap for children who do not absorb code-switching at home and to emphasize instruction of standard language so that these children can become academically successful. Prof. Washington suggests using the corpus of accumulated knowledge on dialects and on development of pupils so as to enable schools to enhance their pupils' successful acquisition of Standard English while still maintaining respect for the language of the community. She gave an account of such a method by describing her activities at a Detroit school (K through 12) that approached her and asked for code-switching to be incorporated in their curriculum. Together with the school's teachers she is developing a multi-phase model that will perhaps serve other schools as well.

The first phase of the model concerns attaining agreement regarding the need to teach children to use Standard English within the classroom and to teach teachers to discern features of the AAE dialect. Having reached an understanding regarding the significance of the dialect as an expression of identity and of belonging to the group and the community, in the second phase, the pupils, particularly older ones, must

agree on the different uses of codes, the appropriate settings for use and its inherent importance.

In the third phase, both codes are clearly differentiated from one another, and non-judgmental terminology to be used in the classroom is decided upon - such as, "school language" and "home language" i.e., the language used at school as opposed to the language used within the community. Preliminary research shows that when teachers recognize AAE as legitimate, they develop greater sensitivity and correct children's mistakes without arousing feelings of inferiority. A deliberately confrontational approach between the two languages is recommended when teaching writing, reading and speaking. If, for example, a child has difficulty with the plural case, the teacher clarifies the issue of school language versus home language for the entire class saying for instance, in home language, the plural case does not require the addition of an "s" at the end of the word whereas in school language, the "s" is required. The parallel drawn between oral and written language improves the children's meta-linguistic awareness - i.e., this is how standard language is used and this is how dialect is used.

Problems with phonetics are handled in small reading groups. Students are taught how to read each word and how to pronounce each sound.

Using this model, developing awareness of language is achieved through respect and sensitivity for the language of the community; pupils learn to switch between languages and understand each language's limits and even participate in setting them.

In summary, reading is a linguistic skill and it is therefore important to understand that pupils who speak a dialect which differs from the language used at school start out at a disadvantage. Despite the fact that at a national level, the degree of tolerance towards the non-standard language is low, as is the willingness to incorporate heritage languages in the schools, Yet, at the grass roots level, teachers and principals are slowly learning to recognize the importance of incorporating dialects in teaching so that children's reading, writing and literacy skills are improved.

Research and application must cooperate so that each side learns and appreciates the activities of the other. It is worthwhile for research to precede application so that teachers can have at their disposal the most effective tools that aid teaching.

#### **B. Lecture: Three Aspects of Literacy in the Vernacular**

Prof. Bernard Spolsky, Dept. of English, Bar-Ilan University

The diglossic context, as defined by Ferguson<sup>8, 9</sup>, is characterized by the use of two versions of the same language despite their differences. Written language

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7. Fergusson describes four diglossic situations: (a) German in Switzerland: in public life, the German of Germany and Austria is used but in private life, a different German, Swiss-German, is used; (b) Arabic: two versions of the language one is used for writing and the other for speaking with substantial differences between them; (c) Haiti: French is the language of public life and used in school however, everyone speaks a Haitian version of Creole; (d) Two versions of Greek.

<sup>9</sup> Ferguson, Charles A. (1959), Diglossia, *Word*, 15, 325-340.

belongs, as it were, to public life and is learned at school; it has set grammatical rules and uses a lexicon which differs from other types of language. Spoken language is a private language, learned at home. It too has its own set of grammatical rules and lexicon and it is possible to make errors just as in any other language, though no one believes that writing in the spoken language is a possibility.<sup>10</sup>

Educating towards literacy in a diglossic context is influenced by three factors: educational policy, readiness for literacy and the power of the standard language.

More and more research data from around the globe show that teaching reading and writing of spoken (home) language leads to positive results. However, in many cases the expectation is that children will learn to read a language they do not speak. Throughout the world there are examples, on the one hand, of the gap between the educational system and the language used at school, and on the other hand, the spoken language with which children are raised and speak at home.

For instance, in Belgium, 40% of high school students report that they are taught in a language different from the one spoken at home. French and Flemish are Belgium's two official languages however, everyone speaks their own dialect. In most African countries, school is taught in either English or French – not in the various African languages. This differs from the situation in South Africa where the prevailing policy plans to put into practice, teaching in the 11 local languages mentioned in the constitution.

To give substance to his words, Prof. Spolsky brought two examples from field work he had done: in a small village in Tonga, an island in the Pacific Ocean, and among the Navaho Indians.

Tongan society recognizes the importance of reading and writing and its utility for daily life; its educational language policy dictates that the spoken language will be used in school. As a result, Tongan children enthusiastically and effectively learn - as witnessed by events in school and the community - for example, distribution of the weekly newspaper in school - little girls come home from school and read the news before they give the paper to their parents. Study of the local language is accompanied by the study of English which, as a second language, is both the language of the conquest as well as the language used in the job market.

Tonga's educational language policy is anchored in the island's history when missionaries arrived in 1829 and taught the children to read and write in European languages because they reasoned that this was the most efficient way to attain their aims – converting the children to Christianity. The Tongan culture's readiness for acquiring reading and writing skills they would later use, emerged from an

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<sup>10</sup> He demonstrated this point with an anecdote about the difficulty Arab students had when he asked them to write a word in Classical Arabic on the blackboard and then asked them to write a word in spoken Arabic. They did not know in which alphabet to write the word.

anthropological story about a sailor who decades prior to the missionaries' arrival, revealed to the tribal leader the advantages of reading and writing.<sup>11</sup>

Navaho tribe members did not find reading and writing to be an advantage in their daily lives and in this, they did not differ from their leaders.<sup>12</sup> In the Navaho Indian reservation, all types of oral communication were conducted in the Navaho language (including radio broadcasts, as well as court and tribal council proceedings) whereas, English was the language used in school and the only written language (protocols of legal proceedings conducted in the local language were recorded in English). Navaho society is not authoritarian and since literacy was not a natural need, they accepted the inherently problematic situation wherein they were taught to read a language they did not speak.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, under these conditions, their educational system did not attain high achievements and their level of literacy was much lower than that of Tonga. It is evident that not recognizing the importance of literacy for use in daily life presents a serious obstacle to teaching literacy.

Another problem in the diglossic context touches upon the question of whether it is possible to read in a language that one does not speak. This apparently is the situation that took place in the Jewish "cheder": children who spoke Yiddish learned to read Hebrew – a language they did not speak. In actual fact however, learning the (Hebrew) blessings was accompanied by the study of Hebrew reading, thus, the language itself and reading is learned at one and the same time. The point of interest in the case of Yiddish and Hebrew is that as Hebrew reading skills were being acquired (the written language), the Yiddish speakers were also learning to write in the language – they started writing their spoken language using the Hebrew letters of the written language. For many years, writing in Yiddish was accompanied by apologetics for not using Hebrew – the high-status language, the language of the holy texts. It was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that writing in Yiddish became accepted as natural and valuable.

The power of ideology and its influence on language are brought to bear on attitudes regarding the extent to which standard language should remain intact and whole and are reflected in the strength of the standard language's status. These factors play a role in the diglossic context and in the possibility of surmounting it. When standard language is perceived as high-status, local language speakers develop respect for it; they feel that their own language is not as important and tend to prefer the standard language. Standard language's status grows even more in the case of Arabic where it

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<sup>11</sup> The sailor was on good terms with the tribal Chief and showed him the advantages of reading and writing when he wrote down on a piece of paper, the words the Chief had whispered in his ear. Afterwards he gave the paper to another sailor who read the words back to the Chief. The Chief said, "What a wonderful idea. This way I can send orders to my people all over the kingdom." And then he had another idea: "Why not teach me and all the women? Do not teach the men. That way I can send them all sorts of messages and their husbands will not know what I want to tell their wives."

<sup>12</sup> For example, they do not think of leaving written messages for one another even though their houses are situated far apart. No one leaves a note if he has gone out. Likewise, a guest who has driven a great distance in order to visit will not know whether he has arrived at his destination because it is not customary to enter a home before someone leaves it.

<sup>13</sup> Thus, when researchers asked the Navaho tribesman for their views regarding bi-lingual education in school, all the respondents including teachers and parents said that it was up to the children. In their opinion, a child of six is capable of making such a decision on his own.

is the language of the holy written texts including the Koran. In such cases, the notion of writing the spoken language is completely opposed to ideology.

At times it is possible to find a way to both live up to an ideology and also bend it to fit a certain process. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Norway was debating which language would be its official one – the country's written language, the high language used by big city residents which included many linguistic components with Danish roots - or folk Norwegian, the language used by villagers, fishermen and farmers. In the end, after a political struggle lasting close to 70 years, a fascinating solution was reached: the decision was made to name both as the official languages of the country. The country's educational language policy dictated that children's spoken language would not be tampered with; they would speak in their own dialects but everyone would learn both languages. Around the world, there are other diglossic situations that require a decision between two languages to be made – with which of the two to identify? Such a situation exists in Haiti where the two languages in question are Creole and French.

### 3. Lecture: **Situations in which a Child's First Spoken Language and First Written Language are Related but Linguistically Distant: A Cross-Language Survey**

Prof. John Myhill, Dept. of English Language and Literature, Haifa University

Research studies in the field of diglossia do not systematically deal with the question of its influence on literacy. This lecture is an attempt to raise some of the issues, looking at them from a linguistic perspective - the linguistic distance between the spoken and written languages<sup>14</sup>, the relationship between the written language and literacy, diglossic contexts and literacy, and the role of educational policy.

There is no commonly accepted, objective method of measuring the distance between different languages. It is accepted practice to assume that the distance between different languages is greater than the distance between dialects however, this is not always true since socio-political issues and society itself determine if a language is categorized as a dialect or as a separate language. Occasionally, the distance between different languages is smaller than the distance between dialects of a language. Such is the case, for example, with the difference between spoken Palestinian Arabic (*āmmiyya*) and Classical Arabic (*fuṣ-ḥā*); from the perspectives of syntax, morphology, phonology and lexicon, the differences are greater than those between Russian and Ukrainian despite the fact that Russian and Ukrainian are classified as two separate languages. The Scandinavian languages – Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are closer to each other than dialects of German.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Studies of many spoken languages throughout the world have shown that children learn to read more quickly and with greater comprehension if the language they are learning is closer in form, syntax and lexicon to their own spoken, mother tongue. In 1953, UNESCO published its recommendation for multi-lingual societies stating it is preferable to teach in the native language. See also Prof. Spolsky's lecture.

<sup>15</sup> In this lecture, reference to linguistic distance between spoken and written language are mainly the result of impressions.

At times, the written language is the spoken language as well as the mother tongue (that is, they are linguistically very close to one another) and at times the differences between the written language and the spoken one, which is the mother tongue, are considerable. In various countries, when the percentage of the population who can read and write is correlated with the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), the importance of the proximity between the written and spoken languages in acquiring literacy is clearly demonstrated and even reveals that it is a stronger determining variable than investment in education.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the percentage of people who read and write in the 15 republics that were part of the former Soviet Union is high while their GDP is very low. The cause is grounded in the former USSR's policy of developing written languages which are a direct imitation of spoken languages. Even speakers of Central Asian languages such as Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik, which had not been written before the Soviet period, achieved literacy rates<sup>17</sup> in these languages of over 96% by 1959 and today, exceed 99%. The situation is similar with respect to Slavic languages in the states that were not part of the USSR. This is due to the fact that the language ideology of all Eastern Europe is based on homogeneous languages, on nationalism and on proximity between written and spoken languages.

Literacy rates in Maltese - which from a linguistic standpoint is a dialect of Arabic but with a writing system based on the spoken language - stand at 92.5%, the highest literacy rate of all Arabic-speaking countries that use Modern Standard Arabic as their written language and significantly higher than the general rate of literacy in these countries which stands at 71.5%.

The British and the French who ruled the Indian sub-continent and Africa did not have a policy of developing written languages based on local spoken languages and were not interested in the reading and writing rates in the areas they ruled. Instead, they urged the elite portions of the population to study reading and writing of a foreign language - English or French and at times, encouraged local language speakers to develop a written language that was at variance with their spoken one. The result is that literacy rates in these areas today reach just 60% on average.

For the purposes of the present discussion which centers mainly on educational problems, Diglossia is defined as a situation wherein the "high language" and the "low language" are close and linguistically related. Examples include Standard Arabic (*fuṣ-ḥā*) and spoken Arabic (*āmmiyya*), Standard English and African-American English, Standard German and Swiss German, Standard Tamil and the spoken Tamil of India and Standard Italian and Sicilian Italian.

What happens in a diglossic context when the written language is significantly different from the language spoken by the people? To understand the differences in the various diglossic contexts as well as the different rates of literacy in countries where diglossic situations exist, it is helpful to describe four diglossic categories:

- A. The "low language" (spoken language) based on a local dialect and the "high language" (written language) based on the language of people living in a

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<sup>16</sup> This fact is determined by correlating the country's rank with respect to GDP which is a measure of its wealth to its rank on a literacy scale showing the proportion of the population who can read and write.

<sup>17</sup> In this lecture, literacy refers to knowledge of reading and writing.

different part of the country. In Sicily, for example, the "low language" is the Sicilian dialect and the "high language" is Standard Italian. At times, there is an ethnic component in the differences between languages – as in the case of African American English. In a situation such as this, those who speak the other language or dialect are exposed to standard language. Even in areas where the predominant language is "low" a relatively large percentage of the population speaks "high" language in their daily lives. In countries where this is the case, literacy rates are high.

- B. High language which is based on a language spoken by people living outside of the country. For example, in Jamaica the local language known as Jamaican Creole is spoken whereas English, the standard language, is based on the language of Britain or the US. The situation is similar in Switzerland. In this category, high language is used mainly on television though to a lesser degree than in category A and the percentage of those who can read and write is also lower than in category A.
- C. High language and low language are separate but have a connection. For example, in the Philippines 30% of the population speak Tagalog and the rest speak another language which is related and similar to Tagalog. This situation is more problematic than those presented in categories A and B from the perspective of literacy but since it is relatively rare it is difficult to make generalizations.
- D. High language is not spoken at all under any conditions. It is based on an ancient language and tied to holy or highly valued texts. Examples of this are Farsi, Sinhalese and Arabic. The percentage of literacy among those included in this category is on average, significantly lower than in the other categories. The data available for India are particularly interesting in view of the generally low level of literacy across the entire Indian sub-continent. This is also the case for relatively wealthy countries (in sub-continent terms) where a diglossic policy was enforced: there is a low rate of literacy and they suffer from literacy problems. Among the countries where the rates of literacy are lowest as compared to GDP, the five countries where this contrast is the strongest are countries with an Arabic-speaking population. An excellent example of this is Qatar which ranks very high in GDP terms but low in the percentage of those that can read and write (89%).

In categories A, B and C, there will always be those that speak the high language, albeit with different degrees of proficiency – and it is therefore possible to view the languages as natural. In contrast, those included in category D are standard languages which are never used as spoken language and whose rules are difficult to master.

Greece solved its diglossic problem in 1977 when it switched from a written language based on Byzantine (which was standard language) to a written form based on the spoken language. As a result, the rate of those who could read and write rose from 86% in 1971 to 96% in 2006.

Comparison of the literacy rates in Sri Lanka and Egypt is instructive: the GDP in these two countries is similar and the diglossic context is as described in category D. However, the rate of literacy differs by tens of percent: in Sri Lanka 90.5% of the population is literate whereas in Egypt 56.6% can read and write. Sri Lanka

overcame diglossic challenges by means of an effective educational policy: in the first four years of school, children are taught to read and write in the spoken language; only in the fifth year do they advance to writing the standard language. In Egypt and in other countries as well, teachers teach in the high language.

During the remainder of the lecture, Prof. Myhill gave a historical perspective to the situation, as follows. Prior to the invention of the printing press, Europe was in a state of diglossia as Latin was the only legitimate written language while the spoken languages which emerged from it such as French, Spanish, Portuguese and the like, were low languages. With the introduction of the printing press, texts written in the spoken languages made their appearance.

During the past ten years, a technological innovation of similar proportions has taken place. More and more people – particularly under the age of 30 – use electronic writing forms (blogs, e-mails, text messages, etc.) instead of print forms in which writing almost always conforms to the spoken language – even in languages such as Swiss German, Farsi, Tamil and Arabic in which standard written forms do not reflect spoken language.

To illustrate the situation further, Prof. Myhill brought examples from the work of his student Eman Gara who is studying recent developments in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), text messages and chats in which the spoken Arabic dialect is generally used. Young Arabs write their spoken dialect incorporating letters and symbols of the Latin alphabet while Israeli Arabs often use the Hebrew alphabet. Certain phonemes do not have a Latin or Hebrew equivalent and therefore adjustments are made using numbers and diacritic marks. Individual variations are also found especially in representing vowels.

### 1. Panel Discussion: **The Linguistic Distance in Teaching Arabic as the Mother Tongue**

Moderator: Dr. Elinor Saiegh-Haddad, Bar-Ilan University

Participants: Dr. Muhammad Amara, Beit Berl College; Prof. Sulaiman Jubran, Tel Aviv University; Mr. Abdalla Khatib, Ministry of Education

The grand questions of what can be learned and inferred from the situation in different parts of the world today regarding standard language and reading acquisition in Arabic, language policy in Arab sector schools and the place of spoken language, stood at the center of the panel discussion. Dr. Amara placed emphasis on the differences between African American English and Arabic and focused on the issue of the ideological distance between spoken and Classical Arabic. His argument was that the difference between AAE and Standard English is mainly functional-social, while the distance between spoken and Classical Arabic is not only a linguistic distance – according to Ferguson's definition of diglossia – but also a social and ideological distance. Despite the linguistic distance, which can be bridged since children can be taught Classical Arabic, here the ideological distance prevents the educational system from recognizing spoken Arabic as a language despite its presence in the schools. Even as the US educational system is searching for pedagogic ways to use AAE within the classroom in order to advance literacy through, for example, structuring systematic use of code switching, the Israeli school

system does not have any structured way of using spoken Arabic as an educational tool.

The distance or the gap between the spoken and written languages is perceived as remaining uniform throughout the years, a fact which illustrates the rigidity of Ferguson's conception. This is understandable from an ideological perspective since Classical Arabic is the language of God, the language of religion and of the Koran and Arab unity – this is how Arabs have seen it for hundreds of years and how it will continue. All the while, there is a different reality as reflected by the media, in particular, at television networks. Alongside networks that broadcast in Standard Arabic (for example, Al-Jazeera), there are hundreds of stations that broadcast in the local dialect. Thus, things are happening "on the ground" that deviate from the official language policy.

There are two divergent possibilities: acceptance of local spoken languages while developing a comprehensive set of grammatical rules and creating separate languages (linguistic pluralism) or imposing Standard Arabic in every place where Arabic is spoken (as was the case with Russian which everyone was compelled to learn wherever the Soviet Union ruled) – a solution that was shown to be impractical. Instead of these solutions, Dr. Amara suggested a middle road taking into account what is happening on the Arabic street and recognizing its bottom-up effect. The speaker expressed his regret that due to rigidity and inflexible ideology, this approach barely exists in the Arab world. With respect to teaching Arabic, this would entail studying the spoken language, learning its rules and regularities, borrowing components and understanding the common denominators between it and Classical Arabic so that it would be possible to leverage spoken language for the benefit of the Standard Language, leading to the hoped-for successful switch between them – i.e., that the home language remains at home and the school language, at school.

Dr. Jubran supports teaching Standard Language and believes it will continue for nationalistic and religious reasons. At the same time, he came out against the claim that spoken Arabic and Classical Arabic are entirely separate. Standard language is depicted as the official language, the national language, the holy language and the language of the Koran – the language that one should aspire to speak – in contrast, spoken language is related to as inferior. According to him, spoken language is natural language, the language of life and attempts to repress it have not succeeded but in fact, accomplished the opposite. Beginning with the Second World War, when Arab countries were granted independence, spoken language's star started to rise. For instance, there are teachers who use spoken language in the classroom or there are those who speak standard language but require spoken language to express emotions.

There is also evidence of its penetration into literature at different levels. The renowned Egyptian writer, Youssef Idris was a pioneer in this respect. His dialogues were written in pure spoken language. Spoken language's syntactic structures and lexicon items/ elements "infiltrated" his prose. Spoken language is also found in the works of poets who, at first, included only lone words placed in quotation marks as if they were apologizing for their unusual use. Today however, its inclusion in serious poetry (not only folk poetry) is found especially in Egypt and Lebanon. This is an

ongoing process and there are even attempts to write complete novels in spoken Arabic – in even as conservative a country as Saudi Arabia.

This is a revolutionary development which will continue so long as Spoken Arabic is not recognized as an important, independent system and no attempts are made to simplify standard language's syntax and morphology so it can be brought as close as possible to spoken language – the natural language. In other words, if on the one hand, the current stance of disregarding spoken language continues and on the other hand, standard language does not evolve, the gap between the two systems will grow wider while spoken language will gradually and persistently take over most functions that are now the preserve of standard language.

Mr. Abdalla Khatib, the director of Arab education at the Ministry of Education discussed additional problems found in teaching standard language: frontal instruction and memorization, which make the development of independent thinking difficult for students, the gap between the Jewish and Arab sectors, the meager literacy environment which makes acquiring standard language difficult, the shortage of textbooks both in class and school libraries, deficient teacher training and the socio-economic conditions of Israeli Arabs as a factor in acquiring language.

He pointed out that the Ministry of Education recognizes the importance of spoken language as a stimulus for acquiring standard language and this is brought to bear on the creation of new programs for the Arab schools. He referred to an Egyptian study which found 100,000 words in the language of children from ages one through six, common to both spoken and standard language. He presented the new, clear policy formulated by Ministry of Education experts and academics from both the Arab and Jewish sectors regarding Arabic language instruction and detailed its principles.

Dr. Saiegh-Haddad pointed out that one should not conceive of spoken and standard language as two separate entities but rather as a continuum and discussion concerning them should take place at different linguistic levels: phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon and the similarities between them. A situation could exist wherein a child has a rich lexicon and phonology in the spoken language or vice versa.

Speakers from the Center for Educational Technology reported that they prepared a corpus of words common to both spoken and written Arabic and on its basis, developed activities for kindergarten age children. They also reported on a long-term study regarding literacy in the Arab home.

Prof. Myhill found support for his results in Prof. Washington's lecture regarding the substantial change taking place in third graders with respect to the use of African-American English features in Standard English and recommended giving thought to the idea of writing spoken Arabic in the lower grades.

The matter of the societal context of the Arabic language in the State of Israel was raised and its influence on the status of the language in the eyes of the Arab population was discussed.

## **Appendix C – Brief Background Information on Committee Members, Speakers and Panel Discussion Participants**

### **Professional Advisory Committee on Language and Literacy**

#### **Members**

**Elite Olshtain**, Committee Chair, is a professor (Emeritus) of Language Education at the Hebrew University School of Education and was formerly the Louis and Ann Wolens Professor of Educational Research at the University. Her main research interests are second language acquisition, bilingualism, language attrition, and reading instruction. She earned her doctorate in Applied Linguistics from the University of California in 1979.

**Ruth Berman** is a professor (Emeritus) in the Department of Linguistics at Tel Aviv University where she holds the "Language Across the Life Span" Chair. Her major research interests are Modern Hebrew structure, Hebrew language acquisition as the mother tongue and cross-linguistic comparisons. She received her Ph.D. in Hebrew Language from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem in 1973.

**Shaul Hochstein** is a professor in the Department of Neurobiology, the Institute of Life Sciences and the Interdisciplinary Center for Neural Computation at the Hebrew University. His major research interests are the visual system (from the photo-transduction process, in which light is absorbed by the eye, to visual information processing in the eye and brain, formation of internal representations of the external world in a hierarchy of cortical areas, and storage of these representations in the memory), perceptual skill learning, and conscious perception. He received his Ph.D. in Zoology from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem in 1973.

**Elinor Saiegh-Haddad** is a lecturer in the Department of English at Bar-Ilan University. Her major research interests are reading acquisition (cognitive and linguistic factors), the psycholinguistics of reading, diglossia, bilingualism, and assessment of reading. She received her Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Bar-Ilan University in 1999.

**Joseph Tzelgov** is president of the Achva Academic College, and a professor in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. His major research interests are automaticity of psychological processes, cognitive skill acquisition (with emphasis on reading), bilingualism, numerical cognition, consciousness, and methodology and statistics in psychological research. He received his Ph.D. in Psychology from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem in 1981.

**Tammy Katzir** is a lecturer in the School of Education, Haifa University and is currently on leave from the Harvard University School of Education. Her major research interests include reading comprehension, reading remediation, and subtypes of dyslexia. She received her Ph.D. in Child Development from Tufts University, Boston in 2002.

**Ruvik Rosenthal** is a linguist and writer, editor of *Panim*, published by the Israel Teachers' Union, and coordinator of journalism workshops at the Open University

Department of Sociology and Political Science. He writes a column entitled "The Linguistic Arena" in the weekend *Maariv*, and edits books and journals. He is a board member of the Israel Association for Research of Language and Society. Among the books he has written are: *Comprehensive Slang Dictionary* (Keter, 2005) and *The Joy of Language* (Am Oved, 2004). He has served as the Op Ed editor at *Maariv* and *Hadashot* and is a winner of the Sokolow Prize for Journalism in 2003/04.

### **Brief Biographies of Speakers and Members of the Discussion Panel**

**Muhammad Hasan Amara** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Political Science and English at Bar-Ilan University and Beit Berl College. His research interests are language education, language policy, sociolinguistics, language and politics, the Arab-Jewish rift in Israel, and collective identity. He received his Ph.D. in Sociolinguistics from Bar-Ilan University in 1991.

**Eman Gara** is a graduate student in the Department of English Language and Literature at the Haifa University. She teaches English as a foreign language at al-Qasemi Academic College of Education in Baqa al-Gharbiyya and in high schools. Her research interests are multi-scriptal and multi-lingual representation of Palestinian Arabic in written online communication. She received her M.A. in English Language and Literature from Haifa University in 2007.

**Sulaiman Jubran** is a professor in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Tel Aviv University. His research interests are modern literature, modern poetry, innovative modern Arabic, autobiography, Palestinian literature and Mahjar literature. He received his Ph.D. in Arabic Language and Literature from Tel Aviv University in 1985.

**Abdalla Khatib** is the director of the Department of Arab Education in the Ministry of Education and is responsible for all issues related to the Arab sector. He was previously a member of the Minister of Education's advisory council, advisor to the Housing Minister on Arab affairs, and inspector of post-secondary education in the Northern District. He is a director of the Yitzhak Rabin Center. He received his M.S. in Science Education from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1991 and his teaching certificate in Biology, also from the Hebrew University, in 1990.

**John Myhill** is an associate professor and lecturer in the Linguistics Faculty of the Department of English Language and Literature at Haifa University. His research interests include sociolinguistics, language and nationalism, semantics and discourse analysis. He received his Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania in 1984.

**Bernard Spolsky** is a professor (Emeritus) in the Department of English of Bar-Ilan University. His research interests are language policy, sociolinguistics, educational linguistics with emphasis on literacy and second language learning, applied linguistics and language and identity. He received his Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Montreal in 1966.

***Guest Speaker***

**Prof. Julie Washington** chairs the Department of Communicative Disorders at the University of Wisconsin and is an investigator at the university's Waisman Center. Her research interests are language and literacy development in diverse populations. Her work focuses on understanding cultural dialect use in young African-American children with specific emphasis on language assessment, specific language impairment and academic performance. She received her Ph.D. in Education (Speech and Language Pathology) from the University of Michigan in 1989.