

## **Standard Arabic and Diglossia: A Problem for Language Education in the Arab World**

**Turki Ahmad Ali Bani-Khaled**

Department of Linguistics  
Faculty of Foreign Languages  
University of Jordan  
Amman 11942, Jordan

### **Abstract**

*This paper examines some scholarly linguistic attitudes regarding the concepts of Standard Arabic and Diglossia in the available literature of sociolinguistics and education. The study also seeks to highlight salient research themes over the past decades and draw possible implications for education and literacy with particular reference to the Arab situation. To this end, a survey of the literature reported in English-medium journals was conducted. The data involved a corpus of (28) research articles drawn from a number of journals known in the field. Five themes were identified in the data. These were (1) Arabic is a diglossic language, (2) standard Arabic as a mother tongue, (3) diglossia and education, (4) learning standard Arabic as a foreign language, and (5) standard Arabic and EFL. The results suggest that diglossic Arabic is still a hot issue and the division has negative and serious impacts on acquiring general literacy in both Arabic and foreign languages such as English. These trends are discussed with reference to implications for the wider educational context in the Arab World.*

**Key Words:** Standard; Arabic; diglossia; research; education; sociolinguistics

### **1. Introduction**

It goes without saying that language plays a vital role in any society. Society also impinges on language. Language is naturally a means of showing identity and solidarity among individuals and groups in the same society. In addition, developing a communicative competence in a foreign language may be linked to awareness of and proficiency in the mother tongue. It is a truism that the Arabic language is a composite of many varieties: old classic, modern standard and numerous local colloquial varieties as dialects. Most songs are in local dialects. Standard Arabic is NOT actually used for spoken communication. Radio news and Friday and religious sermons are in standard Arabic whereas chat shows on radio are all in spoken dialects.

In the modern Arab society, the young age group is demographically dominant and their language use may influence the overall society. Young Arabs may be becoming truly bilingual at least in capital cities and primarily among the young generation who are mostly students. Perhaps this comes as a result of modernization and world-wide globalization and impact of rapidly-spreading communication technology. Consequently, attitudes and perceptions of language in Arab countries may have changed. Arabic has been associated with the religion of Islam for centuries as the language of the Holy Quran. However, many see Arabic as a difficult language, or even the most difficult language on earth! Many students take private tuition classes in standard Arabic because it is 'difficult'.

### **2. Research Problem**

One may wonder if the Arab society is becoming truly bilingual or indeed bicultural. Bicultural is "a person who knows the social habits, beliefs, customs, etc. of two different groups." (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:51). Bidialectal is a "person who knows and can use two different dialects. The two dialects are often a prestige dialect, which may be used at school or at work and is often the standards variety, and a non-prestige dialect, which may be used on at home or with friends". (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:51). However, upon discussions with my students, I have come to realize that in our society it is quite the opposite. People seem to find 'prestige' in avoiding standard and feel proud of using the local variety; this is very ironic. We wondered if Standard Arabic was literally dying. According to Richards and Schmidt 2002: 288), language death is "the disappearance of a 'living' language as its speakers switch to using other languages and children cease to learn it." This led to taking the issue further to investigate the attitudes of researchers and scholars as to the effect of diglossia on literacy and foreign language learning in the Arab World.

In particular, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What does the literature say about SA and diglossia?
2. What does the literature say about the effect of diglossia on learning?
3. What are the implications for literacy and sociolinguistics research in the Arab World?

### 3. Literature Review

Richards and Schmidt (2002: 286) define language attitudes as the "attitudes which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each other's languages or to their own language. Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitudes towards a language may also show what people feel about the speakers of that language. Language attitudes may have an effect on second language or foreign language learning. The measurement of language attitudes provides information which is useful in language teaching and language planning."

It seems that the term 'attitudes' is fuzzy and illusive. According to Johnson & Johnson: 1999:14) "Attitudes may be thought of as opinions, beliefs, ways of responding, with respect to some set of problems. They may not be formulated verbally until someone asks; they may not even be immediately available to common attention. They may be formed from haphazard experience. Or they may be the result of deliberate thought. They may conform to cultural or peer-group norms or not. As such, they are vague, loose and difficult to capture. They may exert considerable control over a learner's behaviour in numerous ways, and therefore may be related directly or indirectly to levels of achievement." Johnson & Johnson (1999:19) also see that "attitudes interact with other concepts such as motivation, learner training, personality, and acculturation."

According to Halliday, cited in Brown (2007:224), language has an 'interactional' function which allows people to establish social contact and to keep channels of communication open. In addition, there is the 'personal' function which enables speakers to express feelings, emotions, personality. In this function, language, cognition, affect, and culture all interact.

With this in mind, few would dispute the fact that language and society are closely related and one affects the other. Therefore, the relationship between the two has long been established as a vital aspect of linguistics. This relationship is interdependent. According to Trudgill (2000:8), different dialects and accents are evaluated in different ways due to the fact that language as a social phenomenon is closely attached to the social structure and value systems of society. From a purely scientific point of view, Trudgill argues, all dialects are equally 'good' because "all varieties of a language are structured, rule-governed systems which are wholly adequate for the needs of their speakers." Consequently, taking Trudgill's point of view, judgments about concepts such as 'purity' or 'correctness', or 'beauty' of a language would be basically social rather than scientific.

On the other hand, language choice, according to Grosjean (1982:136), may be governed by a number of factors. These include *participants* variables such as language proficiency; language preference; socio-economic status; age; sex; education; occupation; ethnicity; history of linguistic interaction; kinship; intimacy; power relation; attitude to languages; and outside pressure. These factors also include *situation* variables such as location or setting; presence of monolinguals; degree of formality; and degree of intimacy. In addition, there are *discourse* variables such as: content; topic; and vocabulary. Finally, *interaction* variables include raising status; creating social distance; excluding someone; requesting or commanding.

However, the language situation in the Arab World is complicated. Swales (1984:9) in an overview, has characterized the Arab World linguistic (ESP) situation as follows:

"The Arab World as a whole is notoriously difficult to assess- in politics, in culture, in quality of life and in education. For one thing, it is often difficult to get adequate information, especially information that permits a reasonable comparison between two or more Arab states. For another, if the observer does manage to reach some useful vantage point it often turns out that his instrument is not so much a telescope as a kaleidoscope. Suddenly the clear bright pattern of shapes he has created is changed in an instant with an inadvertent movement of the hand brought by ground tremor or buffet of wind. Suddenly, today's Arab World is not the same as yesterday." Perhaps, this smart and witty portrayal of the Arab World linguistic scenario is still valid today in the year 2014 as it was thirty years ago. Many things have been changing drastically due to impacts of all sorts. The picture is quite blurred as regards language planning and literacy acquisition policies in the Arab World.

#### **4. Method**

This study employed content and a meta-analysis qualitative approach to examine (28) research articles randomly drawn from various journals in tackling issues in sociolinguistics and education. Some key words were entered in the search box of for possible titles. A list of titles was made and related abstracts were skimmed and scanned for significant trends. The results section in each abstract was particularly scrutinized. Wherever possible, full-text versions for articles were also examined. Potential trends were highlighted and compared for a possible framework and taxonomy. The initial results were discussed with a few research colleagues and suggestions were elicited for an improved framework. The implications were also discussed with some Jordanian educationalists.

#### **5. Results**

Having examined the data, it was possible to identify at least five prevalent issues that can be presented in the form of themes as follows:

**5.1. Theme One: Arabic is a Diglossic Language:** There seems to be an ongoing debate concerning the realities and the necessities of a mother tongue of Arabs as a nation. Cote (2009) argued that "Arabic is spoken by more than 400 million persons in nearly two dozen countries and holds the dual distinction of being the fifth most widely spoken as well as one of the fastest growing languages in the world. However, it also faces the challenge of being a diglossic language, one with two distinct forms, where Modern Standard Arabic coexists with numerous national vernaculars." Also, Haeri (2000:63), cited in Cote (2009), described the high variety as "the language of writing, education and administration," whereas the vernaculars are "the media of oral exchanges, non-print media, poetry and plays".

Diglossia has been defined as "the use of two different varieties of the same language by the same speaker in separate socially-determined contexts", Ferguson, (1959) in Johnson & Johnson: 1999:97). Ferguson (1959) cited in Al-Mamari (2011) defines diglossia as "a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety- the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature either of an earlier period or in another speech community- that is learned largely by means of formal education and used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversations. The superposed variety is the High (H) variety and the regional dialect is the Low (L) variety"

Ferguson (1959: 336) cited in Al-Mamari (2011) argued that Arabic is one of few languages that exhibited this reality and that it is the most classic example of the coexistence, side by side, of a high variety that is mainly written, literary and formal language that displays a high degree of uniformity around the Arab countries, and low varieties which are mainly spoken dialects that are seldom codified and are used for daily life communication and vary widely around the geography and communities of the Arab world. Al-Mamari (2011) describes diglossia as a sociolinguistic phenomenon that exists when a language has two different varieties that are used in different domains of language use. Arabic is one of the typical examples of this phenomenon in world languages today.

Unfortunately, many Arabic dialects are not mutually comprehensible forcing speakers to 'code-switch' or even stop communicating with one another. Arabic is a diglossic language and has many local varieties where Modern Standard Arabic (MSA henceforth) is the 'High' variety. The realities of diglossia are possibly exasperating along the fragmentation of the Arab situation aggravated by current and seemingly chronic political divides. In fact, Arabic can be seen as involving three distinct yet related varieties:

1. Classical Arabic which is the language of the Holy Quran and pre-Islamic era and the language of literature.
2. Modern Standard Arabic widely referred to as the FusHa; the language of writing, education, and administration. Standard Arabic has been used in school, universities, news, writers and scholars in highly formal contexts. Arabs use standard dialect in prepared speeches or in formal writing.
3. Colloquial spoken varieties considered as dialects used in informal oral communication. Local dialects are used in daily expression, non-print media, poetry and plays.

**5.2. Theme Two: Standard Arabic as a Mother Tongue:** In the available literature of sociolinguistics pertaining to the use of Arabic varieties as mother tongues, we find varying, sometimes conflicting, attitudes reported by many scholars in the field.

For example, Suleiman (2003:142) cited in Cote (2009) calls for a clear intervention to sort out the mess of using Arabic and argues that "Arabs need a unified language which can in turn unify them, an instrument of fusion rather than fission." Abu-Absi (1986:338) wrote that language planners across the Arabic speaking world were divided into two schools of thought as early as the late 1800's. The debate focused on whether Classical Arabic (CA) or one of the spoken dialects should be chosen as the literary language and the medium of instruction. Those who supported classical Arabic "pointed to the richness of Arabic as the language of poetry, religion, philosophy and science; moreover, they argued CA was the language of Islam".

Moreover, numerous studies (Abdulaziz, 1986; Abu-Absi, 1986; Alrabaa, 1986; Gully, 1993; Suleiman, 1994) have addressed this diglossic situation, identifying the wide linguistic distance, particularly on syntactical and morphological levels, between the two varieties, as well as the debate on whether or not the vernaculars should be considered Arabic at all or are simply manifestations of local national culture (Haeri, 2000: 63). Abdulaziz (1972) cited in Haeri (2000:71) described the situation as "a situation of triglossia...involving switching between all three forms", a challenging task even for the most highly educated individual.

In fact, the debate has been going since the middle of the past century. Numerous articles have been published stressing that Arabic language use is becoming a dilemma for Arabs. Furayhah (1955), cited in Abu-Absi, 1986: 338) reported that proponents of vernacular dialects argued that Classical Arabic was "a dead language with a complex grammar and an archaic vocabulary which were not familiar to a modern speaker of Arabic". Mahfouz (1965), cited in Haeri, 2000:63) believed that the vernacular dialects were obstacles to progress that needed to be overcome "exactly like poverty and disease". Because of its complex structure, MSA will never develop as a spoken language; furthermore, it is no one's mother tongue, a fact which may be hindering the educational development of the Arab world in general."

On the other hand, Altoma (1970), cited in Abdulaziz, 1986:17) wrote that the language academies of Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad, which had played the greatest roles influencing the standardization of modern written and formal Arabic up to that time, "look[ed] upon the encroachment of the various colloquial forms of Arabic as the greatest hazard in the promotion of a single, standard variety, and therefore, all forms of colloquialism must be deliberately excluded". On the other hand, Palmer (2007:111) cited in Al-Mamari (2011) argues that spoken Arabic "is often stigmatized as a less prestigious variety of Arabic and is less worthy of study even though it is the language of choice for day to day communication for native speakers."

**5.3. Theme Three: Diglossia and Education:** From an educational perspective, the challenges of using MSA were discussed by Abu-Absi (1984) who reported on language planning in relation to education in the Arab world. He also discussed the problems facing modernizing Arabic (Abu-Absi, 1986). Abdulaziz (1986) discussed factors in the development of modern Arabic. Also, Abdulaziz (1986: 22) argued that "University lectures, with the possible exception of those dealing with Arabic language and literature, are also in the urban form of colloquial..." This diglossic situation may in fact be delaying school age children's learning.

Abdulaziz (1986: 21) explained the seriousness of the situation when he wrote: The gap between the colloquial forms, which are the true mother tongues of the speakers, and MSA causes many problems to educationalists and writers. Although it is assumed that in the education system only the standard form would be used, the fact is that it is used only for writing. The language of instruction in schools or university lectures is the colloquial in its various forms. Students are therefore faced with the problems of receiving their instruction in one form and reading and writing in the other. Until a consensus can be reached regarding the validity of the vernaculars as worthy of being used as languages of instruction, little progress in education will be made. Abdulaziz (1986:18) also states that MSA faces several major challenges, including "the development of a more efficient orthography, the modification of grammar to make modern Arabic a workable standard for most functions including education, and the elaboration of vocabulary to cover modern culture and learning".

Other scholars such as Aroian (1983), cited in Haeri, (2000: 71) argued that this dual instruction created numerous problems rooted in "the difficulty of the grammar and orthography of Classical Arabic". (Haeri (2000:70) made the point that the Arab world in the middle of the 20th Century changed when various regions gained independence from their colonizers. During this time, many nations saw the emergence of state schools, often based on French or British educational systems, which expanded their curricula to include non-religious subjects to be taught in MSA in addition to the reading, recitation and memorization of the Qu'ran, which was (and is) in Classical Arabic

According to Abdelali (2004: 23), MSA is the language of the news media, including both radio and television, throughout the Arab world, and “in addition, books, newspapers, journal reports, and most other printed material are printed in Modern Standard Arabic”. This would lead the belief that MSA dominates the media world to the extent that a lack of fluency in MSA would prevent minimally literate persons from having access to daily information pertinent to their lives. Despite this, the mass media in its various forms - newspapers, magazines, and more importantly in the Arab world, radio and television - have played an important role in the spread and standardization of MSA.

Alrabaa (1986: 74) pointed out that that “The presence of a high variety with its social implications inhibits people in their writing activities as the learner is forced to emphasize form rather than content”. Similarly, Haeri (2000:71) asserted that although “trans-forming Classical Arabic into a language for mass education to make pupils use it actively in writing and reading was considered a task of monumental magnitude given the differences between it and the spoken languages” it has been carried out successfully for the most part, and is the form known today as MSA. Haeri (2000: 71) further portrayed the predicament as follows: For most Arabs, Classical Arabic had not been a language they had to learn to write in or take exams in, but one that belonged to readings of the Qur’an and their obligatory daily prayers. Little knowledge of its syntax or any of its intricacies, rhetorical styles, genres, and so on, was necessary for such ritual activities.

In the same vein, Maamouri (1998: 5) claimed that there is a growing awareness among some Arab education specialists that the low levels of educational achievement and high illiteracy (and low literacy) rates in most Arab countries are directly related to the complexities of the standard Arabic language used in formal schooling and in non-formal education. These complexities mostly relate to the diglossic situation of the Arabic language and make reading in Arabic and overly arduous process.

However, Cooper (1989:100) noted that despite its complexities to learn and use for non-religious purposes, literary or Classical Arabic, which functions “as a legally appropriate language for all politically and culturally representative purposes on a nationwide basis” was delegated as the official language of all Arabic-speaking counties. We also find a useful discussion by Ayari (1996) who highlighted specific obstacles posed by contemporary Arabic diglossia to the acquisition of literacy including the attitudes of parents and teachers to the colloquial and standard forms of Arabic.

According to Haeri (2000:70), cited in Cote (2009), there are two pressing questions: (1) which form of the language should serve as the medium of instruction, and (2) should the MSA form be modernized and in what manner. For this reason, Suleiman (2003:142) discussed the Arabic language in relation to national identity and wrote, “Arabs need a unified language which can in turn unify them, an instrument of fusion rather than fission”. Al-Husri (1985) cited in Suleiman, 2003:143, supported this idea, stating that “the Arabs need a ‘unified and unifying language’, rather than a series of dialect-languages which will lead to further fragmentation”.

Ferguson (1996) cited in Haeri, 2000: 65) described the unique situation with Arabic as follows: L is invariably learned by children in what may be regarded as the ‘normal’ way of learning one’s mother tongue, whereas the actual learning of H is chiefly accomplished by the means of formal education, whether this be Qur’anic schools, modern government schools, or private tutors. The speaker is at home in L to a degree he almost never achieves in H. Though considered to be the language of the common and often less educated population, these L varieties constitute the mother tongue of all Arabic speakers, whose numbers range from a few hundred among certain nomadic Bedouin tribes to more than 80 million speakers of Egyptian (Cote, 2009). Because MSA (H) is not learned until one enters school, more than 120 millions Arabs do not have the opportunity to learn the more prestigious H form, resulting in an overall literacy rate in North Africa and the Middle East of about 60%.

According to Cote (2009), there are also linguistic divisions on a macro level. The main dialectal division is between the Maghreb dialects and those of the Middle East, followed by that between sedentary dialects and the much more conservative Bedouin dialects. Having so many distinct dialects makes choosing and implementing a common Arabic-language both daunting and unlikely, for not only would the governments of more than 20 nations have to choose a particular dialect to implement, but they would also have to convince their populations to adopt the chosen language.

Cote (2009) explored factors affecting the feasibility of selecting a particular dialect of Arabic to serve the educational needs of the entire Arabic-speaking world, including the widespread use of colloquial Arabic and present-day national education policies.

In addition, to learn how native-Arabic speakers perceive this diglossic state of affairs, the researcher interviewed (84) participants ranging in age from (17) to (48) living in Tucson, Arizona, or Madrid, Spain, to determine their views on the various vernacular dialects of Arabic and to obtain their opinion on the prospects of replacing MSA with one of these dialects. The author concluded that having so many distinct dialects makes choosing and implementing a common Arabic-language both daunting and unlikely, for not only would the governments of more than (20) nations have to choose a particular dialect to implement, but they would also have to convince their populations to adopt the chosen language.

**5.4. Theme Four: Learning Standard Arabic as a Foreign Language:** Al-Mamari (2011) addressed the research question: what are the impacts of Arabic Diglossia, if any, on the experience of learners of Arabic as a foreign language? The study attempted to answer this question through the perception of a sample group of (23) learners studying Arabic as a foreign language in World Learning Oman Center. The participants were first surveyed online. This was followed by three separate focus groups that involved all the participants partaking in the survey. Further investigation was done through three individual interviews with alumni of World Learning programs currently living in Oman. It was concluded that Arabic diglossia is indeed an impactful factor in learning Arabic as a foreign language. It is especially impactful while learning Arabic in a native country. The data proved that students of Arabic in Oman were aware of Arabic diglossia and its impact on their learning. The higher level students coped better with this reality while lower level students tended to be confused about it. Similarly, the level of interaction with the speech community increases as the learner became more confident in handling the diglossic reality. Most participants agreed on the value of learning both MSA and spoken dialect for the learner.

On the other hand, Sehlaoui (2008) developed a rationale for the acquisition and teaching of Arabic as a heritage language of the USA. Three general themes emerge: (1) the unique demands made by heritage languages on parents, (2) the central role of culture and literacy in the maintenance of heritage languages, and (3) the need to think of heritage language learning as a variety of language learning that must constitute a 'dialogue' in a deeper-than-usual sense if it is to be successful. Ayari (1996), on the other hand, identified the negative impact of the linguistic situation in the Arab world, characterized as it is by the phenomenon of diglossia, on Arab children's ability to acquire reading and writing skills in Arabic; and hence on their academic attainment in general. Specific obstacles posed by contemporary Arabic diglossia to the acquisition of literacy are discussed, including the attitudes of parents and teachers to the colloquial and standard forms of Arabic. Some remedies are suggested. These include modification of the Arabic script, and improving the status of Arabic as a language of instruction in the schools, where it is often replaced by English or French. The author emphasized the necessity to expose young children to literary Arabic, by means such as story reading to preschoolers, so that it is not, in effect, another language that they have to learn as soon as they enter school.

Husseinali (2006) reported on the initial motivation of learners of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL). One hundred and twenty students enrolled in first-year and second-year AFL classes participated in this study. The participants were classified into two major groups of learners according to their heritage background: The first group consisted of learners of Arab and Muslim heritage, and the second consisted of all other heritage backgrounds. Data were collected using a survey. The results indicated that AFL learners had a variety of orientations prompting them to study Arabic: travel and world culture orientations, political orientations, instrumental orientations, and cultural identity orientations. These were then broadly grouped into three major types of orientations, namely instrumental orientations, identification orientations, and travel and culture orientations. Significant differences were found between heritage and non-heritage learners on instrumental and identification orientations.

**5.5. Theme Five: Standard Arabic and EFL:** Within the particular context of teaching EFL, Abdulmoneim (2000) focuses on the learning of English as a foreign language by Arabic-speaking students who are often misled by the partial similarities between the two languages. The problem is further complicated by the fact that there are two main varieties of Arabic in each Arab country: modern standard Arabic (MSA) and non-standard Arabic (NSA). So, which variety is it that students transfer from? To answer this question, (50) third-year secondary-school students were asked to translate into English two versions of a short Arabic text; one MSA and the other NSA including (14) relative clauses. No significant difference was found between the means of the number of clauses produced in both cases.

This finding is supported by an analysis of (35) inter-lingual errors found in free compositions written by (24) students. The results indicated that it is important to take both MSA and NSA into account when making use of Arabic in teaching English as a foreign language.

Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) argued that the common assumption in ELT that all learners are fully competent in their first language skills is unfounded. Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) investigated writing skills in the two languages involved, English and Arabic, and to see whether there is an association between poor writing across languages. Data were collected from (150) students (chosen randomly) who wrote about the same topic in English and Arabic. Scripts were assessed respectively by ELT as well as Arabic specialists. The study confirms that poor writing in English correlates with similar deficiencies in the mother tongue. Thus the common assumption in ELT, that all learners are fully competent in their first language skills is unfounded.

Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) addressed the function of L1 for promoting communication as one aspect of communicative language teaching. Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) explored the perspectives that (14) Arab and Jewish EFL student teachers adopted towards the use of L1 (mother tongue) and L2 (target language). The study was conducted within the context of student teachers' reflections on their classroom discourse during practice teaching. Student teachers were asked to record, transcribe and reflect on one classroom lesson implemented in their practice teaching through a series of guiding questions. The analysis revealed that both Jewish and Arab student teachers exhibited new insights regarding the different purposes for which L1 can be used in a communicative lesson. Novices reported to have gained a more situated and realistic perspective of the various uses of mother tongue in communicative teaching as a result of analyzing their own classroom discourse. The findings shed light on the striking similarities between Arab and Jewish student teachers in regard to the new understandings gained about the use of L1/L2 in communicative lessons.

Alshammari (2011) investigated the use of native Arabic in English classes at two Saudi technical colleges. The main objectives were to examine the purpose of L1 use and the attitudes of Saudi teachers and students towards the role of Arabic in the EFL classroom. Data were collected through two different types of questionnaires. Results indicated that the use of Arabic (L1) was for clarification purposes and that a balanced and judicious use of L1 in the EFL classroom by both teachers and students can be useful in the language learning process and may even be essential to increase learners' comprehension. Hayes-Harb, (2006) conducted two experiments to compare the reading processes of native Arabic speakers to the reading processes of native English speakers and non-Arabic ESL learners and provided evidence that native Arabic speakers are less aware of vowel letters in English texts than either control group. This differential awareness of vowel letters may contribute to native Arabic speakers' ESL reading comprehension difficulties. Also, Dweik and Abu Al Hommos (2007) investigated the relationship between first language (Arabic) proficiency and second language (English) performance in the writing skills of Jordanian bilingual second secondary school students. Despite the linguistic distance between English and Arabic, it was postulated that Arabic writing skills can be transferred positively to the target language (English). The researchers used composition prompt tests instrument for this purpose; one test was in Arabic and the other was in English. The data was collected in the second semester of the academic year 2005-2006. The population was from two leading public secondary schools in the First Directorate of Amman in Jordan. The participants were (20) male students who were chosen on the basis of the students' achievements in the previous years. A significant relationship was found between the two languages. Those students who got high marks and were proficient in Arabic writing performed well in the counter skill (English). The present study supports the notion of L1 transfer.

Bader (1995) examined switching to English in daily conversations in Jordan in search for factors and attitudes. The results of a questionnaire given to (145) students at Yarmouk University (Jordan) showed that most students disapproved of code-switching and considered it harmful to the purity of Arabic speech, national pride, and social identity. On the other hand, Hamdan and Diab (1997) analyzed the role of Arabic as the native language in assessing reading comprehension in English as a foreign language. They reported the findings of an experimental study on (60) secondary school students in Jordan. The results showed that the participants who were tested in Arabic outperformed their counterparts who took the English test version.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusions**

Having presented the research in summary form, it is possible now to elaborate further and draw some conclusions on the basis of this study.

It seems clear now that Arabic as a mother tongue should and cannot be neglected in the process of learning a foreign language. There is evidence from research that use of L1 in the EFL classroom by both teachers and students can be useful in the language learning process and may even be essential to increase learners' comprehension as suggested by Alshammari, 2011).

In addition, the English-only policy in many foreign language learning contexts needs to be reconsidered to allow for more integration of Arabic as first language, cf., Hamdan and Diab, 1997).

Whether we like it or not, there is no way to accept the claims that Arabic as a mother tongue, in whatever form, can be excluded from factors that impact the acquisition of foreign languages. The research provides evidence that poor writing in English correlates with similar deficiencies in the mother tongue. Therefore, it is difficult to accept the notion that all learners who come to the foreign language class are already skilled in Arabic, cf. Khuwaileh and Shoumali, 2000).

Furthermore, it appears very vague what mother tongue/s EFL students actually bring to the classroom. Abdulmoneim (2000) argued that it is important to take both modern standard Arabic as well as non-standard Arabic into account when making use of Arabic in teaching English as a foreign language. We have to acknowledge the fact there is evidence in the literature supporting the notion of language skills transfer. For example, those "students who got high marks and were proficient in Arabic writing performed well in the counter skill (English)", cf., Dweik and Abu Al Hommos, 2007). The issue is, however, far from being resolved and therefore more research is needed on students', teachers' and parents' attitudes as to the role of Arabic in the learning of foreign languages.

Another issue that emerged from this study is the observation that lack of competency in SA as mother tongue drives Arabs to switch to foreign languages or local dialects, Haeri 2000:70). It is a worrying reality that many Arabic dialects are not mutually comprehensible forcing speakers to 'code-switch' or even stop communicating with one another, Al-Mamari 2011). Even in learning Arabic as a first or foreign language, there is still an issue of Arabic diglossia which is indeed an influential factor in learning it, *ibid*).

A theme that emerged from the study was to do with how diglossic Arabic may affect the acquisition of literacy. Despite the fact that the literature consistently indicated a correlation between the use of standard Arabic and notions like national pride, and social identity among many Arabs, there is a big problem with what Arabic variety should be used as a medium of instruction. Choosing and implementing a common Arabic-language as a unified mother tongue can be both 'daunting and unlikely,' given the current situation in the Arab World, Cote (2009) because Arab governments seem to lack a unified or coordinated national language planning policy in connection with the use of language in the educational process. According to Cote (2009), having so many distinct dialects in use is a problem facing and standardizing codifying efforts.

One suggestion was put forward by Ayari, (1996) and that was to expose young children to literary Arabic, by means such as story reading to preschoolers, so that it is not, in effect, another language that they have to learn as soon as they enter school. Also, we have to take the observation made by Ferguson (1996) that Arabs do not have the opportunity to learn the more prestigious high form, resulting in an overall literacy rate in North Africa and the Middle East of about 60%.

Standard Arabic is often accused of having negative effects upon literacy in the Arab world. Maamouri (1998: 5) claimed that there is a growing awareness among some Arab education specialists that the low levels of educational achievement and high illiteracy (and low literacy) rates in most Arab countries are directly related to the complexities of the standard Arabic language used in formal schooling and in non-formal education. These complexities mostly relate to the diglossic situation of the Arabic language and make reading in Arabic and overly arduous process. Standard Arabic was described by Alrabaa (1986: 74) as a factor that "inhibits people in their writing activities as the learner is forced to emphasize form rather than content". On the other hand, Aroian (1983), cited in Haeri, (2000: 71) noted that dual instruction created numerous problems rooted in "the difficulty of the grammar and orthography of Classical Arabic". Abdulaziz (1986:18) calls for "the development of a more efficient orthography, the modification of grammar to make modern Arabic a workable standard for most functions including education, and the elaboration of vocabulary to cover modern culture and learning". Diglossia in Arabic is a thorny issue when we relate it to the educational context in the Arab World.

The language of instruction in schools or university lectures is the colloquial in its various forms. Students are therefore faced with the problems of receiving their instruction in one form and reading and writing in the other.

We also observe from the literature that the language planning matter across Arab countries is neglected at the official levels. The evidence for this comes from an authority in the field. Suleiman (2003:142) cited in Cote (2009) calls for a clear intervention to sort out the mess of using Arabic and argues that "Arabs need a unified language which can in turn unify them, an instrument of fusion rather than fission, as he nicely puts it.

This is a sad fact when we know that "Arabic is spoken by more than 400 million persons in nearly two dozen countries and holds the dual distinction of being the fifth most widely spoken as well as one of the fastest growing languages in the world, Cote (2009).

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