

*Reading methodologies for uncooperative orthographies*

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*Abstract:* Early-grade reading programming in African languages has expanded significantly over the past decade, as large international education donors have begun to recognize the links between language of instruction and effective learning. As fairly transparent orthographies have been encountered, the perception has grown that *all* African-language orthographies are, or should be, transparent. This perception is of course supported by the relatively short written history of many African languages. The favored reading methodologies in these program contexts depend on orthographic transparency for their effectiveness, and the large number of African orthographies that feature substantial underdifferentiation has thrown a spanner into the works where accepted reading instructional methods are concerned.

This presentation examines the linguistic and orthographic issues that “get in the way” of the reading methods currently being used in early-grade reading programming in Nilo-Saharan languages, and looks at methodological alternatives that are better at accommodating the orthographies encountered. We argue that, while many of the orthographic challenges to fluent reading are significant, assumptions about how children gain meaning from text can also be broadened to meet the reading needs of the language community in question.