

ABSTRACT

BACKWARD TRANSFER: THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND  
LANGUAGE ON SYNTACTIC AND SEMANTIC ASPECTS  
OF ARABIC AS A FIRST LANGUAGE

By

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This study questions whether people develop different knowledge of their native language when they begin learning a second language. Under the framework of *multi-competence*, the study examines the *backward influence* of English L2 on Arabic L1 with respect to three linguistic areas: null-subject, tense-aspect priority, and preposition selection.

Two groups of monolinguals and bilinguals that included 67 participants were recruited in this study. The perception was assessed through an *acceptability judgment task* and a *preference judgment task*. The production was also assessed using *retelling written descriptions* of a silent film. The results did not show significant differences between monolinguals and bilinguals with respect to the perception. However, a slight, but visible, influence appeared on the bilinguals' written production. Grammatical restructuring was associated with their use of *tense-aspect* and *null-subject* rules but not with the use of *prepositions*. The research indicated that language production is sensitive

to backward influence *more* and *earlier* than perception. The research also indicates that the backward influence seems limited with less developed L2 (2–5 years of acquisition), and it only takes place when L2 learners deal with structure complexity in the written production.

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