

Acquisition of Main-Clause Wh-Questions in Egyptian Arabic-English Bilinguals
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This study examines the production and judgment of Egyptian Arabic (henceforth EA) main-clause wh-questions in four groups of EA native speakers: two monolingual groups living in Egypt (18 children and 16 adults) and two bilingual groups living in Ontario, Canada, or in the United Kingdom (16 EA-English bilingual children and 19 first-generation immigrants).

The domain of wh-questions exhibits surface overlap among the two chosen languages, English, and EA, regarding wh-movement. In non-echo English main-clause wh-questions, a wh-phrase must move to a clause-initial position (wh-fronting) (Radford, 2004).

In contrast, wh-fronting, as in (2a), is ungrammatical in EA complement wh-questions and leaving the complement wh-phrases in their canonical position (wh-in-situ) is the grammatical option, as in (2b). Nonetheless, both wh-fronting and wh-in-situ are grammatically correct in EA adjunct wh-questions (Wahba, 1984), as shown in (3a) and (3b) respectively.

- (2) a. **ʔeh ādam rasam?* (*wh-fronting in EA wh-complements)
 what Adam drew.3SGM
 ‘What did Adam draw?’
 b. *ādam rasam ʔeh?* (wh-in-situ in EA wh-complements)
 Adam drew.3SGM what
 ‘What did Adam draw?’
- (3) a. *ʔimta ādam rasam ʔl-xarītah di?* (wh-fronting in EA wh-adjuncts)
 when Adam drew.3SGM the-map this
 ‘When did Adam draw this map?’
 b. *ādam rasam ʔl-xarītah di ʔimta?* (wh-in-situ in EA wh-adjuncts)
 Adam drew.3SGM the-map this when
 ‘When did Adam draw this map?’

The wh-movement in EA is a narrow syntactic structure as it does not involve syntax-pragmatics interface. Until fairly recently, it was believed that only structures that exhibit syntax-pragmatics interfaces are vulnerable to cross-linguistic influence (Müller and Hulk, 2001). Yet, there is growing empirical evidence that cross-linguistic influence can also occur in narrow syntactic structures with no pragmatic or discourse motivations (Cuza, 2016; Mohamed, 2022).

This research is guided by the following research question: Is wh-movement in EA interrogatives vulnerable to cross-linguistic influence?

Results from an Elicited Production Picture Task and a Grammaticality Choice Task showed that the bilingual children have a robust knowledge of obligatory structures in EA wh-questions. The study concluded that there is a tentative cross-linguistic influence from English in narrow syntactic structures of EA wh-questions among both bilingual groups. However, such influence occurs when the majority language’s structures are allowed by the linguistic system of the minority language, namely wh-fronting in wh-adjuncts, but not when they are ungrammatical in the minority language, as in the case of wh-fronting in wh-complements. By examining both obligatory and optional structures in EA wh-questions, this study gives us novel insights into the selective nature of the cross-linguistic influence observed among the EA-English bilingual groups.

Keywords: Bilingualism, heritage speakers, wh-questions, wh-movement, Egyptian Arabic, cross-linguistic influence.

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