The Language of Subtitles for Arabic-English Bilingual Speakers in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract: This paper investigates the use of subtitles by Arabic-English bilingual speakers in the UAE. While extant research on the effects of subtitles on language acquisition focuses on either first language acquisition by children or second or foreign acquisition by monolingual speakers, this study examines bilingual speakers and their preference for the language of subtitles in different contexts via an online questionnaire. Results from 28 Arabic-English bilingual speakers revealed that subtitles were used more frequently for foreign language films and English language films over Arabic language films, and English was the preferred subtitle language regardless of the language of the film. Higher dependence on subtitles for English language films in contrast to lower dependence on subtitles for Arabic language films suggests the participants' lower English proficiency and higher proficiency in Arabic. However, an analysis of self-reported language proficiency revealed that participants were more dominant in English, which also accounts for the selection of English as a preferred subtitle language. The paper concludes that such contradictory findings reflect linguistic dualism between English and Arabic that prevails in the UAE, which is due to the proliferation of English especially in the education sector in the country.

Keywords: Arabic, bilingual, English, interlingual, intralingual, subtitles

1. Introduction

Subtitles translate film dialogues into another language and have become an essential part of film culture in our world today. Thanks to subtitles, audiences all over the world can enjoy countless movies, videos, TV programs, and online audiovisual materials without understanding the language spoken in the media (Mahoney 2021). Nowadays, subtitles are widely available in many languages, and various online streaming services such as YouTube, Netflix, and Amazon Prime videos allow viewers to choose the language of subtitles.

Subtitles can be divided into two types, depending on the language subtitled (à la Neves 2008). *Interlingual* subtitles translate the language of the film into another language, thus the language of dialogues the viewer hears in the media and the language displayed on the screen are different. For instance, an Arabic speaker may watch an English language movie while the viewer reads subtitles in Arabic on the screen. Accordingly, interlingual subtitles are useful to those who do not understand the language spoken in the film dialogue (Lavaur and Bairstow 2011).

Intralingual subtitles, on the other hand, refer to the same-language subtitles, which transcribe the language of the film in the same language. They are also known as captions whose original function was to serve hearing-impaired audience. Not only are intralingual subtitles suitable to hearing-impaired spectators, but they are also beneficial to other audiences by providing additional information on the film content and may assist language learning (Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2007; as cited in Lavaur & Bairstow 2011).

While the benefits of subtitles for film watchers cannot be denied, one may wonder whether viewers can also improve their language skills via using subtitles while watching a film in their native language (L1) or a second or a foreign language. This has naturally led researchers to study the effects of subtitles on language acquisition. A group of researchers advocate that subtitles can be integrated into a second or foreign classroom as various forms of activities, through which language learners enhance their linguistic and metalinguistic skills in a second or foreign language (e.g., Talaván 2006; Incalcaterra McLoughlin & Lertola 2014; Kantz 2015). On the other hand, linguists and psychologists have investigated the effects of subtitles in an experimental setting where participants watch a film with and without subtitles and their various language skills are tested and compared in these two conditions. Overall, there is growing evidence showing that using subtitles can facilitate first language acquisition (e.g., Koskinen, Wilson, & Jensema 1985.; Goldman and Goldman 1988; Koolstra & Beentjes 1999; Lekkai 2014) as well as second or foreign language acquisition (e.g., Markham & Peter 2003; Danan 2004; Bianchi & Ciabattoni 2008; Birulés-Muntané & Soto-Faraco 2016; Dizon & Thayawatpokin 2021). Especially, subtitles are proven to be an effective tool for the viewer to comprehend the content of the program, learn new words, and improve listening skills in the language of audiovisual materials.

Most research on the effects of subtitles in relation to language acquisition has focused on exploring how subtitles facilitate different areas of language learning, including the viewer's native language or a second language or foreign languages. Especially, subtitles have been extensively studied with respect to second language acquisition or foreign language acquisition in which a group of monolingual speakers were observed in an experimental setting where they are asked to watch a subtitled video program with or without subtitles. Also, the language of subtitles may be controlled either following the language of the soundtrack (intralingual subtitles) or the language of the viewer (interlingual subtitles). Results of previous research on this topic indicate that subtitles indeed seem to benefit language learners, but the findings are not yet conclusive.

The bulk of research on interlingual and intralingual subtitles focuses on whether these two types of subtitles benefit second or foreign language learners in different domains such as vocabulary acquisition (D'Ydewalle & Van de Poel 1999; Bianchi & Ciabattoni 2008; Yuksel & Tanriverdi 2009; Zarei & Rashvand 2011; Lertola 2012; Birulés-Muntané & Soto-Faraco 2016; Matielo et al. 2018; Dizon & Thanyawatpokin 2021), listening comprehension (Talaván & Rodríguez-Arancón 2015; Birulés-Muntané & Soto-Faraco 2016; Dizon & Thanyawatpokin

2021) or film content/plot comprehension (Markham & Peter 2003; Bairstow & Lavaur 2012; Birulés-Muntané & Soto-Faraco 2016).

By and large, the effects of interlingual and intralingual subtitles have been investigated separately, and only a few studies directly compared them (e.g., Lavaur & Baristow 2011; Matielo, de Oliveira, & Baretta 2018). Moreover, almost all prevailing studies include monolingual speakers learning the target language as a second or foreign language through subtitles, and there is no study that investigated the use of interlingual and intralingual subtitles used by bilingual speakers, to our knowledge. One study that comes close to examining both interlingual and intralingual subtitles used by near-bilingual speakers is Lavaur and Bairstow (2011). The researchers investigated how interlingual and intralingual subtitles would influence information processing of an English language film by French speakers with different fluency levels of English. The results revealed that the language of subtitles had different effects on film content processing, which also largely depended on the viewer's foreign language proficiency. More precisely, both types of subtitles benefitted low EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, yet the effects of interlingual subtitles were greater than those of intralingual subtitles. On the other hand, neither type of subtitles helped advanced EFL learners: their processing was inhibited by the presence of both types of subtitles. This can be further corroborated by the assumption that unlike the novice EFL leaners, the advanced EFL learners did not have to rely on subtitles to understand the movie content, thus the displayed subtitles rather had a distracting effect on the advanced group. To conclude, it seems that the overall benefits of subtitles seemed to be limited to monolingual speakers and do not extend to bilingual speakers. This might be also related to the fact that subtitles target monolingual viewers, not bilingual viewers (Khuddro 2018).

In this regard, the present study aims to explore interlingual and intralingual subtitles used by bilingual speakers. More specifically, the study examined whether Arabic-English bilingual speakers would use subtitles depending on the language of film (English vs. Arabic vs. other foreign languages) and which language they prefer for subtitles (English vs. Arabic vs. other foreign languages). Unlike monolingual speakers who need to rely on their native language to understand a foreign language film, Arabic-English bilinguals who are proficient in both languages can freely choose either Arabic or English for subtitles. In this sense, one may ask if there is a language preference for subtitles by Arabic-English bilinguals and what influences their selection of a subtitle language.

This paper is part of a larger ongoing research project that explores bilingualism in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), whose sub-topics include code-switching between Arabic and English and foreign language acquisition through subtitles. While earlier research on subtitles employed a questionnaire to test the viewers' linguistic competence and performance, recent studies use eye-tracking methods to measure their cognitive performance (Kruger & Steyn 2014; Liao 2019; Perez, Desmet, & Peters 2015; Winke, Sydorenko, & Gass 2013). In this respect, we use both types of methods, a questionnaire that asks the language preference for the use of subtitles in different settings (Part 1) and an eye-tracking study that

compares interlingual and intralingual subtitles read by Arabic-English bilingual speakers (Part 2). In this paper, we report the results from the first part of the project, an online questionnaire exploring the effects of subtitles in foreign language acquisition by Arabic-English bilingual speakers. Before we move to the next section, a brief description of linguistic profiles in the UAE is provided below.

English and bilingualism in the UAE: Arabic is the official language in the UAE. However, more than 85% of the population consists of foreign nationals and expatriates, which greatly impacts the linguistic landscape of the country. Although it is not an official language, English is widely used in conjunction with Arabic in most business and government sectors, and occupies a special role as a second language, a foreign language as well as a lingua franca (Siemund, Al-Issa, & Leimgruber. 2020). English is introduced nearly in all private schools and many public schools as early as kindergarten, and it has become a medium of instruction in most higher education institutions (Troudi 2007; Al-Issa & Dahan 2011). English is also spoken in daily life as it is used in street signs, billboard advertisements, shopping malls and stores (Thomas 2021). Thus, the proliferation of English, along with the value assigned to it, has elevated the status of the language and marginalized the status of the Arabic language (Siemund et al. 2020).

With an early introduction of the English language and its continued use in daily life in the UAE, many Emiratis speak English fluently. English is not only used between Arabic and non-Arabic speakers, but also between speakers of different Arabic dialects. Government public schools have begun implementing a bilingual curriculum and Arabic has been downgraded to a minority language or second language, especially in the education system in the UAE (Siemund et al. 2020). This has in turn created Arabic-English bilingualism in the society and changed Emiratis' relationship and identity with the English language. Arabic-English bilingualism and code-switching between English and Arabic are regarded as a source of pride among young generations, for the ability to speak English symbolizes power and education (Hopkyns 2020, Hamdan, Naser and Hamdan 2021). Many Arabic speakers even identify English as their first language and Arabic as a second language.

Against this background, we asked highly proficient Arabic-English bilingual speakers living in the UAE regarding their use and preference for subtitles in Arabic or English in different contexts. As Almedia and Costa (2013) point out, most empirical studies on subtitles focus on subtitled television programs and do not include cinema settings where subtitles are much more widely used. On the other hand, the language of subtitles is limited in cinema, for example English or Arabic in the UAE, which contrasts to home settings where a broad selection of subtitles is available through online streaming services such as Netflix. Thus, we compared the use of subtitles at home and in cinema in the questionnaire.

2. Materials and methods

Data for quantitative analyses were obtained via an online survey via Qualtrics. The study primarily aimed to elicit evidence to explore the language preference for subtitles by Arabic-English bilinguals and its effects on foreign language

acquisition in a broad sense. The participant populations of interest targeted Arabic-English bilingual speakers in the UAE, where daily use of both languages is common. Hence, a language history questionnaire was conducted prior to the survey to screen participants for the study. In the language history questionnaire, participants were asked to provide their history of learning Arabic and English and rate four domains of language proficiency (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) for both English and Arabic.

A total of 28 Arabic-English bilinguals participated in the study. Among the 28 participants, 22 were female, 4 were male, and two people preferred not to specify their gender. The mean age was 23.57, ranging from19 to 50. The age at the onset of learning or the age of acquisition (AoA) of English and Arabic was 3.68 and 1.59 years, respectively, which indicates that the participants were early bilinguals. Nonetheless, most of them were, on average, exposed to Arabic before English, as indicated in the difference in the AoA of these two languages. This in turn suggests that that Arabic is the first language (L1) and English is the second language (L2) for the participants.

The online survey comprised 23 questions in total. The main survey questions were constructed in accordance with a 3 x 2 factorial design, combining the language of a film (English vs. Arabic vs. foreign language) and the context (cinema vs. home). For each condition, three questions were created asking (a) frequency of watching a film, (b) frequency of using subtitles, and (c) language preference for subtitles. Figure 1 exemplifies the questions created for the condition of a foreign language film in cinema.

Q1 How often do you watch foreign language films in cinemas on average?

Once a week	Once a month	Every other month	Once a year	Never
□	□	□	□	□

Q2 How often do you pay attention to subtitles when watching foreign language films in cinema?

Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
□	□	□	□	□

Q3 For subtitles, which language do you prefer for a foreign language film in cinema?

English □
Arabic □
No preference □

Figure 1. A series of questions asked for foreign language films in cinema

A set of questions presented in Figure 1 were designed in the following way. Q1 was presented to all participants. However, not all participants may not have seen Q2 and/or Q3, depending on their provided answer to Q1. For instance, when the participant answered they never watch a foreign language film in cinema, Q2 was not presented, which asks whether the viewer pays attention to subtitles while watching a foreign language film in cinema. Otherwise, Q2 was presented to all other participants. Similarly, depending on the answer to Q2, Q3 was presented optionally. If the answer to Q2 was 'never', Q3 did not follow.

Finally, Q3 asked about the viewer's subtitle language choice for a foreign language film played in cinema. Since subtitles are available mainly in two languages, English and Arabic, in movie theatres in the UAE, the preferred language choice was limited to these two languages. As mentioned earlier, however, other languages are available for subtitles of TV programs and online streaming materials. Thus, this question was revised for home settings by adding the third choice; (a) English, (b) Arabic, and (c) other language(s). In addition, there was an additional question added in home context, which seeks for a reason of the language choice for subtitles. For instance, those who chose a specific language as their preferred subtitle language for foreign language films at home were asked to provide a reason for their selection. Figure 2 illustrates these additional questions.

Q4-A Why do you prefer English subtitles? You can choose as many answers as you want.

- My English is stronger than my Arabic
- I think English is better to understand a foreign language film
- Arabic subtitles (modern standard Arabic) are too formal
- Subtitles are not available in my Arabic dialect
- Other

Q4-B Why do you prefer Arabic subtitles? You can choose as many answers as you want.

- My Arabic is stronger than my English
- I think Arabic is better to understand a foreign language film
- I am familiar with modern standard Arabic
- Subtitles are available in my Arabic dialect
- Other

Q4-C What language do you prefer for subtitles and why?

Figure 2. Customized questions asked for subtitle language selection

Depending on the answer to Q3, one of three questions presented in Figure 2 was presented as next question. As shown in Figure 2, a list of possible explanations

was constructed when the participant chose either English or Arabic as a preferred subtitle language. Participants were allowed to choose as many as they want from the given answers. Additionally, they were able to state their own reasons. If the participant selected neither English nor Arabic as a preferred language, he was asked to write a reason for it as described in Q4-C.

One question was presented at a time and participants were not allowed to skip any question except for those that were designed to be presented as a follow-up question to the previous question. Thus, depending on the answer choice, the follow-up question may or may not have been displayed. As explained earlier, for instance, in a series of questions in Figure 1, if the participant answered "never" to the first question Q1 (they never watch a foreign language film in cinema), the following question Q2 that asked for one's dependence on the subtitles of the film was not presented. Similarly, when the participant answered "never" to Q2 (they never pay attention to subtitles), the third question Q3 soliciting language selection for subtitles was not asked. On average, participants took 3-5 minutes to finish the survey.

3. Results

3.1. English language films as the most favored language film

In a series of questions in block, the first one asked about the frequency of watching a specific language film in two locations, cinema vs. home (e.g., Q1 in Figure 1). Table 1 below illustrates the number of people, out of 28 participants, who reported to watch different language films in cinema and at home. As shown in Table 1, English language films were the mostly watched language film, followed by foreign language films and Arabic language films in cinema and home. While almost all participants informed that they watch English language films/shows in cinema and at home (n=27 and 28, respectively), the number of viewers of foreign language and Arabic language films was much lower in cinema (n=16 and 14, respectively) than at home (n=24 and 19, respectively). Although the reason is unknown, since the survey did not ask for it, such a difference may be explained by the fact that participants have access to a wide selection of foreign language films at home via various online streaming services, which may not be available in cinema. Another interesting finding was that despite Arabic being the first language for most participants, Arabic language films and shows were the least watched language film by our Arabic-English bilingual speakers both in cinema and at home.

Table 1. The number of viewers for different language films in cinema vs. home

	English	Arabic	Foreign language
In cinema	27 (96.43%)	14 (50%)	16 (57.14%)
At home	28 (100%)	19 (67.86%)	24 (85.71%)

English language films were also the most frequently viewed language film both in cinema and at home. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of

contexts on the frequency of watching three different language films. There was a significant effect of the context on the frequency of watching English language, Arabic language, and foreign language films in cinema ($F(2, 81) = 34.51$, $p<.01$) as well as at home ($F(2, 81) = 34.20$, $p<.01$). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that in the context of cinemas, the mean frequency value for an English language film ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.82$) was significantly different from that of an Arabic language film ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.77$) and a foreign language film ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.01$). However, there was no significant difference between an Arabic language film and a foreign language film. Similarly, in the context of home, the mean frequency score for an English language film ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 0.82$) was significantly different from that of an Arabic language film ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.45$) and a foreign language film ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.21$). There was no significant difference between an Arabic language film and a foreign language film.

Taken together, these results suggest that English language films are the most frequently viewed language film in cinema as well at home by our Arabic-English bilingual speakers.

3.2. Use of subtitles for different language films

The second question of the block (Q2 in Figure 1) asked how often participants would use subtitles for each language film. As explained earlier, this question was not presented when the participant reported that they never watch a certain language film. Table 2 shows the number of participants who reported to use subtitles.

Table 2. The number of viewers using subtitles for different language films

	English	Arabic	Foreign language
In cinema	27/27 (100%)	14/14 (100%)	16/16 (100%)
At home	28/28 (100%)	12/19 (63.16%)	24/24 (100%)

As shown in Table 2, all movie watchers paid attention to subtitles in cinema regardless of the language of the film. This may be due to fact that subtitles are always displayed on the screen in movie theatres in the UAE. On the other hand, the pattern of using subtitles was different at home, depending on the language of the film, where subtitles are optional. While the viewers always used subtitles for English language films and foreign language films, only 63% of them used subtitles for Arabic language films. In other words, the reliance on subtitles was higher for English language films and foreign language films than Arabic language films. While it is comprehensible to use subtitles for foreign language films, the difference found between English language films and Arabic language films is hard to be missed.

Table 3 shows the use of subtitles, the frequency of using subtitles for different language films in cinema and at home settings was analyzed (using Likert scale indicates 1: always, 2: often, 3: sometimes, 4: rarely, and 5: never)

Table 3. Frequency of using subtitles language films in cinema and at home

	English	Arabic	Foreign language

In cinema	2.78 [N=27]	3.57 [N=14]	1.63 [N=16]
At home	2.25 [N=28]	3.42 [N=21]	1.08 [N=24]

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of context on the frequency of using subtitles in three different language films. First, in the context of cinemas, there was a statistically significant difference in the frequency of using subtitles between at least two language films ($F(2, 54) = 13.6002$, $p = 0.00001647$). Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean frequency value was significantly different between English language films and foreign language films ($p = 0.002434$, 95% C.I. = 0.3658, 1.9397) and between Arabic language films and foreign language films ($p = 0.00001157$, 95% C.I. = 1.0336, 2.8593). There was no statistically significant difference between English language films and Arabic language films ($p = 0.06034$).

In the context of home, there was a statistically significant difference in the frequency of using subtitles among three language films ($F(2, 68) = 24.2396$, $p = 1.129e\text{-}8$). Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of the frequency of using subtitles was significantly different among all language films: between English language films and Arabic language films ($p = 0.00175$, 95% C.I. = 0.3903, 1.9518), between English language films and foreign language films ($p = 0.0008256$, 95% C.I. = 0.436, 1.8973), and also between Arabic language and foreign language films ($p = 5.341e\text{-}9$, 95% C.I. = 1.5311, 3.1443).

Taken together, these results suggest that the frequency of using subtitles was the highest for foreign language films both in cinema and at home. While this is an expected result, it is surprising to find that the frequency of using subtitles was still higher for English language films over Arabic language films at home.

It is noteworthy to discuss higher dependence on subtitles for English language films over Arabic language films in relation to the linguistic background of our Arabic-English bilingual speakers. The fact that the participants relied on subtitles 100% for an English language film and foreign language films but used subtitles much less for Arabic language films suggests that they might be less proficient in English and more proficient in Arabic. However, a statistical analysis of self-reported language proficiency revealed that our Arabic-English bilingual speakers were more proficient in English over Arabic. Results of a paired *t*-test indicated that there is a significant medium difference between English ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.4$) and Arabic ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.8$), $t(111) = 6.2$, $p < .001$. This means that the result from the study do not reflect the participants' self-reported language proficiency. While there is no clear account for this discrepancy, one possible explanation might be found in the difference of the mean AoA of these languages by the participants. As mentioned earlier, the AoA of Arabic was 1.59 years, and the AoA of English was 3.68 years. Additionally, many participants described Arabic as their native language whereas only a few reported that English was their mother tongue. Thus, one many assume that the participants were in fact more proficient in Arabic in contrast to their self-reported language proficiency. Language proficiency of the participants in English and Arabic will be discussed further in the Discussion section.

3.3. English as the language of subtitles

The last question of the block (Q3 in Figure 1) elicited the language choice for subtitles. Except for those who expressed that they never use subtitles, participants were asked to choose a language for subtitles. Tables 4 and 5 below present the preferred subtitle language for English language, Arabic language, and foreign language films in cinema and at home, respectively.

Table 4. Preferred subtitle language at home

	English films	Arabic films	Foreign language films
English	16 (59.26%)	5 (50%)	10 (66.67%)
Arabic	2 (7.41%)	3 (30%)	4 (26.67%)
No preference	9 (33.33%)	2 (20%)	1 (6.67%)

Table 5. Preferred subtitle language in cinema

	English films	Arabic films	Foreign language films
English	24 (85.71%)	7 (58.33%)	19 (79.17%)
Arabic	3 (10.71%)	5 (41.67%)	5 (20.83%)
Other language	1 (3.57%)	0	0

As presented in Tables 4 and 5 above, English was the most preferred subtitle language for our Arabic-English bilingual speakers regardless of the language of the film and viewing locations. For instance, in cinema, English subtitles were preferred for English, Arabic, and foreign language films 59.26%, 50% and 66.67%, respectively. At home where a choice of languages is available for subtitles, the preference of English subtitles was even higher by our Arabic-English bilinguals. 85.71%, 58.33%, and 79.17% of subtitle users answered that they use English subtitles for English language films, Arabic language films and foreign language films, respectively.

What is of great interest here is that the participants still preferred English subtitles to Arabic subtitles when they watch Arabic language films. As mentioned earlier, our Arabic-English bilingual speakers used subtitles less frequently for Arabic language films (e.g., 63.16% at home) than English language films (e.g., 100% at home). Yet, when the participants choose to use subtitles, they prefer in English rather than in Arabic, which seemingly suggests that the participants' reading proficiency might be higher in English over Arabic. This prediction was confirmed. Results of the paired-*t* test indicated that there is a significant medium difference between English reading proficiency ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.3$) and Arabic reading proficiency ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.8$), $t(27) = 3.3$, $p = .003$.

Finally, the last question of the questionnaire asked if participants think subtitles are a good way to learn a new language. 27 participants (96.43%) expressed that subtitles are an effective tool for learning a new language.

4. Discussion

The present study, as part of an ongoing research project on bilingualism and code-switching in the UAE, investigated the use of subtitles by Arabic-English bilingual speakers. As extant research on subtitles and their effects on language acquisition predominantly involve monolingual speakers, results from the present study add new findings to the topic and highlight unexpected linguistic patterns and behavior exhibited by bilingual speakers.

The major findings of the present study are summarized twofold: (a) Arabic-English bilingual speakers heavily relied on subtitles for foreign language films and English language films, but not for Arabic language films, and (b) English was the preferred subtitle language regardless of the language of the film by Arabic-English bilingual speakers. Despite being fluent in both English and Arabic, our Arabic-English bilingual speakers testified that they use subtitles more often when watching an English film than an Arabic language film. As mentioned in the introduction, effects of subtitles may be closely related to the language proficiency of the viewers. While learners with lower L2 proficiency are benefitted the most through interlingual subtitles, a high level of L2 learners do not rely on subtitles and are negatively influenced by both interlingual and intralingual subtitles (Lavaur & Bairstow 2011). Thus, the finding that our bilingual speakers used subtitles more frequently for English language films over Arabic language films suggests that they behaved as if they were less proficient in English and more proficient in Arabic. This might be due to the fact that Arabic is their L1 and English is L2, as the AoA of Arabic was earlier than that of English, as mentioned earlier.

However, the behavioral pattern obtained from the present study did not seem to reflect their self-reported language proficiency. A statistical analysis of self-reported proficiency in four domains of the two languages (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) revealed that our bilingual speakers were more proficient in English as a whole. Especially, the difference was noticeable in reading and writing. Results of the paired-*t* test indicated that there is a significant difference between English reading proficiency (M = 3.9, SD = 0.3) and Arabic reading proficiency (M = 3.5, SD = 0.8), $t(27) = 3.3$, $p = .003$, and also between English writing proficiency (M = 3.8, SD = 0.4) and Arabic writing proficiency (M = 3.1, SD = 1), $t(27) = 4.6$, $p < .001$. In listening too, our Arabic-English bilinguals were better in English. Results of the paired-*t* test indicated that there is a significant small difference in listening between in English (M = 4, SD = 0.2) and in Arabic (M = 3.8, SD = 0.4), $t(27) = 2.4$, p = .022. The only area where the participants were equally proficient in their two languages was speaking. Therefore, it seems that the frequency of using subtitles for different language films by Arabic-English bilingual speakers does not seem to be related to their language proficiency, which contrasts to the findings of previous research.

On the other hand, language selection for subtitles seems to be related to language proficiency. Our Arabic-English bilingual speakers strongly preferred English as the language of subtitles for all language films; English, Arabic, and foreign language films, and their reading proficiency was higher in English. Since reading proficiency is required for using subtitles, our participants' higher reading proficiency in English can explain why they would choose English as the language of subtitles.

Despite the fact that Arabic is L1 and English is L2, our Arabic-English bilingual speakers seem to be more proficient in English. This was more prominent in literacy skills, as their reading and writing skills were much higher in English. Considering Arabic is the mother tongue to most of our participants and the official language in the UAE, one may ask how they become less proficient in their native language and more proficient in another language. We argue that this is related to 'linguistic dualism' present in the UAE.

Linguistic dualism in the UAE has been noticed by many researchers. As English has become the official language of instruction in most higher education institutions in the country (Troudi 2007), students are exposed to English more than Arabic over time and an emphasis is often given on English over Arabic by parents and students alike. Consequently, Arabic, the indigenous and official language of the country, has practically been relegated to a minority language or second language, especially in the education system and society (Siemund et al. 2020). These further impact literacy skills in Arabic, which is evidenced by many students who express reading in Arabic is difficult (Al-Issa & Dahan 2011). It has been argued that the overemphasis on English jeopardizes the overall status of the Arabic language in the country (Al-Issa & Dahan 2011; Thomas 2021).

Although findings are not yet conclusive, research on intralingual and interlingual subtitles indicates that interlingual subtitles are more beneficial for lower level of second language learners whereas intralingual subtitles are more helpful for advanced higher level of second language speakers. The present study found that Arabic-English bilingual speakers with Arabic as L1 and English as L2 preferred intralingual subtitles for English language films, in contrast with their favor of interlingual subtitles for Arabic language films. In other words, the behavior pattern found in our Arabic-English bilinguals with respect to language selection of subtitles exhibited that Arabic-English bilinguals in the UAE behaved as advanced speakers for English and less advanced speakers for Arabic. Even though Arabic is their L1, English seems to become more dominant over time, especially in literacy skills, as evidenced in higher reading and writing skills in English. Not only is this issue informally recognized by the speakers themselves, but it has also raised grave concern among researchers and educators over the years. Thus, the present study sheds further light on the current language education system and future directions in the UAE.

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