This study investigates the biliteracy development of young learners who learn both Arabic and Latinate writing systems as an L2. It aims at defining the interrelationship between L1 and L2 literacy acquisition defined in terms of spelling skills and word recognition (Norris & Phillips, 2003) in Arabic as opposed to English/French/Dutch, which are typologically very different languages (Rahbari, 2010; McBride, 2016). According to the common underlying proficiency theory (Cummins, 1980, 1984), acquiring an L2 would progress along a common (L1 and L2) underlying proficiency in the mind, which is believed to cause a facilitating interrelationship between the L1 and L2 with regard to literacy development. In line with the linguistic coding differences hypothesis (LCDH) in literacy acquisition, L1 works as a foundation for an L2. Consequently, L1 literacy skills are likely to be transferred to the L2 (Kahn-Horwitz et al., 2017). The question is, whether this still holds true for the acquisition of two typologically very different languages with different writing systems. The study, moreover, wants to determine whether learners who seem to be better in L1 word recognition and spelling skills may also master better counterpart skills in their L2, even if L1 and L2 are based on very different writing systems. Until now, too little attention has been paid to Arabic in this area either as an L1 or L2. Consequently, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. In literacy development, in what way does L1 (Arabic) orthography influence word recognition in L2 (English, a Latinate spelling system)?
2. In literacy development, in what way does L1 (French/Dutch, a Latinate spelling system) orthography influence word recognition in L2 (Arabic)?
3. In what way does the order of literacy acquisition influence word recognition in L1 (Palestine)?
4. In what way does the order of literacy acquisition influence word recognition in L2 (Palestine and Belgium)?

To answer these questions, a study has been conducted in both Palestinian and Belgian schools. The participants were 249 pupils divided into beginning and intermediate levels. The Palestinian learners (N=154) speak Arabic L1 and learn English L2 (a Latinate language). A comparison group in Belgium (N=95), however, speaks Dutch or French L1 (a Latinate language) while learning Arabic L2. Both groups received an Arabic spelling test (Asadi et al., 2017) according to their levels. Meanwhile, English spelling tests were administered to the learners in Palestine. Likewise, they were subject to an Arabic and English lexical decision task, while the learners in Belgium conducted an Arabic lexical decision task (L2). The results indicate that learners will benefit from their linguistics level of L1 to support L2 spelling and word recognition.
Bibliography


