

# [The Performance of Arabic-English Speaking Bilinguals on the Jordanian Expressive Vocabulary Test (JEVT): A Case Study

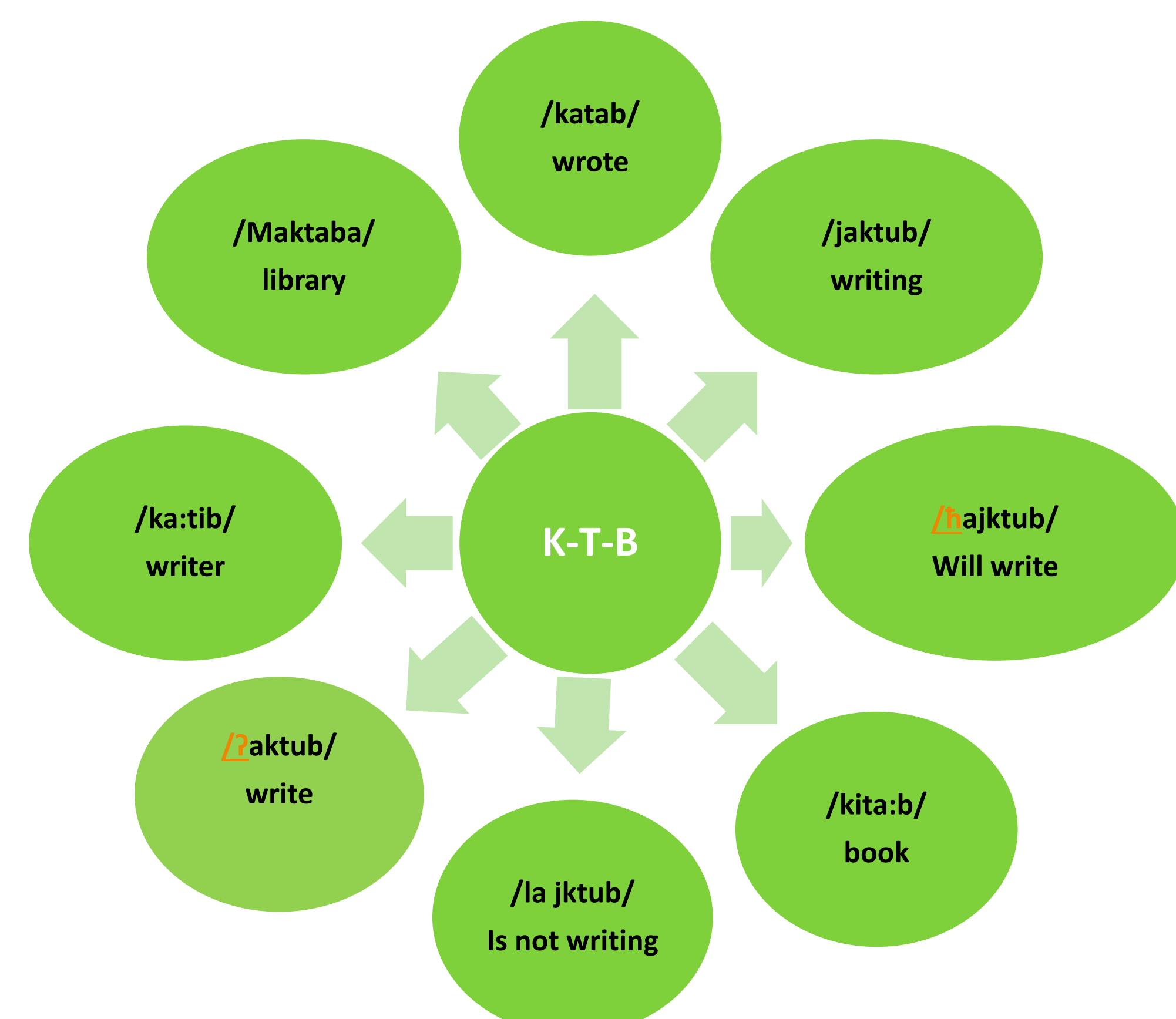
Nada O. Faquih, M.S.-SLP. Linda Bland-Stewart, Ph.D, CCC-SLP  
Howard University

## ABSTRACT

Several studies have been done to analyze language acquisition in bilinguals. As speech and language pathologists, it is critical to identify the language acquisition patterns of bilinguals in order to accurately diagnose the presence or absence of a language disorder. This study was an initial investigation of the performance of typical children who are Arabic-English bilinguals on the Jordanian Expressive Vocabulary Test (JEVT). The participants were two Arabic-English bilingual children from Saudi Arabia. The study revealed the participants scored higher on the Arabic JEVT compared to the English JEVT. The need to assess bilingual children in both languages is critical to assure a fair and unbiased diagnosis.

## BACKGROUND

- Approximately 75% of middle easterns speak Arabic language as their first language.
- Arabic language has an infixing system (O'Grady & Debrovolsky, 1996).
- Lexicons derive from root words, meaning can be changed by adding affixes.
- Modern Standard Arabic is the formal form used in writing, speeches, and poetry.
- Multiple dialects exist in Arabic (Dashash & Safi, 2008).
- Single-word naming is one of the first milestones of expressive language acquisition.
- Depending on the age and type of acquisition of the second language, bilinguals will either have a single lexical system for each language, or two lexical systems for two labels (Pearson, 1998; Cummins, 1979, 2001).



## OBJECTIVE

Bilinguals are often misdiagnosed as having a language impairment. The objective of this study was to compare the number of vocabulary items in English and Arabic acquired by children who are Arabic-English bilinguals. The preliminary results of this study will assist SLPs to identify how bilinguals would perform when assessing their expressive vocabulary using the Jordanian Expressive Vocabulary Test (JEVT). This study is an initial investigation on Arabic-English bilinguals and does not present normative data.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

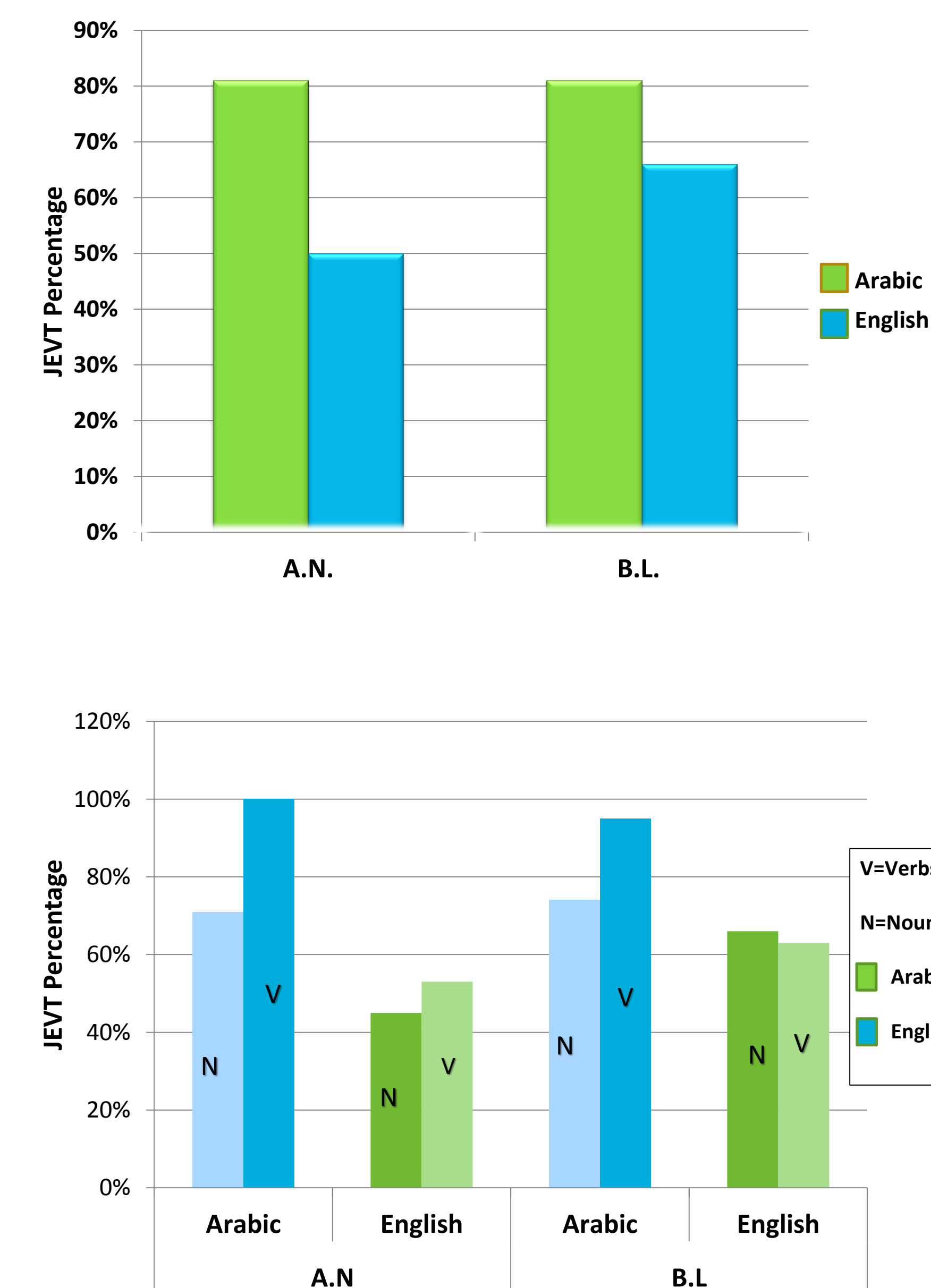
Are the number of expressive vocabulary items in Arabic different from the number of expressive vocabulary items in English for Arabic-English bilinguals as measured by the JEVT?

If there are differences, is the type of vocabulary items produced in Arabic different than English as measured by the JEVT (e.g., nouns, actions verbs)?

## METHODOLOGY

- The participants targeted in this pilot study were two Arabic-English bilingual children living in Saudi Arabia.
- Both participants acquired Arabic since birth.
- A.N., 4;0 years old male, was exposed to English since he was 2 years old.
- B.L., 3;7 years old female, was exposed to English since birth.
- Questionnaires were given to the parents regarding the developmental history, speech-language history, and bilingual proficiency.
- Parents reported participants had developed typically.
- The Jordanian Expressive Vocabulary Test (JEVT) was developed by Al-Sa'bi (2007).
- During the test, the participants were asked to name the picture presented from the test easel.
- Cultural and dialectal differences were considered during the test administration and scoring.

## RESULTS



## DISCUSSION

- Generally, participants labeled more verbs than nouns in both languages.
  - *Verbs may be easier to acquire in Arabic than in English because of its infixing system.*
- Both participants labeled the religious target words “Quran” and “pray” in Arabic.
- Participants did not respond when asked to label “Quran” and “pray” in English.
  - Participants were not exposed to these items in English language. (Baker & Garcia, 1996).
- A.N. identified fewer vocabulary items in English but he stated that he knows the equivalent word in Arabic.
  - *A.N. may have two lexical systems.*
- B.L. may have scored higher than A.N. on the English JEVT because:
  - *B.L. was exposed to English earlier.*
  - *B.L.'s siblings speak English consistently.*

## CONCLUSION

- From the current study, both participants had better expressive vocabulary skills in Arabic than in English as measured by the JEVT.
- The participants performance differed in English probably due to the difference of the type of English acquisition.
- Bilinguals should be assessed in both language as their performance may differ.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further studies may investigate the Arabic-English bilinguals performance with a larger sample and with different assessment tools.
- Studies may design a specific Arabic/English vocabulary test for accurate assessment of the bilinguals vocabulary skills.
- The assessment tool should include an adequate representation of vocabulary items in Arabic and English (verbs, nouns, grammar forms...etc).
- The assessment tool should be more dialectally and culturally specific.

## REFERENCES

- O'Grady, W. & Dobrovolsky, M. (1996). Contemporary linguistic analysis: An introduction as cited by Abdalla, F. (2002). *Specific Language Impairment in Arabic-Speaking Children: Deficits in Morphosyntax*. McGill University, Canada: unpublished dissertation.
- Al-Sa'bi, Y. (2007). *The Jordanian Expressive Vocabulary Test Study*. Washington D.C: Howard University: unpublished dissertation.
- Dashash N., Safi S. (2008). *Investigating Lexical Development of Hijazi Infants & Toddlers Using the Arabic Version of the MCDI*. Retrieved October 20, 2010, from ASHA Convention : [http://www.eshow2000.com/.../1420\\_1397Dashash\\_Nahla\\_\\_126134\\_Nov12\\_2008\\_Time\\_022051...](http://www.eshow2000.com/.../1420_1397Dashash_Nahla__126134_Nov12_2008_Time_022051...)
- Pearson, B. (1998). Assessing Lexical Development in Bilingual Babies and Toddlers. *The International Journal of Bilingualism*, Vol 2, Number 3, 347-372.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special thanks goes to Dr. Yaser Al-Sa'bi at the Jeddah Institute of Speech and Hearing,, Saudi Arabia, for providing the JEVT instrument and his valuable input. Special thanks goes to King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, for their support.