Multidialectal Use of L2 Arabic: A Study of Advanced Learners' Profiles

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Abstract

Developing sociolinguistic competence in Arabic can be a complex process given how Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic (CA) are used within a changing sociolinguistic environment in Arabic-speaking communities. Findings from empirical research suggest that second language (L2) Arabic learners who receive multidialectal training in MSA and CA can gain awareness of context-related sociolinguistic expectations. However, research is yet to examine the association between L2 Arabic learners' profiles, the type of first-year Arabic instruction, and their metasociolinguistic awareness and code preferences as shown in their metasociolinguistic reflections. It also needs to examine how such association manifests itself in learners' oral and written productions. The current study addresses these questions. Six advanced students receiving multidialectal training participated in the study. The data comprised a language learning history survey, reflections on sociolinguistic variation, and oral and written productions. All the data were analyzed qualitatively, and MSA-CA use in the participants' productions was also analyzed quantitatively. The findings show that first-year training was sometimes associated with participants' MSA-CA use. However, learners' personal preferences, the type of task, topic, and interpersonal cues interacted with the type of training to influence how participants use MSA-CA, providing evidence of the participants' rich, multifaceted sociolinguistic competence and agency that enable them to navigate tasks and contexts. This study offers important pedagogical implications for the L2 Arabic classroom.

Keywords: *Sociolinguistic awareness, metasociolinguistic awareness, multidialectal training, L2 Arabic sociolinguistic competence*

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Introduction

Developing sociolinguistic competence is one of the most important yet less researched aspects of L2 acquisition. Defining sociolinguistic competence can be a challenging task in the context of a diglossic language, such as Arabic, given that Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic (CA) are used within a rich, changing sociolinguistic environment created by increasing contact among first-language (L1) Arabic-speaking communities and enhanced exposure to multiple varieties of Arabic through technology and the media (Al-Batal, 2018; Belnap, 2018; Isleem, 2018).

Since the 1990s, L2 Arabic instruction has grappled with determining how to support the development of L2 learners' sociolinguistic competence, especially in light of their need to communicate and connect with L1 Arabic speakers. L2 Arabic programs have adopted a variety of models, where MSA and CA can be introduced either simultaneously (in the same lesson or in parallel lessons), consequentially, or exclusively (one or the other). To date, no studies have explored the association between these models in the foundational years of Arabic instruction and learners' code choice and MSA-CA use at the advanced level or how their own preferences interact with the type of training. There is also a dearth of studies that closely examine the advanced L2 Arabic learners' diverse experiences, linguistic choices, and voices through recall and interviews that elicit their metasociolinguistic reflections (i.e., their

metalinguistic awareness with regard to sociolinguistic aspects of language) on their own learning experiences and use of Arabic. The current study addresses these issues.

Literature review

The goal of communicative L2 instruction is to help learners develop the ability to communicate effectively in meaningful situations (Dornyei, 2013; Spada, 2007) and to meet the needs of social interactions (Savignon, 2007). Communicative competence includes the awareness of sociolinguistic variation. Geeslin and Long (2014) define sociolinguistic variation as "the choices a speaker makes when selecting the forms necessary to convey a message that is appropriate in a given context," and they note that speakers may not always be aware of these choices (p. 3). For L2 learners to be able to communicate meaning effectively, they need to understand the range of variation in the target language, make linguistic choices appropriate to the different social contexts in which they participate, and gradually develop their individual L2 identities. These choices could be made consciously as informed by learners' understanding of specific sociolinguistic and sociocultural factors associated with the use of specific varieties or mixes in specific contexts.

Developing sociolinguistic competence in Arabic, including an awareness of sociolinguistic variation (i.e., the simultaneous use of MSA and CA varieties), can be a complex process. Arabic is a diglossic language (see Ferguson, 1959a) with 'high' and 'low' codes. The 'high' code is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), commonly used in formal contexts, such as religious sermons, the news, and government

correspondence. The 'low' code refers to colloquial Arabic (CA) varieties used for daily communication, pop culture, TV, and film. However, research in Arabic sociolinguistics reveals a richer reality of the modern Arabic speech communities that goes beyond a 'high'-'low' dichotomy. Educated diglossic users of Arabic (see Wahba, 2006) do not always keep the varieties separate but rather mix the two codes to achieve different goals (Albirini, 2011; Bassiouney, 2006, 2013, 2020; Holes, 1993; Mejdell, 2006). Given how common code mixing is, L2 Arabic learners need to gain familiarity with the MSA-CA continuum and multidialectal practices (Al Masaeed, 2020, 2022; Al Masaeed *et al.,* 2020) to communicate competently in different contexts (see, e.g., Al-Batal, 2018; Belnap, 2018; Trentman & Shiri, 2020).

Understanding the importance of learner awareness of sociolinguistic variation, an increasing number of Arabic programs have shifted from the traditional focus on MSA alone to the integration of CA (Al-Batal, 1992, 2018; Al-Batal & Belnap, 2006; Younes, 2015). Recent research has explored how learners enrolled in these programs use the two varieties in their speech production. Shiri and Joukhadar (2018) examined the effectiveness of teaching parallel MSA and CA curricula. They analyzed 36 first-year students' use of MSA and CA in sample student-to-student and student-to-instructor interactions during classroom activities as well as the students' oral production in the end-of-year skits. The study showed that students were able to reach an intermediate level of proficiency in both MSA and CA and to maintain prolonged

interactions in both varieties with a relatively high grammatical accuracy and a rare use of hybrid MSA-CA constructs.

Nassif (2018) investigated patterns and the appropriateness of MSA-CA codeswitching in the oral productions of 70 L2 Arabic learners who received multidialectal training, which is commonly known as the integrated approach, where MSA and CA are introduced in the same lesson as early as the first semester of Arabic instruction. The learners' proficiency ranged between Novice Mid to Advanced Low on the American Association on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency scale (ACTFL, 2012). The analysis showed patterns of codeswitching at the word, phrase, and sentence levels, with a gradual increase in sociolinguistic competence and code awareness as the participants advanced in their Arabic studies. Interestingly, instances of MSA-CA hybridization at the word level resembled features of *lughat al-muthaqqafīn*, i.e., educated speakers' language (Mejdell, 2011). In a more recent study, Nassif (2021) explored how 51 L2 Arabic learners who were trained in MSA and CA simultaneously used the two codes in their speech productions and how their use of the two varieties evolved over years of study. The data analysis revealed salient patterns between and within groups of first-, second-, and third-year students. Codeswitching between MSA and CA corresponded to specific sociolinguistic functions, with more advanced learners showing a wider range of functions in their codeswitching.

Findings from empirical research also show that L2 Arabic learners who receive multidialectal training can meet and sustain context-related sociolinguistic expectations. Nassif and Al-Masaeed (2020) investigated multidialectal practices in the speech productions of 28 third-year L2 Arabic learners trained in MSA and Levantine Arabic simultaneously. They found that learners used a focused variety consistently; that is, there was predominant MSA use in presentations (formal) and CA in skits (informal). The researchers interpreted these findings as evidence of evolving sociolinguistic competence. In a study that examined the naturalness of codeswitching, Leddy-Cecere (2018) analyzed 24.5 hours of classroom interactions and sociolinguistic interviews with 16 learners from the first to the fourth year. He found a congruity between general theories of dialect contact in naturally occurring settings and learner production in a multidialectal classroom.

These multidialectal MSA-CA practices have been recently studied from a translanguaging perspective, echoing the growing body of research in SLA focusing on translanguaging practice in the L2 classroom and linguistic agency in language acquisition (e.g., García & Wei, 2014; Leung & Valdés, 2019; Wei, 2018). These studies have reported learners' ability to employ multidialectal practices in contextually-appropriate use of Arabic, and how these practices were used by learners in ways that transcend the boundaries between MSA and CA varieties to enhance learning gains and identity negotiation (e.g., Al Masaeed, 2020, 2022; Oraby & Azaz, 2022).

One concern raised by some practitioners and curriculum designers regarding multidialectal training is that learners' MSA proficiency may suffer due to the introduction of CA. In a longitudinal study, Ebner and Watson (2018) compared the reading and listening MSA proficiency of two groups of beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners (total of 910 students). One group received MSA instruction only, and the second studied MSA and Levantine Arabic using the integrated approach. The study showed no statistical difference between the two groups, suggesting no decrease in MSA proficiency where CA was present.

These studies suggest that the oral production of L2 Arabic learners who receive multidialectal training indicates a sociolinguistic awareness of codeswitching and that this awareness develops as learners advance in their studies. There also seems to be no evidence that learners' MSA proficiency would suffer due to the introduction of a dialect.

However, research is yet to examine the interaction between L2 Arabic learners' profiles (i.e., language learning history), their metasociolinguistic awareness, and their code preferences and choices, and how such interaction manifests itself in their oral and written productions. Investigating the trajectories of individual learners with a focus on the development of sociolinguistic competence from a qualitative perspective is also limited in studies of L2 acquisition (van Compernolle, 2019).

The current study addresses these questions by qualitatively examining the metasociolinguistic awareness and code choice of six advanced L2 Arabic learners

who received training in MSA and CA simultaneously at some point in their Arabic learning journey but had different types of initial training (i.e., foundational Arabic instruction in the first year). We chose first-year training because it was the most variable part of their experiences. First year tends to be largely emphasized by L2 Arabic practitioners as the foundation of Arabic study and the year involving the largest student population in L2 Arabic programs, with the biggest student attrition taking place between first and second year. Thus, the 'Arabic' presented in first year is what a large number of learners take away from their Arabic studies. While a causation cannot be established between first-year training and learners' metasociolinguistic awareness and current MSA-CA use, we wanted to explore whether there is a specific pattern of MSA-CA use among learners with similar first-year training. We also wanted to determine whether learners developed specific preferences for one code or both as they continue to develop their sociolinguistic competence.

Two research questions guided the study:

1. Does the type of foundational training in the first year of L2 Arabic instruction associate with the frequency of MSA and CA use in the oral and written productions of advanced learners of Arabic?

2. Does the type of foundational training in the first year of L2 Arabic instruction associate with learner preference for code use among advanced learners of Arabic as shown in their metasociolinguistic reflections?

Methods

Participants

Six participants (3 females and 3 males; 21-34 years old [2]) from a class of 11 students took part in the study. The participants were English L1 speakers, none of whom came from Arabic-speaking households. They were undergraduate and graduate students with varied majors, including Middle Eastern Studies, history, and political science. These students were chosen because they represented different profiles: three started their Arabic learning with MSA only for 1-3 years, two with MSA-CA from the beginning, and one with CA only for two years.

At the time of data collection, the participants were enrolled in the fifth week of an intensive Arabic summer program at a major US public university. This five-week program involved an Arabic course of 15 hours of MSA and Damascene Levantine Arabic (DLA) weekly instruction in addition to co-curricular activities. Prior to joining the program, participants had studied Arabic between two to six years. All participants had received MSA and DLA training, and some studied Cairene Egyptian Arabic (CEA) as well. Their Arabic proficiency levels were Advanced Low to Mid on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines based on course training as well as the instructor's evaluation. Table 1 shows the participants' profiles.

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[2] The participants were between 21-26, apart from one participant aged 34.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Name	Years of Arabic study prior to program	Arabic varieties studied prior to program	First year of Arabic training	Study abroad
1. Karen[3]	6	MSA, DLA, & CEA	MSA	4 months
2. Maya	2	MSA & DLA	MSA	No
3. Carl	4	MSA & DLA	MSA	3 months
4. Mark	3	MSA, DLA, & CEA	MSA-CA	No
5. Jacob	3	MSA & DLA	MSA-CA	2 years
6. Anna*	6	MSA, DLA, & CEA	CA	No

*This participant also had some training in Moroccan Arabic.

Procedure

The data analyzed in the study included: 1) language learning history survey in English; 2) semi-spontaneous oral production in Arabic; 3) reflections in English on MSA-CA use; 4) planned oral production in Arabic; and 5) written production in Arabic. The first three sources of data were collected during an individual 1- to 1.5-hour session during the final week of the course. The latter two were obtained from the course instructor. Author 1 visited the class to explain the study and to share consent forms. Interested students emailed the author and took part in an individual session.

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[3] Pseudonyms

Instruments and data collection

Language learning history survey

An online survey developed through Qualtrics software was created to collect participants' basic demographic information, their Arabic learning history, and study abroad experiences, if any.

Semi-spontaneous production

A prompt consisting of six questions (Appendix A) was used to collect sample semi-spontaneous oral production. Participants were asked to state their opinion on the role universities play in the lives of individuals, communities, and cities. The topic was familiar to the participants as they had encountered it in the Arabic course. The questions were presented in English to avoid directing students to a particular code, and no instructions on code use were provided. Participants were allowed two minutes to plan their responses, and they were asked to speak as much as they could. Semi-spontaneous productions ranged from 2.50 to 8.40 minutes.

Planned oral production

The planned oral production was an end-of-course presentation. Students were asked to read and present three articles on a topic of their choice. These productions were video-recorded and ranged from 4.20 to 10.32 minutes.

Written production

The written production was the last of three course essays. The learners were asked to write about their experiences and challenges with university education in their home country. The participants did not receive any instructions by the course instructor as to what code to use in either task. The essays ranged from 362 to 410 words.

Reflections on code use

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect information on the participants' metasociolinguistic knowledge of and thoughts on the use of MSA and CA. Author 1 asked participants general questions about their Arabic learning experience (e.g., years of study, motivation, achievements, etc.) to establish a smooth transition to the focus of the interview. The topic of MSA and CA came up naturally as participants discussed their L2 Arabic learning experiences. More questions were then asked to elicit further reflections on MSA-CA use and codeswitching in their own production and in L1 Arabic speakers' production. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 15 and 28 minutes, depending partly on whether the participant asked questions as invited by the researcher.

Data analysis

Two analyses were conducted: all data were analyzed qualitatively, and the qualitative findings from student productions (oral and written) were analyzed

quantitatively. Interviews and oral productions were transcribed in preparation for analysis.

Qualitative analysis

The data analyzed in this article were collected as part of a larger study focused on the types of metasociolinguistic awareness that are evident among advanced learners of Arabic who have had multidialectal training (Nassif & Shapiro, manuscript submitted for publication). The analysis of the current study focused on the association between the type of first-year training that learners received over their Arabic learning trajectory with their preferences in MSA-CA use as shown in their reflective data and code choice in productions.

All data were analyzed qualitatively. In analyzing the surveys and interviews, we considered the most common models of L2 Arabic instruction. As all participants had received some form of multidialectal training prior to joining the summer program, three major profiles emerged based on first-year training: CA-only, MSA-only, or MSA-CA. Next, we used axial coding to identify connections in the data based on the research questions. These connections were grouped into themes in the form of categorical aggregation (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Stake, 1995), such as the association between initial MSA-only training and learners' preference for MSA in semi-spontaneous productions. These themes were tallied and compared across participants.

The analysis of participants' MSA-CA use was based on the original analysis from Nassif and Shapiro (manuscript submitted for publication). The original analysis adopted categories from studies of L1 Arabic speech (see, e.g., Alaiyed, 2018; Albirini, 2011; Bassiouney, 2006, 2020; Eid, 1988) and previous L2 Arabic research (e.g., Nassif, 2018; Nassif & Al Masaeed, 2020). The linguistic properties shared between MSA and CA were grouped under a separate category (see Alaiyed, 2018; Bassiouney, 2006; Eid, 1988; Mejdell, 2011). Oral production coding was performed considering internal word voweling but not MSA mood or case endings as they are typically dropped by Arabic speakers and do not hinder comprehension (Alaiyed, 2018; Eid, 1988). The coding process also accounted for training, as some shared words were introduced to participants as MSA (e.g., *wa lākin*, "but") with a CA variant (*bass*). These words were coded under the variant in which they were introduced. Hesitation, repetition, and the highly frequent conjunction *wa* "and" were excluded from the word count in oral and written productions to provide a more accurate estimation of participants' word/minute production.

Proper nouns (e.g., Lebanon, Texas), repetitions (e.g., my life, my life has changed a lot; now I, I study), hesitations (e.g., I wa…was), and foreign words (e.g., internet, Facebook, gym) were excluded from the data analysis to provide a better representation of each participant's core lexicon. Table 2 provides examples of data coding.

Table 2

Examples of data coding

Code	Examples			
	Verb	Conjunctions	Nouns	Negation
MSA	*aradtu* "I wanted"	*ayḍan* "also"	*dawr* "role"	*laysa* "not"
CA	**ballashit** "I began"	**kamān** "also"	**shī** "thing"	**mish** "not"
Shared	ṣārū "they became"	aw "or"	ᶜālam "world"	mā "do/does not"

Participants sometimes included internal voweling in their essays. When they did, internal voweling was relied upon in coding a shared word as either MSA or CA (e.g., *darastu* (MSA) vs. *darasit* (CA) "I studied," both of which are written in the same way if not voweled). The coding guidelines described were applied by the two authors independently. They then discussed any coding discrepancies until an agreement was reached.

Quantitative analysis

The agreed-upon coding was tallied, and the means were calculated for oral production (planned and semi-spontaneous) and written production for the six participants. Table 3, adapted from Nassif and Shaprio (manuscript submitted for publication), presents the frequency in percentages and mean MSA-CA use by participants. Unlike the original study that focused on types of metasociolinguistic awareness and their alignment with production, the current study sheds light on the

association between initial year of Arabic training and learners' metasociolinguistic awareness, code preference, and frequency of MSA-CA use across different types of production.

Results

The current study addressed the questions of whether the type of foundational training in the first year of L2 Arabic instruction associated with the frequency of MSA and CA use among advanced learners of Arabic across oral and written productions, and with their preferences for code use. Our findings show that regardless of the type of initial or subsequent training, a) MSA was the predominant code used in written production and the more predominant variety in formal speech, and b) all participants showed metasociolinguistic awareness of which code would be appropriate in day-to-day interactional social contexts. In terms of semi-spontaneous and planned oral productions, we observed a clearer association between the type of foundational training and MSA-CA use for three participants (Karen, Jacob, Anna) than the others (Carl, Maya, Mark). The key factor seems to be participants' preferences of code. These findings indicate that the development of participants' sociolinguistic competence is a multifaceted process influenced by training, metasociolinguistic awareness of specific MSA-CA indexes, and personal preferences of code. The following sections present the findings arranged by the type of training the participants had in their first-year of Arabic learning prior to receiving simultaneous MSA-CA training.

Table 3

MSA-CA Percentages in Participants' Productions*

Name	Mins.	Semi-spontaneous oral productions				Mins.	Planned speech productions				No. of words	Written productions		
		No. of words	MSA	CA	Shar-ed		No. of words	MSA	CA	Shar-ed		MSA	CA	Shared
1. Karen	2.5	239	47.28	6.28	46.44	6.58	355	49.3	5.63	45.07	386	27.98	0.78	71.24
2. Maya	5.08	187	23.53	37.43	39.04	6.28	263	17.87	33.08	49.05	410	40.49	0.49	59.02
3. Mark	7.5	328	45.43	4.57	50.00	10.32	403	36.48	1.98	61.54	383	30.81	0	69.19
4. Anna	6.3	258	18.22	21.7	60.08	4.18	202	32.18	18.81	49.01	362	36.19	0.28	63.53
5. Carl	8.45	401	23.94	11.97	64.09	6.02	307	32.25	3.91	63.84	367	30.52	0	69.48
6. Jacob	6.31	407	15.97	36.86	47.17	5.13	287	28.92	13.24	57.84	362	27.62	0	72.38
Average	6.02	303.33	29.06	19.80	51.14	6.42	302.83	32.83	12.78	54.39	378.33	32.27	0.26	67.47

*From Nassif and Shapiro (manuscript submitted for publication)

MSA-only start

Three participants had an MSA-only start prior to their simultaneous MSA-CA training—Karen, Carl, and Maya—ranging from one to three years. Of the three participants, Karen and Carl had study abroad experiences that raised their awareness of the limitations of their MSA-only training and enhanced their metasociolinguistic awareness of MSA-CA use. Maya, on the other hand, seemed to have developed a unique trajectory in which she developed a preference for CA with no study abroad experience.

Karen

Karen started her Arabic learning journey with three years of grammar-focused MSA with no "real-life Arabic," referring to CA. She then studied MSA-CA concurrently for three years. Despite the two types of training being equal in length, Karen showed a general preference for MSA over CA. MSA constituted 47.28% and 49.3% of her semi-spontaneous and planned oral productions, respectively. Her written production contained 0.78% CA only. However, Karen was aware of the relationship between context and code choice, an awareness that seemed to have developed during her study abroad experience. While studying Arabic in Jordan for four months, Karen learned that mixing CA and MSA in speech was acceptable and that some linguistic choices were more appropriate in everyday contexts. She commented on her choice of *bass* instead of *wa lākin* "but" in her speech:

(1)   I know I always use *bass* (but) instead of *wa lākin* (but). *Wa lākin* sounds so antiquated to me. When I was in Jordan I—because I heard it all the time … because when I first got there all I knew was *fuṣḥā*, so if I would talk to Jordanians, I got the impression that it sounded weird to them. I would say *wa lākin* or *adhhab* (I go) it's like *brūḥ* (I go), even though I still say *adhhab* here [at the summer institute]. And I say *bass* because I hate saying *wa lākin*.

Like educated users of Arabic, Karen may vary her code choice or switch between MSA and CA depending on the production context. Despite her preference for MSA, she would use CA in writing if "it's like a quick note maybe or if [she's] texting someone." In her planned oral production, she sometimes switched to CA, and her codeswitching was systematic, as shown in (2).

(2)   *Kāna*[4] *baḥathtu* 'an *ḥuqūq al-nisā'* bi-shakl ʿām wa [5]fī as-saʿūdiyya[6] wa [7]fī *al*-maghreb **shwayy**. *Wa aradtu an a'rif* **kīf** *as-siyāsāt al-ijtimāʿīyah jadīdah* taḥt *niDHaam* bin Salman, **kīf** *tu'aththir* fī *ḥuqūq an-nisā'*.
       I did research on *women's rights* in general and in Saudi Arabia and in Morocco **a little**. And *I wanted to know* **how** *new social policies* under the regime of bin Salman **how** *they affect women's rights.*
       [Italics = *MSA*, Boldface = **CA**, Regular = shared between MSA and CA.]

In excerpt (2), Karen presents the focal points of her presentation, such as verbs and central concepts (e.g., "women's rights"), in MSA. She used CA for hedging ("a

little") or to connect ideas through subordinating pronouns ("**how** *they affect women's rights*").

Carl

Like Karen, Carl's learning history with an MSA start seemed to have associated with his current MSA-CA use. MSA was more predominant in his productions compared to CA, with the latter accounting for 11.97% and 3.91% of his semi-spontaneous and planned speech, respectively, and dropping to 0% in his written production.

However, the length of his subsequent simultaneous MSA-CA training (three years) compared to one year of MSA only seemed to have increased the use of CA in his speech compared to that of Karen's (Table 3), reporting that his increased MSA use in the semi-spontaneous speech was due to feeling a "more *fuṣḥā* mode" during the interview than he usually does in speech. As was shown in Karen's production, Carl displayed a consistent use of specific MSA features in his planned speech (e.g., verbs, negation, demonstratives, most connectors). However, unlike Karen, he used these same features in both MSA and CA in his semi-spontaneous speech (Appendix B).

Also similar to Karen, Carl shared his experience using MSA only during his study abroad in Jordan. He noted:

(3)   I didn't hear it [CA] until I went to Jordan. And I went to Jordan, and nobody understood[8],

and they were all looking at us real funny, and that was the first time where I was like "wait,

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[8] Here, Carl was referring to himself and his colleague speaking in *fuṣḥā*.

I don't speak the same language that they do. So I think it was helpful to start in that way, but at the same time, as far as the speaking goes, it's not very practical to start in that way... Some people would be able to communicate in *fuṣḥā*, but the students at the university, most of them weren't really wanting to communicate in that way with us.

As a result, Carl's metasociolinguistic awareness of when it is more appropriate to use MSA or CA was enhanced. "If I'm in a context with someone who might not understand *fuṣḥā*, then I can actively try not to use it," he remarked. He noted that during his subsequent travels in Morocco:

(4) I was more aware there of what I was using when I was with cab drivers and stuff like that. I would try to use more of the Levantine stuff because they would be like, "Oh, you sound like a soap opera!"

On the other hand, Carl noted, "Rarely do I write an *ʿāmmīyah* word in written productions," displaying awareness of the more predominant use of MSA in formal writing.

Interestingly, Carl explained that having experience in the MENA region would impact a student's ability to express themselves in CA but was surprised by its competent use by some of his classmates who had never traveled to the region before. He said:

(5) I mean, I'm amazed that some of the students who have never traveled in the region are able to use dialect pretty well. Because otherwise, if I had never gone to Jordan, I think I would just use *fuṣḥā* most of the time.

Carl's remark applies to the next participant, Maya, who displayed a codeswitching pattern different from that of her classmates with an MSA-only start.

Maya

Of the three participants with an MSA-only start, Maya showed preference for and more frequent use of CA in her spoken productions. Maya had studied MSA for one year before being introduced to CA. Maya's initial training in MSA instruction does not align with her code choice in oral production. The percentage of MSA was 23% in her semi-spontaneous production and 18% in her planned production. Her writing, however, included 0.49% CA content.

Despite the MSA-only training in her first year of Arabic learning, Maya's subsequent classroom experiences seemed to have an influence. She reported some discomfort using MSA in everyday communication and general discussions.

(6)   It feels more foreign, *fuṣḥā*, when I am speaking. When reading, actually, it's not
         hard at all. But speaking—it's hard for me to speak in *fuṣḥā*.

Maya was aware of the role task plays in determining code choice. Despite her general preference for CA, she would use MSA when more appropriate for the topic.

(7)   [I]n class I'm very conscious. Like, if the topic is fitting for *fuṣḥā*, I try to speak in
         fuṣḥā, but I always tend to go halfway into speaking, end up in *'āmmīyah*. But I try
         to speak in *fuṣḥā* if the topic suits it.

Maya's reflections indicate an emerging understanding of educated spoken Arabic. Commenting on an interview she watched between an Iraqi guest and an

Egyptian interviewer, she said that they spoke in what was "like a lighter version of *fuṣḥā*," where they dropped case endings and used a colloquial pronunciation (e.g., the Iraqi guest using /g/ instead of /q/ for the letter *qāf*). This awareness is reflected in her production as illustrated in excerpt (8) from her semi-spontaneous production, where she discussed the role of university education in an individual's life:

(8) **Kamān fī ktīr** furaṣ li **al-masalan** li *al-ḥuṣūl* 'alā **waṣṭah**, *ḥuṣūl* 'alā *aṣdiqā*' wa, wa ta'līm 'an *nafsahu* wa, wa **ēh**.

Also, **there are many** opportunities, **for example**, for *getting* **connections**, getting *friends*, and learning about *oneself*, and **yeah**.

In this excerpt, Maya codeswitched between MSA and CA beyond the word level. She presented whole phrases in either code: "There are many" in CA and "obtaining [=making] friends" in MSA, which includes the verbal noun, or *maṣdar*.

MSA-CA start

Mark

Mark received multidialectal training from day one. However, the percentage of CA in his oral production was the lowest among the six participants—5% and 2% in semi-spontaneous and planned production, respectively. His writing had no CA. To make a word choice, he would use the words that "tend to come" to his mind, which were generally MSA words. The only recurrent CA word in either production was *aywa* (yeah), which he used strategically to pause and have more time to formulate the next idea.

Mark's conscious preference, rather than initial training, seems to influence his code choice. He identified with the formality of MSA and believed that using the formal code better serves his career goals. Mark drew a connection between CA and group identity and believed that by speaking CA, he would not be fooling native speakers.

(9)   I just figured for who I am, six-foot tall, white skin guy with blue eyes, you know, I'm not going to be faking anybody with my amazing *ʿāmmīyah*.

By using MSA in his speech, Mark distinguished and maintained an outsider identity, simultaneously acknowledging that CA is the default choice for L1 users. However, his consistent use of MSA does not mean he was unaware of the MSA and CA continuum. For example, he noted that some Arabic news outlets used "more *fuṣḥā* than others," while other outlets incorporated more "casual" speech. He noted that Aljazeera adheres to a "classic" MSA approach (i.e., one which retains classical features, such as case endings, which educated diglossic speakers may typically drop when speaking in MSA). He contrasted this with BBC Arabic, which he believed has a Western influence on MSA: "whatever style they [BBC] have, it's a lot simpler language compared to Aljazeera."

Jacob

At the time of data collection, Jacob had been learning Arabic for three years. He was the only participant who started his formal Arabic learning in an Arabic-speaking

country, having studied MSA and CA in Lebanon for two years followed by one year in the program of focus.

Similar to Anna, Jacob's use of CA in semi-spontaneous production seems to be guided by his initial training. Jacob and Maya had the highest percentages of CA use in their semi-spontaneous productions (36.86 and 37.43%, respectively). While Maya's use of CA remained high in her planned production (33.08%), Jacob's CA use dropped (13.24%). Jacob spoke in MSA for the majority of his planned production, shifting to CA when expressing personal opinions and experiences (Appendix B).

Jacob's decision to speak more often in CA in the semi-spontaneous production reflects his awareness of his interlocutor and the social context. He noted that the researcher just greeting him in CA prompted him to speak more in this variety. He remarked:

(10)   I think when we first spoke, you said something to me in *āmmīyah*, and that's what I knew. If you would have said *marḥabā, as-salāmu 'alaykum* "hello, peace be upon you" in the first probably two sentences, I said, "Okay, this is going to be in *āmmīyah*. And I do sometimes use *fuṣḥā* when I speak, but I conjugate it like *āmmīyah*. I can speak *fuṣḥā*, but I really prefer not to. If I'm really hunting for a word and I know it in *fuṣḥā*, I'll say it. I'm not sure if that's good or bad. I know a lot of people don't do it.

Jacob did not use any CA in his written production. However, like Karen, he made a distinction between a more formal form of writing, as was the case with his

course assignment (an essay on the role of university in the life of the community), and a more personal form of writing. He said:

(10)   [w]hen I'm writing my daily, my yawmīyah (daily journal), I write in 'āmmīyah. When I write, the only time I use my 'āmmīyah in my wājib (homework) is—I'll use 'ashān (because), or things like that.

CA-only start

Anna

Of the six participants, Anna was the only participant with a three-year learning experience of Arabic in high school, where she received CA-only training in Egyptian Arabic in the first two years. She was also the only participant with exposure to Levantine, Egyptian, and Moroccan Arabic in her subsequent MSA-CA training at the program of focus.

Anna's CA-only training in the first-year of her Arabic learning seems to have associated with her code preference. In her interview, she said she would prefer having more CA in her classes to communicate with Arabic speakers. She remarked, "I'm a big fan of trying to replicate the actual ways that it [Arabic] is spoken." Anna's preference for CA is based on her awareness of the suitability of code to context.

The frequency of CA in Anna's semi-spontaneous productions aligned with her preference, similar to Maya and Jacob (the other two participants with a preference for CA). Anna had comparable MSA-CA percentages in her semi-spontaneous speech (18.22 and 21.7%, respectively). However, she had a higher MSA percentage in her

planned oral production, which suggests potential influence of task (summarizing MSA news articles) on code use. The percentage of CA was .28 in her written production. Anna characterized her MSA-CA use and codeswitching as dependent on her learning experiences, noting:

(11)   [I]t's solely because of how, which one I learned first, and which one pops into my head first. It's very much not intentional or conscious. And when I'm writing, it's just easier to be conscious. And I am conscious about staying in *fuṣḥā* if I'm writing something formal.

This preference was evident in Anna's codeswitching as it was not restricted to specific linguistic categories (as was the case with Karen and Mark); rather, the codeswitching seems to be spontaneous and fluid (Appendix B).

Discussion

The current study focused on the questions of whether the type of foundational training in the first year of L2 Arabic instruction associated with the frequency of MSA and CA use among advanced learners of Arabic across oral and written productions, and with their preferences for code use. The findings show a clearer association between the type of foundational training and MSA-CA use for three participants (Karen, Jacob, Anna) than the others (Carl, Maya, Mark). However, learners' personal preferences seem to be the key factor. The type of task, topic, and interpersonal cues also played a role in how the participants used MSA-CA. These findings provide

evidence of the participants' rich, multifaceted sociolinguistic competence and agency, enabling them to navigate tasks and contexts.

Overall, the findings suggest that first-year training plays a role in learners' MSA-CA use. Of the three participants with an MSA-only start, Karen and Carl showed a predominance of MSA use in their three productions. Anna who was the only participant with CA-only initial training, had the third-highest percentage of CA in semi-spontaneous production. She believed that her MSA-CA use aligned with her training (excerpt 11).

The participants' high level of metasociolinguistic awareness aligns with well-documented findings of studies showing a connection between explicit classroom sociolinguistic instruction and learners' developing sociolinguistic competence (see, e.g., (French & Beaulieu, 2016, 2020; Nassif, 2021; van Compernolle, 2019; van Compernolle & Williams, 2012, 2013; Yates, 2017). It also aligns with patterns reported in the speech of educated L1 Arabic speakers, associating MSA with abstractness and formality and CA with concreteness and informality (see Albirini's 2011 model of the sociolinguistic functions of codeswitching between MSA and CA among L1 Arabic speakers; also see Alaiyed, 2018; Albirini, 2016; Bassiouney, 2012, 2013, 2020; Soliman, 2008).

One factor that contributed to the participants' awareness of the importance of CA use is study abroad experiences. In our data sample, three participants had study abroad experiences, two of whom went with no prior training in CA (Karen and Carl).

Karen and Carl's reflections illustrate their increased awareness of CA use and the MSA-CA codeswitching across different contexts of use. Jacob, who started his Arabic learning journey in a study abroad experience (two years), seemed to be more attuned to the level of formality during the interview. The interviewer's one-word CA greeting (*marḥaba*) at the start of the data collection session cued him to assume an informal tone during the session and to respond to the semi-spontaneous prompt with more frequent CA. This sociolinguistic awareness associated with study abroad experience corroborates findings from studies reporting a positive influence of study abroad experiences in raising learners' awareness of the significance of learning CA prior to traveling abroad (see, e.g., Shiri, 2013) and in the development of sociolinguistic competence in Arabic (Shiri, 2013, 2015b; Trentman, 2017) and in other languages (Kennedy Terry, 2022; Li, 2014; Regan *et al.*, 2009).

The absence of a study abroad experience, however, did not prohibit the development of learners' sociolinguistic awareness of MSA-CA use. This is evident in how Maya, Mark, and Anna, the three participants with no study abroad experiences, still showed a developing sociolinguistic awareness to the degree of making conscious decisions about code choice. This shows that successful multidialectal training can provide learners with the tools to develop sociolinguistic awareness and to make informed decisions about code choice (e.g., Nassif, 2018, 2021; Nassif & Al Masaeed, 2020).

Task expectations also associated with code choice. Considering all the experiences and personal preferences discussed, all the participants adhered to overall task expectations. When the formality of speech context increased, moving from semi-spontaneous (stating opinions about the role of university in the life of the individual and society) to planned productions (reporting on three news articles), so did the frequency of MSA use in participants' speech production (see Table 3). Interestingly, the percentage of CA use in the written productions did not exceed 1% for any of the participants and was even 0% for three participants, Mark, Carl, and Jacob, the third of whom had the second-highest percentage of CA in the semi-spontaneous oral production and reported a personal preference for CA. However, the participants were conscious of the more nuanced aspects of MSA use in written production. This is shown in the reflective data from the participants, who noted writing in CA in more personal forms of writing, such as text messages (Karen) or a daily journal (Jacob), as shown in studies of L1 Arabic speakers' codeswitching on social media or computer-mediated communication (see, e.g., Al Alaslaa, 2018; Al Alaslaa & Alhawary, 2020; Ramsay, 2013).

Importantly, personal preference seems to be the factor that determines the frequency of MSA-CA use in speech production. For example, while Maya received the same duration of MSA-only training initially as Carl (one year), she had the highest percentage of CA use in speech in the entire data sample, noting in her metasociolinguistic reflections an explicit preference for CA use in speech. Mark, who

had an MSA-CA initial start, had the lowest percentage of CA use in the two oral productions and expressed an explicit preference for MSA. As discussed, Mark asserted himself as a non-L1 speaker by maintaining an MSA-based identity that separates him from the in-group of CA L1 speakers. Anna also expressed a preference for CA. However, in her case, her preference aligned with the CA-only initial training, noting a desire to hear more CA from her instructors. Learners' code choices as informed by personal preferences represent a sense of agency over how they draw on the linguistic repertoire available as a tool for communication. We could argue that this agency is akin to educated L1 Arabic speakers' agency as they draw on their linguistic repertoire in making code choice decisions.

Conclusion and pedagogical implications

This study focused on the relationship between the first-year of L2 Arabic training and code preferences and patterns of MSA and CA use in speech (semi-spontaneous and planned production) and written production by advanced learners. The findings suggest that the first year of L2 Arabic instruction plays some role in participants' MSA-CA use. Successful multidialectal training, even in the absence of study abroad experiences, enhanced learners' sociolinguistic awareness of the appropriate code choice across contexts of use. However, learners' personal preferences were the main factor guiding participants' informed code choice decisions, providing evidence for a growing sense of agency and evolving L2 identities.

These findings have important pedagogical implications for the L2 Arabic classroom. First, Arabic instructors need to adopt a holistic view of the L2 Arabic learning experience; it should not be assessed on performance at one point in time in the learners' learning trajectory. Rather, it should be viewed as a multi-year process during which learners need to have the space and support to develop sociolinguistic competence and awareness and to exercise agency. Therefore, explicit instruction, classroom discussions, and continual guidance need to be provided over years of Arabic instruction as to the contextually appropriate use of Arabic and how MSA and CA are simultaneously used by Arabic speakers. Exposure to input from L1 Arabic speakers in a variety of social contexts in which learners observe and analyze how Arabic is authentically used and how speakers convey specific messages through specific code choices is key. Instructors could use awareness-raising activities that involve explicitly analyzing Arabic use in different social contexts and in light of specific social variables. In the process, instructors should make space in the classroom for the learners to reflect on their observations of Arabic use, express their take on code choices, and develop agency as informed by their preferences and linguistic needs.

Instructors should also build on shared MSA-CA features to emphasize the large shared core among varieties and reduce the cognitive load for learners (See Younes, 2015 for specific examples). They also need to tolerate some mixing errors, especially in earlier stages of Arabic learning, while providing judicious feedback just

as they do with other types of errors as learners continue to develop their sociolinguistic competence.

Developing sociolinguistic competence is one of the most subtle aspects of L2 acquisition. It can be a complex process. However, its complexity does not mean delaying key aspects of language learning such as language variation and multidialectal Arabic use. Rather, a more authentic representation of how Arabic is actually used by its speakers is needed. The earlier we present this reality to our learners, the more we enhance their learning experiences and provide them with the time needed to develop sociolinguistic competence. We need to trust the learners as they navigate a rich sociolinguistic environment and develop an understanding of the nuances of linguistic variation.

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Appendix A

Prompt for Semi-spontaneous Oral Production task

What is the role of university in the life of the individual and the society? Does it just educate? What

opportunities does it give? How does it help a person grow? How does it affect the life of a community?

How does it affect the town or city where it is located?

Appendix B

Sample semi-spontaneous and planned oral productions

<u>فصحى</u>

عامية

كلمات/تراكيب مشتركة بين الفصحى والعامية

1.1. Anna (semi-spontaneous production)

وَاَلمَدينَة جزء مِن **هيك عشان** اَلمَدينَة **كمان عِندها** ناس مِن **كُتير** أَماكِن وكُتير ثَقافات. مَسلاً في عِندَنا مجتَمَع مِن لاجئين مِن العالم العربي. وأُمارِس لُغَتي معَهُم وَمُمكِن عِندي أَكثَر فُرَص لِأَتعَلَّم **عَشان** أنا في مَدينَة عَظيمَة. أَيوَة. نَعَم. أنا نَشَّيت **هون**. أَيوَة.

[9]And <u>the city</u> is a part of **that as** it **also has** people from **many** places and **many** <u>cultures</u>. **For example**, <u>we have</u> a community of refugees from the Arab world. I <u>practice my language with them,</u> and I possibly <u>have more</u> opportunities <u>to learn</u> **because** I'm in a <u>great</u> city. **Yes**, yes, I was raised[10] **here**. **Yes**.

1.2. Anna (planned production)

<u>اِخترتُ</u> لمشروعَ <u>قِراءَة</u> الأَخبار مُجتَمَعْ الميم في مصر **عشان** عِندي أهتَمّ بِمُفردات *الهوايات[11] في مُجتَمع الميم **عشان** دائماً تَتَغيَّر باللغَة الإنجليزِيَّة، فأَكيد **حتتغيَّر بالعربيَّة كمان**. فَمَسلاً أُستاذي الأَوَّل في **العَرَبي** هُوَ أَحَبّ الرِّجال بالإضافَة لِلنساء، و**هُوَ آللنا إنَّ ما في** أي كِلمَة **لِهالمُجتَمَع بالعربيَّة**، **فبس** اِستخدَمُوا اَلكَلِمَة الإنجليزِيَّة. **بس** بعد فَترَة صَغيرَة وَجَدَت اَلكلمة "مزدوجي الجنس" أَو **كمان** "<u>ثنائي</u> الجنس" **لِ**هالمجتمع.

For the <u>reading</u> project, <u>I chose</u> the LGBT community in Egypt **because** <u>I am interested</u> in the vocabulary of *hobbies[12] in the LGBT community **because** in <u>English</u>, it always <u>changes</u> and so it **will** certainly **change** in <u>Arabic</u> as well. **For example**, my first <u>teacher</u> in **Arabic** <u>liked men as well as women</u>, and **he told us** that **there was no** word **for this** community in <u>Arabic</u>, and **so** they **just** used <u>the English word</u>. **However**, <u>shortly</u> thereafter, <u>I found the word "bi</u>sexual" or also "<u>bi</u>sexual"[13] **for this** community.

2.1. Carl (semi-spontaneous production)

لَمَّا أنا **قَريت** هذا الـprompt أنا فِكَّرت عَن تَجرِبَتي في جامِعَة X في X. مُنذُ سَنَة أنا دَرَسَت في جامِعَة X ولَكِن أَبل **هيك** أنا في جامِعَةْ X شَمال مِن **هون**. وَجامِعَة X جامِعَة مَسيحيَة وَحَتَى مُمكِن تَغَيَّرَث اَلعَلاقات بَين اَلجامِعَة واَلمَدينَة X وَاَلعَلاقات بَين الجامِعَة واَلطُلاب. في الجامِعَة اَلدَرَسَة مُهِمَّة وَلَكِن أَيضاً مُهِمَّة... **مِش بَس** دينِيَّة[14] **بَس أيضاً** *الرِّياح والروح في الطُلَاب والعمل في المجتمع.

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[9] Translations are more literal to reflect the linguistic structures used by the participants.

[10] *Nashait* "نَشَّيت" seems to be a mixed word. Anna uses MSA voweling in the pronunciation of the first two letters. Then, she shifts hamza to ī at the end of the stem verb, a change made in the *āmmīyah* variant of the first person, past tense verb form when a verb has hamza in its last root letter.

[11] Linguistic errors are marked with an asterisk (*).

[12] Here, Anna seems to have meant "identities."

[13] Anna here uses two expressions in Arabic, both of which are translated to English as "bisexual".

[14] It is likely that Carl meant "from a religious standpoint" here.

When I **read** this prompt, I thought of my experience at University X[15] in X. A year ago, I studied at university but **prior to that** I am at University X north of **here**. University X is a Christian university and it is even possible that the relations between the University and City X have changed, and the relations between the university and the students. At university, studying is important but also important is…**not just** religious **but** also the *wind[16] and the spirit in the students and the work in society.

2.2. Carl (planned production)

اِمرَأَة مُسلِمَة مِنْ الحُكومَة اللُّبنانِيَّة زارَت وشَرَكَتَها في طقوس مَسيحية. وهذا الحَدَث أَثَّرَت العواطف عَلى التَّواصِل الإجتماعِيَّة، *اِجتَمعي لِأَنَّ الكاهِن وَضَعَ **الكاس** على **راسا**. ولكِنْها كانَتْ شجاعَة ودافَعَت عَن تَجرِبَتها في الكَنيسَة، كَحَدَث لِلوَحيد* بين المسيحيين والمسلمون في بلد لبنان الذي مقسوم على حُكومَة طائِفِيَّة.

A Muslim woman from the Lebanese government visited and shared it*[17] in Christian rituals. This event stirred emotions on social media, *social because the priest put **the cup on her head**. However, she was brave and defended her church experience as an event for *only[18] between Christians and Muslims in the country of Lebanon, which is divided along the lines of a sectarian government.

3.1. Jacob (semi-spontaneous production)

مَثَلاً، في رَأيي دَورِ الجامِعَة في حَياة أفراد كُتير مُهِمّ، مَثلاً، بالنِسبَة لِي حَياتي تَغَيَّرَت كُتير بِسبب تعليمي. مَثلاً بَلَّشِت في جامِعَة X في ولايَةْ X ودَرَسِت عِلم إِجتِماعي. وبَعد سِنِة لاحَظِت هذا مِش...هذا مُهِمّ بَس مِش ...لاحَظِت بَدّي إدرُس تاريخ وحَكيت مَع أُستازِتي وهِيّ قالَت "وأيّ تاريخ؟ شو بَدَّك بتِدْرُس؟" وقَالَت ممكِن تاريخ يابان. وفَعَشان هيك أَخَدِت كَتير صُفوف عن تاريخ يابان. بَعدين كان في حَرب بين إسرائيل وفلسطين في ألفين ووتَلاثتَعش؟ بَعتَقِد نْسيت العام، بَس بَعد هيك كان بَدّي إتْعَلَّم أَكتَر مَعلومات عن الشَّرق الأوسَط.

For example, in my opinion, the role of university in the life of individuals is **very** important. For instance, for me, my life has changed **a lot** because of my education. For example, I **started** at University X in state X and **studied** sociology. A **year** later, **I noticed** that **isn't**…That's important **but not**…I **noticed I wanted to study** history and **I spoke** with **my teacher** and **she** said, "any history? **What do you want to study**?" She said, possibly the history of Japan. **Therefore, I took a lot of** classes about the history of Japan. **Then**, there was **a war between** Israel and Palestine in 20**13**? **I think I forgot** the year, **but afterwards**, **I wanted to learn more** information about the Middle East.

3.2. Jacob (planned production)

لِأَنو أنا كاتِب رسالتي دَكتورَة على الحَرَكات الإسلامِيَّة العراقِيَّة الشّيعِيَّة، قَرَّرت أُركِز على مَعلومات فيني أَستَعمِل فيها. ورَكَّزت على ذِكرَيات محمد باقر الصدر. محمد باقر الصدر كان *فَلَسفَة شيعَة إسلامَة شَهيرَة من العراق. وكان يُقتَل على يد صدام في عام ألف وتِسعميَّة ووتِسعة ووسَبعين.

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[15] Identifying information are deleted in the data.
[16] Here, Carl might have meant "atmosphere".
[17] It is unclear what Carl was referring to by "it" here.
[18] Carl here seems to have meant "unity".

والصدر أَلَّفَ كُتُب مِثل اِقتِصادُنا ووَفَلسَفَتُنا، وإستجابَت كُتبو لِماركسيّة، وكان يَعتَقِد أَنْ اَلدِّين هُوَ الحَلّ لِمشاكِل العراق خِلال تِسعينات وسَبعينات. ومحمد باقر الصدر ما زال يُعتَبَر مُؤَلَّفاً بارزاً في العالَم الشيعَة، وأفكارو الثَّلارَة أَثَّرَت على الدُّستور إيرانيّة بَعد الثَّورَة.

Because I'm writing my dissertation on Shiite Islamic, <u>Iraqi</u> movements, <u>I decided to focus</u> on information that **I can** <u>use</u> it*. **I focused** on <u>the biography of</u> Mohammad Baqer Al-Sadr. Mohammad Baqer Al-Sadr was a <u>famous</u> Shiite, Iraqi *philosophy, and he <u>was killed</u> at the hands of Saddam in the year of 1999. Al-Sadr wrote <u>books such as "*Our Economy*" and "*Our Philosophy*,</u>" and **his books** <u>corresponded</u> to Marxism. He <u>believed that</u> religion <u>was</u> the solution to the problems of Iraq in the 1990s and 1970s. Mohammad Baqer Al-Sadr <u>is still considered a prominent author</u> in the Shiite world, and his …[19] **ideology** <u>influenced</u> the Iranian constitution after <u>the revolution</u>.

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[19] Unclear word

ومحمد باقر الصدر ما زال يُعتَبَر مُؤَلَّفاً بارزاً في العالَم الشيعَة، وأفكارو الثَّلارَة أَثَّرَت على الدُّستور إيرانيّة بَعد الثَّورَة.