



Title	Observations on Arabic Language Teaching and Learning in the United States : Issues, Challenges, and Ways Forward
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Citation	アラブ・イスラム研究. 2013, 11, p. 13-26
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/105949
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Observations on Arabic Language Teaching and Learning in the United States: Issues, Challenges, and Ways Forward*

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Part I: Historical Stages of Arabic Teaching in the U.S. and their Associated Goals and Methods

1. Classical Orientalism, Biblical Studies, and Comparative Semitic Linguistics.

The oldest established programs for Arabic language study in the U.S. were closely associated with Biblical Studies and, to some extent, classical studies and, though the first half of the 20th century, at least, were quite dependent upon British and German Orientalism. Arabic was studied as part of the field of Comparative Semitics, and that field, too, was often largely geared toward the study of the Hebrew (and Aramaic) Bible or Old Testament and toward early Eastern Christian materials in Syriac. It is also worth noting the dependence of the American curriculum on European and British scholarship. In terms of goals and methods, two aspects are of particular note: 1) that the materials were almost entirely old texts that we might term “Classical” or even “Ancient” and the goal of language study was textual: to translate the texts based on a sound command of the syntax, morphology and lexicon. 2) At this period virtually all academics in the fields of the humanities had a thorough grounding in classical Greek and Latin, including a mastery of grammar—including grammatical concepts and terminology. As a result we see, for example in the British Orientalist W. Wright’s *Grammar* (translated from Caspari’s German Grammar of Arabic) that Arabic grammar is presented in the academic lingua franca of Latin terminology and with comparative examples from Semitic languages ranging from Hebrew, Syriac through Ethiopic, etc. Although there might be translation exercises, performed with a goal to inculcating the rules of syntax and morphology, the pedagogical methods neither employed nor aimed at any “active” or “interactive” use of the language, outside of translation and reading for research purposes. We should note that for those brought up since elementary school on the memorization of the verbal and nominal paradigms of classical Greek and Latin, the mastery and memorization of Arabic verbal and nominal paradigms was neither an alien nor a difficult task. Among the notable, indeed monumental, accomplishments of British Orientalism in this regard are E. W. Lane’s

* This lecture was presented at the Kansai Arab Studies Association, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan, on October 22, 2011. I would like to thank my colleagues there, especially the director of the Kansai Arabic Studies Association, Professor Osamu Ikeda, and Professor Akiko Motoyoshi Sumi of Kyoto Notre Dame University, for their warm reception and collegiality, and for the opportunity to share and exchange ideas and experiences in the teaching of Arabic language.

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Arabic-English Lexicon, which incorporates several of the classical Arabic lexica, and James Lyall's edition and translation of the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* (1918), to which may be added their fellow countryman and Orientalist A. J. Arberry's translations of the Qur'ān (1955) and the *Mu'allaqāt* (1957). J. G. Hava's *Arabic-English Dictionary*, originally compiled as an Arabic-French dictionary, was published by the Catholic Press in Beirut, 1915. One could add an aside here for what we might term "missionary Arabic"—for example, E. E. Elder's *Arabic Grammar* (American University in Cairo, 1937)—a quite practical grammar of classical Arabic that introduces new Testament and Christian texts and terms that would not be found in the classical Arabic grammars whose authoritative examples are drawn from such Islamic sources as the Qur'an, the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet), and early classical Arabic poetry. This field, including the translation of the Bible, Christian hymns, etc. into Arabic is a large one which should be subsumed within the field of (post-)colonial studies.

This school of Oriental studies succeeded in its goal of instructing students in the correct reading and translation of mostly classical Arabic texts. The major accomplishments of German and British scholarship in lexicography, grammar, text edition and translation formed the foundation for the American school. Of note in this regard is the 40-volume translation of *The History of al-Tabari* (1985-2007). It should be noted too, that many German and British Orientalists taught or spend part of their academic career, in the United States, notably, Hamilton Gibb, Gustav von Grunebaum and Franz Rosenthal.

2. Post World War II/Cold War Arabic

A major sociological and educational development occurred in the U.S. almost immediately following WWII. This was the GI Bill—a government program that provided college tuition to World War II veterans. Not only was this accompanied by a huge increase in the percentage of Americans attending college, but it also changed the class structure and, in turn, the curriculum. Prior to World War II, in the humanities, extensive emphasis and prestige was placed on the study of classical Latin and, ideally, Greek, in secondary school—often exclusive private schools. Although this trend was already weakening, after WWII and the GI Bill, and with it the introduction of standardized testing, such as the SAT for college admission, as opposed to elite class-based schools and connections, became increasingly the basis for entering elite colleges and universities. This, coupled with the Cold War, the Arms Race and Sputnik, also led a trend away from the traditional humanities as the “elite” academic field, to more practical or applicable fields of study. In terms of Arabic language study, this meant that, while the old “Orientalist” approach was not abandoned, especially in the old established Near Eastern Language and Civilization departments devoted to the study of the Ancient Near East, there appeared alongside them new Middle East Studies departments and programs, devoted as well to the study of the contemporary Middle East and the social sciences. Key to the changes that occurred in Arabic language instructions was the idea that the contemporary Arabic language was a “critical” language in which expertise was needed on the diplomatic, economic, political and eventually military fronts. This type of Arabic was often linked not so much to literature as to linguistics, which was seen as the field that could scientifically establish effective methods of language instruction. This required a curriculum and materials for the

new generation of students who had, generally speaking, no background in classical Greek and Latin, and, furthermore, were interested in the contemporary living language. The aim became to provide students with a full set of language skills—reading, writing, speaking and aural comprehension, all based on contemporary materials—newspapers, novels, etc. In brief, the target language shifted from Classical Literary Arabic to Modern Standard Arabic.

It was at this juncture that the University of Michigan Arabic language textbook series by Peter Abboud and others, *Elementary modern standard Arabic* (1968) and *Modern standard Arabic: intermediate level* (1971) (known as EMSA and IMSA or simply “the Michigan books”) appeared. Grammatical explanations were fully in English and more practical than conceptual or comparative. This was the age of the Language Laboratory—where audio-taped texts and exercises such as those in the EMSA and IMSA series were available to students. My impression is that these were never very successfully integrated into the curriculum. Enrolments were not very large, and the textbook materials not especially enticing or successful in achieving their declared goals. Part of the reason for the lack of practical success, to my mind, was that the extensive information technology that we now take for granted—up-to-date videos (Youtube), satellite television reception from the Arabic world, along with their Internet sites (Aljazeera, BBC Arabic, for example) did not yet exist and study abroad programs were few and costly. Listening to out-of-date recordings of no-longer-current events, for example, was not engaging to students, nor did it lead to further language-based opportunities.

This period also saw the beginnings of study abroad language programs in Arabic, the premier one being the Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) program at the American University in Cairo, which was originally exclusively academic (as opposed to training diplomats, government operatives or businessmen). Through an intensive full-year immersion program, the CASA program was for many years one of the rare programs that allowed students to truly gain an active command of the four language skills, and, additionally, gave students in-depth training in Egyptian colloquial Arabic. This period was one of considerable frustration, I think, as Arabic programs struggled to achieve mastery of the four skills in Modern Standard Arabic and tried to introduce, normally one-semester courses in colloquial Arabic—largely Egyptian or Levantine, but found many students dropping out in frustration, and often inadequate enrolments to support significant numbers of students, or even classes, above the 2nd or perhaps 3rd year. The “Michigan Books” EMSA and IMSA were the most widely used textbooks. Their strong point, in my opinion, was that they rather thoroughly introduced syntax and morphology. A major drawback was that they employed artificially composed texts that contained nothing in terms of structures or vocabulary items that the student had not previously been introduced to. A diligent student could feel that he had achieved total mastery of Arabic, only to find himself at a total loss if faced with even a simple newspaper article, and even moreso the colloquial dialects of Arabic that most Arabs speak in everyday situations. The texts, especially in the first 1 ½ year curriculum of EMSA were dreadfully boring and the exercises largely mechanical. The result was little active command of the language—very limited oral-aural or written ability, but with stronger results in accuracy of reading, use of dictionary and accuracy of translation. Despite the hope or claim to develop the four language skills, in

practice classes were taught largely in English and largely in a mechanical rather than interactive manner. Nevertheless, it must be said that the first two years of the EMSA and IMSA did provide students with a solid grounding for moving forward either in the direction of classical Arabic or MSA, and for moving into Arabic dialects.

By the 1980s or 1990s, it was becoming clear that a more active and interactive approach was needed. In my experience, this is quite correct, but, again, the execution fell short. The new move toward “proficiency,” “the communicative approach,” and “student-based” classroom abandoned one extreme (grammar- and text-based classes taught in English) for another that proposed teaching entirely in Arabic—with no mastery of syntax and morphology, no translation, and minimal correction of student errors. Reading emphasized skimming texts for basic ideas—certainly a needed skill, much emphasis was put on speaking, “task-based” learning, and the interactive classroom. The teacher was encouraged to speak less and leave it to the students, extensive use was made of videos and aural-oral materials. Furthermore, rather than exposing students only to texts or audio materials that have been artificially composed to contain only words and structures to which the students have already or are being introduced, the new approach begins right away with “authentic materials”—i.e., what the student is or will be exposed to in the real world—vocabulary, expressions and structures s/he has never seen or heard before.

The textbooks that came to dominate the field of Arabic language instruction during this period, and until now, were the Brustad, al-Batal and al-Tonsi *Al-Kitāb fī ta'allum al-'Arabiyyah*, parts 1 and 2 (1995-97) and part 3 (2001). One evident benefit was the full incorporation of contemporary technology—particularly C-Ds of videoed dialogues, etc.—into the classroom curriculum. The most obvious positive result was in student retention and interest: students were first of all introduced to speaking about subjects of everyday life, with the result that they could almost immediately feel that they had some competency to speak and understand. Affectively speaking, students felt at home in the language very early on, as opposed to the classical and Michigan approaches which, in my experience, made the students feel always at arm's length from the language—they could perhaps translate a text well, but they could not “communicate”—speak or write. Finally, students trained in “proficiency” do not freeze or panic when confronted with an unknown word, expression or structure, but are taught “strategies” to make at least a good guess from context and proceed.

A point of contention has been the extent to which the Arabic language curriculum and classroom time should be devoted to mastering Arabic grammar (syntax and morphology). This problem is exacerbated because, unlike the old Orientalists days when students most often came to Arabic having mastered Latin, Greek or at least English morphology and syntax, and the grammatical concepts of tense, mood, voice, number, gender, etc. that these involve, the last several decades have witnessed a radical decline in the instruction of English grammar (or any other kind) in the U.S. curriculum. Students know only their own usage and lack any grammatical concepts or terminology. To have to devote hours of precious class time to teaching English grammar as a basis for understanding Arabic grammar is indeed onerous, but I'm not sure there is any escape. In my experience, the non-grammatical teaching approach and the idea that students can be taught comprehension

techniques or strategies for guessing meanings of words and structures reaches a crisis point after the first two years. At that point, students begin to get into serious material only to find that they do not have the ability to accurately express themselves, or to read, write or comprehend, or translate. After the initial exhilaration of feeling “at home” in the language, they hit a brick wall.

In its most extreme form, this approach can require such rigid strictures as: the students should never have to memorize anything; the teacher should never speak for more than three minutes at a time; student errors should not be corrected; no English should ever be used in the classroom; students should teach each other; there should be no translation English to Arabic or Arabic to English; students should read about grammar in the textbook, but it should not be explained in class. The single worst result is that students are often not aware of their own shortcomings and limitations. Taught that whatever they can “extract” from a text through context and reading “strategies” is correct, they are not even aware when they misunderstand something—including entirely misconstruing the meaning of an oral passage or written text. Similarly, in speaking, they are unaware that their error-ridden manner of expression may be amusing and/or offensive to native speakers of Arabic, or may be incomprehensible.

Arabic instruction was veering between these two extremes, and mostly taking a middle course, at the turn of the century. There were successes with both approaches, especially as dedicated advanced students sometimes studied extensively abroad, and as gifted instructors were able, whether using the Michigan series or the *Al-Kitāb* series, to supplement the textbooks as needed. But in general the number of post-secondary institutions offering Arabic language instruction was very limited, and enrolments were generally low. The bulk of students completed merely the two-year foreign language requirement that is common in U.S. colleges and universities. True mastery of Arabic at the level of an educated native speaker was rare, even among professed professionals. It is interesting to find students from *both* the Michigan and *Al-Kitāb* textbook streams complain that their instructor either did not use Arabic enough in class or did not provide adequate English explanations of difficult points in class. This should warn us not to put all the blame for teaching and learning problems on the textbooks!

Let me add that along with MSA as a target language, this period witnessed an increasing interest in colloquial dialects of Arabic, the “diglossia” issue, and the question of how to introduce it into the curriculum. For the most part, the standard curriculum retained MSA, and separate, usually one-semester courses were offered in whatever dialects the Arabic instruction faculty spoke—Egyptian, Levantine, Moroccan, etc. Otherwise, the study of dialects was largely relegated to study-abroad programs, which typically offered courses in the local dialect in addition to a largely MSA curriculum.

3. Post 9/11 Arabic Instruction and Learning

Although 9/11 was certainly a flash-point, it occurred in a context. With the end of the Cold War, at least as it seems to me, the U.S. seemed in need of a new ideological enemy to replace communism, and seems to have chosen the Islamic world—a choice determined or

at least exacerbated by continuing U.S. support for Israeli and a so-called Arab-Israeli “peace process” that was suppurating rather than progressing. A corollary to this was U.S. support of Arab, and Islamic, dictatorships that spiritually and intellectually suffocated the Arab-Islamic populace, and left little avenue for political expression other than the Islamist groups. Repression at the national political level was, rather strangely, compensated for or sublimated into expression—political, aesthetic, social, personal—through the Arab media—Al-Jazeera foremost, but its many followers and imitators as well, not just in their Point-Counterpoint sorts of programs, but, to my mind, in the endless call-in shows that might be on family matters, health, political matters, favorite music idol votes—all of which gave people the sense that they had a voice. From here it was but a short step to the harnessing of the social media and the shared political sentiments of the Arab Spring of 2011. At the same time, Al-Jazeera and other satellite stations, such as al-Arabiyya and BBC Arabic also played a role in establishing a rather high pan-Arab standard of expression in MSA.

On the domestic front in the U.S. another phenomenon had been developing since the 1970s: a new wave of immigration from Islamic countries—Pakistan, but also Iran and the Arab countries. Islam overtook Judaism as the number two religion in the U.S., and particularly the offspring of this new immigrant generation began to enroll in Arabic courses as what are now termed “heritage students.” These are an immensely varied group—they may be Egyptian or Palestinian Americans who speak their family dialect at home, or they may be Pakistani Americans, speaking Urdu at home, but eager to learn the language of the Qur’ān and its cultural heritage.

What happened after 9/11 besides the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq? Interest in the Arab and Islamic world became greater and in some cases hostile. Goals in language training came to be more skills-based, and governmental, political, NGO oriented; and veterans, young men and women, who served in the U.S. armed forces in Iraq began to appear in the Arabic classroom and as Middle East studies majors.

Arabic enrolments soared in existing programs and a huge number of colleges and universities added Arabic language programs. The expanded numbers led as well, for the first time, to 1) substantial enrolments at the upper levels—3rd year and beyond, that allowed programs to fill 3rd year classes and expand their curriculum to 4th year and sometimes beyond. The expanded enrolment also allowed programs to be more selective, if they chose, and still be able to meet their institutions’ minimum enrolment requirements. Further, on the graduate level, it allowed graduate programs to choose or require entering students to have three or more years of Arabic.

It is fair to say that in 2001 the U.S. Arabic language establishment was not prepared, quantitatively or qualitatively, either to absorb the huge increase in student numbers and programs or to achieve the high-level mastery outcomes required for military and governmental matters. While there were some excellent and successful programs, there were others hastily hiring anyone who knew Arabic—Arab graduate students or educated Arab immigrants—to quickly respond to student demand for Arabic courses. The *Al-Kitāb* series is notoriously difficult for the uninitiated instructor to teach, and those who have

successfully taught from it normally have attended training workshops or have developed over time their own tried and tested methods and supplementary materials (i.e., for grammar).

Given the pressure and incentive, there was as well a rapid development of intensive Arabic courses, intensive summer courses (there had for many years been the highly acclaimed and successful Middlebury Intensive summer Arabic program, which now expanded), and study abroad courses—some run by U.S. institutions, many run by Arab state universities and institutes, and many private language institutes. Although there is still considerable unevenness, in my experience the U.S. is currently producing and/or attracting Arabic language instructors of exceptional quality. This includes native speakers, many of whom come from the Arab world as graduate students and stay on as Arabic lecturers and professors, and American non-native speakers who have taken advantage of intensive and rigorous U.S. programs, in addition to long-term language study abroad—junior-year or summer, CASA I & II at the American University in Cairo, Fulbright–Hayes U.S. government funded study abroad grants, etc.

Diglossia and colloquial Arabics: this has been an on-going issue, that is still, to my mind, in search of a solution. A recent trend has been to introduce one or more colloquial dialects into the basic MSA classroom, and the current state is one of frustration: it is hard enough to teach MSA in the class-hours allotted by the usual U.S. course system, let alone introduce a dialect. Further, many fear a confusion of the two (more below).

There has been an increased professionalization, and to some extent, standardization, of Arabic language pedagogy as an academic field, further introducing applied linguistics, socio-linguistics and, increasingly now, cognitive science, into attempts to scientifically determine the most successful pedagogical materials and methods. There has been some attempt to introduce standards and standardized testing through the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) proficiency standards and testing and OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) testing. It should be noted that the *Al-Kitāb* series is most closely in line with these nationwide standards for the teaching of foreign languages that put a premium on “communication” and on “task-based” skills and abilities, as opposed to accuracy of oral and written expression, comprehension, translation, etc.

Part 2: Suggestions for the best ways forward

I would like to devote the second part of this lecture to giving you my perspective on the best ways to consolidate past successes and move forward to more up-to-date and improved methods of Arabic teaching and learning.

Through the process of transition from one extreme, the “dead [classical] language” grammar- and text-based approach, to another extreme, the “task-based” “proficiency” “communicative” approach, we can now see the pitfalls of both, and look for one or more integrative “middle paths.” There appears to be underway a reconsideration of the “no grammar” approach—an approach that was never universally accepted. This entails, or to my mind should entail, a return to the systematic mastery of syntax and morphology—but

in a way that is integrated to a four-skills based active command. In my teaching experience, even for those who really do want only to read (and translate) texts, the key to efficiency and mastery is an active knowledge: careful pronunciation, the ability to translate in both directions, the immediate almost intuitive grasp achieved by developing a high level of aural comprehension, the ability to skim a text to get the gist of it before sorting out its complexities. For those interested in contemporary and social science-related fields, government, NGO-work, journalism, translation, interpretation, etc., a strong foundation in syntax and morphology provides the basis to move into a more correct, sophisticated, and idiomatic expression and comprehension.

At the learning level:

All reading and written work (with the one exception of preliminary skimming of texts) should be done out loud and with full *i'rab*/vocalization and case endings—this includes studying vocabulary. Students cannot use a word if they recognize it only by its (unvocalized) orthography—they will neither be able to pronounce it nor recognize it aurally.

In the classroom:

From the beginning students ears should be hammered with Arabic in the classroom, but at the same time there should not be passive listening:

Classroom activities should be:

- a) Interactive and Participatory;
- b) In Progression from the Mechanical to the Productive: repetition, recitation, dictation, question and answer, dialogue, conversation and written language-tasks. It is worth noting that 1) by moving from the mechanical drills to the more productive and creative tasks students build both confidence and correctness of expression; and 2) the speed of progression from mechanical to productive can be varied in accordance with students' background and ability.
- c) Specific and Integrated: both types of exercise must be done. In my experience, students prepare what they will be tested and graded on, so the instructor needs to target very specific areas, ranging from the correct pronunciation and comprehension of letters and sounds, to recitation of verb forms, to manipulating given sentences or text (in terms of number, gender, tense, mood), to generating full independent sentences and discourses. After drilling a specific aspect, that element should be integrated into a fuller context.

Efficient use of time: An Arabic class should be the linguistic equivalent of an aerobic workout.

In the U.S., class time is very limited. Typically, the students in 1st-4th year Arabic will meet three to five 50-minute class periods. Class time should not be wasted on activities that students can do at home. For example, watching videos, skimming texts, etc., listening to songs, can be done as homework and then serve as the basis for class activities. For tedious activities, such as memorizing vocabulary or verb forms, it is a good idea for students to have study partners or small groups who meet together a couple of times a week over coffee, for example, to drill each other.

Syntax and morphology: Syntax: in my experience is best and most efficiently explained in the students' language, briefly, if possible, but inculcated through 1) brief, clear Arabic examples, especially ones that can be easily memorized or easily referred to; 2) exercises based on a known text (e.g., change singular to dual or plural, put in past tense, put in passive voice, put in feminine; 3) once a point is learned it should be pointed out (in Arabic) when it comes up again; used freely, independently in conversation, writing, etc. In my experience the idea that students can read grammatical explanations at home and then perform exercises in class has not proved successful. In order to achieve correctness of expression and precision of meaning, students need to know the equivalent structures and functions in Arabic and their native tongue.

"Proficiency-based" Arabic instructors are just now beginning to realize the importance of morphology in vocabulary building, but seem to have begun to introduce it at a very limited and simplistic level. To my mind, students should have been exposed to and have largely mastered the full range of Arabic morphological forms (verbal and nominal) by the end of the 3rd year, particularly as a basis for mastering the vast vocabulary required for any serious "proficiency" in Arabic, and as a basis for efficiently absorbing vast amounts of vocabulary during intensive and/or study abroad language programs. Further, in my view, morphology should be introduced from the very beginning so that it reinforces comprehension, expression, pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary building. This does not mean endless and dreary recitations, but rather the constant reinforcement of forms as they occur in texts and audio-materials.

Translation and interpretation: Although "communicative-based" approaches largely disdain translation, this is, to my mind, a grave error. The ability to translate quickly and accurately is not only a requisite of both social and academic life, but also is increasingly what is demanded by the job market for Arabists in journalism, government, diplomacy, NGOs, etc. Furthermore, it is an exercise that both requires and inculcates mastery and precision.

Literature and culture: A great advantage of the "authentic materials" approach is that it allows for the use of poems, short stories, songs, etc. in the classroom. Coupled with the technologies now available, it allows students to listen and record as well as read. These should be exploited to maximum advantage. Further, such materials can provide the subjects, ideas and vocabulary base for everything from dictation and recitation, to discussions, dialogues, class debates, plays, role-acting and essay assignments.

News media: Related to this are the media now so readily available: al-Jazeera.com, BBC Arabic and other satellite stations have written and video version of the same news items—students can read first before listening, or the other way around. These can be read and listened to at home and then used for class discussions, debates, etc., and finally for written essays, etc.

Integrated class sessions: To exercise all the language faculties, as well as to retain student interest, classes should, like the aerobic work-out model, be fast-paced and should

include 3-5 activities per 50-minutes class session. To aid cumulative learning and improve attendance, there should be some sort of quiz or graded exercise each class session.

Technology in and out of the classroom: This is a vast and ever-changing field and ranges from distance courses in Arabic, learn Arabic television programs, such as the one Prof. Akiko Motoyoshi Sumi has developed for Japanese TV and the use of various electronic, computer and internet based technologies inside and outside of the traditional Arabic classroom. Distance courses now take advantage of Skype, for example, to conduct oral and conversation exercises, and virtual chat-rooms and classes in which the students interact with one-another as well as the professor. Students can submit audio- and video-recording as well as written assignments. There are boundless opportunities for accessing live authentic and up-to-date materials—satellite TV, radio, newspapers—quite unlike the days when studying newspaper Arabic meant using a print-textbook with articles from the Nasserist period. Films, songs, documentary films and interviews can be introduced into the classroom and curriculum. My one caveat is that even cutting edge technology should not be a substitute for instruction. For students to sit and watch a video-clip from Youtube can be as passive and purposeless as reading verb forms from a book if the instructor does not integrate them into an interactive and multi-faceted class session. There has been in the last several years an increasing number of complaints from students about instructors who merely project a video from Youtube or have the students endlessly sing songs, and call it “communicative learning.” They should only be used during class-time for active and interactive exercises: active listening that requires writing a summary, names of characters; points in a debate. But even these are best done in the students’ homework time. The further advantage of doing this at home is that students can go at their own speed—some may have to listen twice, others ten times; class time can then be used for interactive activities: question and answer, reenacting, describe a favorite character; debate a particular point; present one’s own “headlines” or “news summary”.

Finally, there are interactive pedagogical materials on-line, such as GLOSS (Global Language Online Support System, developed by the United States Defense Language Institute [DLI]), a site (free to the public) that allows students to both test and improve their proficiency levels. [I thank Cynthia Brandenburg of Georgetown University for alerting me to this valuable website].

National Standards versus Individualized Programs:

Until recently it has seemed that the U.S. Arabic programs were yoked to the *Al-Kitāb* series and standards—for placement, for admission to certain programs—were focused on the ACTFL mostly oral “proficiency” exam. My feeling is that with the variety of new materials and technologies available and the number of Arabic programs at the post-secondary level, the new direction will and should be toward more individualized programs, particularly at the graduate level. A further factor that allows for curricular diversity is the increased enrolment numbers, which allow even some individual programs to have more than one “track,” or to provide at, e.g., the 2nd-3rd year level, supplementary courses and further advanced courses in media Arabic, Qur’ānic Arabic, Arabic dialects, etc.

That said, it is also desirable for students to be able to transfer and move from one program to another, so some national standardization can be useful. In my judgment, however, such national standards should be geared toward a broader variety of skills and be middle-of-the-road rather than veering to either extreme, at least at the 1st – 3rd or 4th year level. By testing the full range of language skills, it would allow individual programs to choose and measure the ones they want to emphasize, without being penalized in national standings for their choice. At the same time it would allow programs to achieve balance by pinpointing their strong points and weak points.

On the national—as well as international—level, Arabic studies will be strengthened if there is a variety of programs—particularly at the graduate level—that offer advanced specialized training in particular aspects or fields: dialects or particular dialects—Levantine, Gulf, Egyptian, North African; classical religious sciences; classical literary texts; classical humanities (history, philosophy, etc.); linguistics and comparative Semitics; modern literature and the humanities; modern social sciences. These, obviously, would be the Arabic-language component of the academic strengths of a particular program or department.

Dialects: It is only natural with the shift over the last several decades from the classical Arabic humanistic fields to MSA and the modern humanities and social sciences that students of Arabic should have some knowledge of Arabic dialects. Anyone who follows the contemporary Arab media or reads the dialogs in modern and contemporary novels will realize that the dialects have made their way into MSA-based media and forms; that Arabic poetry is flourishing in both MSA and in the Arabic dialects; and that the social media, written as well as oral, incline heavily in the direction of colloquial dialects.

The burning questions are which dialects, when and how. Every possible combination has been proposed: start by learning Egyptian dialect for two years, then gradually introduce MSA; or, the other way around; or, introduce a dialect or dialects into the standard MSA curriculum from the beginning; or offer the dialects as separate classes—with a prerequisite or without, etc. Native speaker Arabic teachers usually make a case for their own dialect; otherwise, Levantine or Egyptian are largely preferred. The newest edition of the *Al-Kitāb* series, Part one (2011) introduces four dialects into each lesson from the beginning. The outcomes of these various approaches have yet to be evaluated, and it seems likely to me that there is not one successful method, but that different strategies will be effective for different programs, depending, among other things, on their curricular goals.

A major concern to me is that a lot of the conceptions concerning the place and uses of dialectical Arabic has been based largely on the Egyptian situation: educators repeat that MSA would be entirely out of place in the vast majority of social and public situations in Egypt. This may be quite true, but MSA is used much more extensively and for many more social and professional situations in other Arab countries than it is in Egypt. In many Arab countries would be perceived as peculiar, even amusing, for a non-Arab to speak Egyptian colloquial; MSA would be expected of him/her and, after a bit, at least some basic

expressions in the local dialect.

My view of the issue is as follows: MSA should undoubtedly be the foundation of the Arabic language curriculum: it is the shared written, formal media and educated form of the language throughout the Arab world, and forms the foundation for the study of classical and Qur'ānic Arabic—the classical and devotional language of the entire Islamic world—and forms a foundation for the efficient learning of one or more colloquial Arabic dialects. Colloquial dialects should be introduced early—but in a manner that keeps them clearly distinct from MSA. This could be done by devoting, say, ten minutes of each class session to colloquial expressions; or perhaps one or one-half class session a week. The problem is that in the U.S. class time is very limited, and that any time devoted to colloquial Arabic is at the expense of MSA. At some point, for example after two years of MSA, it would make sense for students to take a full semester course in a particular dialect. In courses such as media Arabic, it would be worth pointing out to students the more common expressions or constructions of Levantine and Egyptian Arabic that often occur in otherwise MSA discourses—speeches, interviews, etc.

The more extensive study of dialects is most effectively and efficiently left to study abroad programs, where they can be fairly quickly acquired by students with a solid 3-year MSA background. Retention of colloquial dialects can be fostered back in the U.S. by supplementary student clubs, such as a Nādī Maṣri (Egyptian Club) that meets once or twice a week for films, discussions, etc. Fortunately there is a wealth of films, soap operas, speeches, sermons, etc. available on the Internet through Youtube, etc.

Study Abroad and Intensive/Immersion Programs

Finally, let me turn very briefly to the issue of Study Abroad and Language Immersion programs, a field of growing pedagogical interest since the vast expansion of programs and opportunities. The long standing premier programs in this regard are CASA at AUC and Middlebury College Summer Language programs in the U.S. There are now a number of competing programs, increased funding, and increasingly undergraduate degree programs in Arabic are requiring a study abroad component (for a summer, a semester or a full academic year). Some of these choose from among available standing programs, others, notably Middlebury College's Arabic program at Alexandria University in Egypt, have developed and supervise programs closely geared to their own curriculum. It is generally recognized that together with the quality of the program, proper student preparation is key. Ideally, this preparation should include about three years of Arabic, including mastery of MSA morphology, syntax, and adequate vocabulary, an integrated command of the four language skills, and some exposure, whether a one-semester course or a brief workshop, to a colloquial dialect. Moreover, an Orientation Program, whether before travel or upon arrival, into the "manners and customs" of the host country is an absolute requisite. Another essential component is incorporating social mechanisms for integrating foreign students into the host culture, whether through assigned student-hosts for each student, introductions to host families with whom the student might live or visit, etc. These will vary broadly with the social norms of the Arab country involved.

Intensive or Study Abroad programs at other levels can be successful as well, but in these cases the home university needs to assure that the program can effectively supplement and improve the student's Arabic. A number of American university Arabic programs have carefully coordinated with host-institutions in the Arab world to provide, for example, second year intensive summer programs that ensure that the student who completes the program will be fully prepared to enter the third year program upon return to his/her home institution. Due to their time- and cost-effectiveness, not to mention the cultural experience of living abroad, we can expect that study abroad will play an increasing important role in Arabic language education, and that the expansion, evaluation and improvement of such programs will continue for some time to be at the forefront of Arabic language pedagogical concerns.

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