



Title	Arabic Language Textbooks between Guide-lines and Diglossia
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Citation	外国語教育のフロンティア. 2018, 1, p. 343-352
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/69806
rights	
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Arabic Language Textbooks between Guide-lines and Diglossia

アラビア語の教科書—ガイドラインとダイグロシアのはざままで

ABDELRAHMAN TAREQ SADEQ ELSHARQAWY

Abstract

The Arabic Language has a long history as living and spoken language. It also occupies a wide geographical area and has acquired the position of a communicational language and international language, as well as a language for religion (Islam) and for science- specially during the medieval ages. There is a well-known phenomenon in Arabic which is having more than one level: standard and colloquial. This is what can be called as Diglossia. Because of diglossia, speakers have to choose the language level to use according to situation and the speech-act. This may cause some difficulty, if not contradiction when adopting guidelines for teaching/learning Arabic. The target of this paper is to review different Arabic language textbooks – currently in use – trying to find out how they deal with contradiction.

Keywords: Arabic Language; Diglossia; Second Language acquisition; language proficiency; ACTFL; CEFr

1. Arabic Language:

The Arabic Language is one of the longest living languages with 4 hundred million speakers. It has appeared long time ago with the few populations that inhabited the Arabian Peninsula about 25 centuries ago. It has been expanding over the last 15 centuries with the increase of Muslims across the old world. It was able to gain more space with the spread of Islam and with the development of its civilization to be a language of knowledge and science during the medieval ages, and as a language of communication mediating between speakers of many different languages in Africa. With the loss of its position as a language of science and knowledge, The Arabic Language became one of the 6 official languages of the United Nations.

The available history sources of Arabic state that it is a Semitic Language that developed in the Arabian Peninsula as a spoken language. Arabs used an old writing system before the current one which is used now. The writing system developed through the fifth and sixth centuries and was able to spread with the expansion of Islam to be used for many other languages in both Asia and Africa. It was very rare, before Islam, to write in Arabic with the difficulty and lack of tools. Arabs used to

memorize and recall instead of writing. In the pre-Islamic period, there are very few documents and they started paying attention to documentation after Islam.

Although many resources mention a long history of the Arabic Language, the available texts go back 16 centuries only. They were recited and narrated by many generations before being written down in the 8th century. The available sources show that the Arabic Language enjoys a unique continuity in its structure and lexicon.

The early Arab linguists recognized the presence of some dialects inside the Arabian peninsula according to the different tribes and geographical areas of the peninsula. The mentioned dialects were limited to some minor lexical units or secondary case endings. Apart from that, all the populations inhabited the peninsula were able to communicate with each other without the need for special knowledge or interpretation, not to mention translators. Being isolated by the nature of the peninsula and its vast desert, Arabic remained pure with little variations until the end of the 7th century.

With the expansion of Islam and outside of the Arabian peninsula, Arabic speaking populations increased rapidly. The increase can easily be attributed to Arabization. Around the end of the 7th century, Arabian King Abdmalek Ibn Marwan ordered to change the language of administration to Arabic in all regions. In addition, a remarkable number of ambitious people decided to learn Arabic and use it in order to get higher chances in administration and society. The 8th century witnessed the existence of great names in different fields who were originally descending of Persian origins. It worth mentioning that the first author in Arabic Grammar – named SIBAWAIH- was originally Persian. He was not an exception. We can recall several other names: Abdel Hamid Alkatib, Ibn Almuqaffa' and Al-jahiz.

As the number of Arabized population increased, a deviation in Arabic grammatical and structural level was noted and documented by early Arabic linguists and grammarians. It became a well-known phenomenon called LAHN AL-'AMMAH (common people errors). It was mentioned by different writers and even in general books such as AL-BAYAN WA AL-TABYEEN by AL-JAHIZ in the early 9th century. For long time, it was not accepted or even noted as actual usage but as mistakes that needed to be corrected. For this reason, early Arabic grammar books were written to give a remedy.

1.1 Arabic dialects

During the 8th and 9th centuries, with the expansion of the new born Arabic Islamic state, two wave of migrations took place where a number of Arab tribes moved from the Arabian Peninsula to several remote geographical areas. In the beginning, they used to live in isolated camps outside the

areas of the natives of every region. But AL-MA'MUN – a king of the Abbasid Dynasty- ordered to dissolve the camps and encouraged the Arabs to mix with the other ethnicities of the state. This has led to more and more of the common errors and to start a big wave of borrowing and code switching and finally Arabizing of new lexicon and expressions. the new vocabulary that was added to the language usage varied according to the region that influenced. But the actual usage did not fruit any changes neither in grammatical rules nor in Arabic dictionaries.

The combination between basic dialects, common errors and borrowed lexicon units led to the emergence of a variety of dialects that grew independently in different regions of the growing Arab world. On the other hand, the Arabian Peninsula remained mostly away from all these changes, or at least, was not influenced directly. This development was excluded from the main corpus that Arabic linguists used to conclude their rules and dictionary entries. But this limitation of the corpus did not stop the continuity of these dialects. They were mentioned in the traditional books as examples of errors. At the same time, they became parallel to the standard language.

The Arabic dialects were traditionally classified in five big groups:

- Dialects of the Arabian peninsula.
- Mesopotamian dialects
- Syro-lebanese dialects.
- Egyptian dialects.
- Maghreb dialects. (versteegh: 2014. P, 189).

1.2 Diglossia

Each dialect was influenced by the local language of the area and by the nearby languages. We can see many examples of the Persian language on the first two groups, while the influence of other Semitic languages and Eastern Mediterranean languages on the third and fourth groups. Different Latin languages as well as barbarian languages left clear prints on the fifth group.

With the modern age, European influence came to affect many Arabic dialects in many ways. With Europeans also came the idea of studying the Arabic dialects. If we consider the Egyptian dialects, we can find many traces of the ancient Egyptian language, Greek Latin, Turkish, French and English, in addition to the different dialects of different Arab migrations.

All these sources of influence, side by side, with other sociological and educational factors lead to the situation of diglossia in Egypt that was well described in the pioneer study of Badawy in 1970s. in his study, badawy was able to distinguish between five different levels of Arabic in Egypt:

- 1- The classical Arabic.
- 2- The modern standard Arabic.

- 3- The colloquial of intellectuals.
- 4- The colloquial of literates
- 5- The colloquial of illiterates.

These variations, and the similar ones in the different groups of dialects, have witnessed many changes on the different levels: phonetic, morphological, structural and semantic ones. In some cases, the same phrase gets a different meaning in different dialects:

ALLAH YE'THIK EL-'AFYAH. (may God give you 'AFYAH) it is a wish for good health for the second person in Kuwait(God bless you) , while it means “go to hell” in Morocco. This happens although the vocabulary and structure are the same in standard Arabic.

This sophisticated classification was usually minimized to FUS-HA, which is standard norm, and “AMMEYAH/ DARJA which is the colloquial or vernacular. Being in a situation to select one of them is what is called diglossia- a term first coined by William Marçais in 1930s. Charles Ferguson later used the term to study the linguistic situation in Arabic speaking countries and three other places: Greece, German-speaking Switzerland and Haiti. (versteegh: 2014. P,142)

The linguistic situation in Arabic speaking countries is dealing with having several norms at the same time, and the presence of the standard norm or the colloquial one is not a matter of choice, it is rather inter-changeable. The speaker of Arabic uses the standard Arabic in classrooms, exams, official context and reading or listening to news, while personal topics and everyday situations require the usage of the colloquial. (versteegh 2014. p: 143). when listening to any political talk-show, for example, we can find a mixture between the standard norm and the different colloquial ones and dialects.

2. Guidelines

Here it becomes legitimate to raise the question about whether guidelines consider diglossia? And if the answer is no, how Arabic language text-books can find their way?

Guidelines are usually concerned with the proficiency and this means they do not pay attention directly to the linguistic part. This part is always there, but in the background. they do not mention it directly or decide what language knowledge is needed for each level.

2.1 CEF

The Common European Framework (CEF) finds its role is to: “provide a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to

use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. The Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis" **(Council of Cultural Co-Operation:2001. P,1).**

It works in a comprehensive way: "By 'comprehensive' is meant that the Common European Framework should attempt to specify as full a range of language knowledge, skills and use as possible (without of course attempting to forecast a priori all possible uses of language in all situations – an impossible task), and that all users should be able to describe their objectives, etc., by reference to it. CEF should differentiate the various dimensions in which language proficiency is described, and provide a series of reference points (levels or steps) by which progress in learning can be calibrated. It should be borne in mind that the development of communicative proficiency involves other dimensions than the strictly linguistic (e.g. sociocultural awareness, imaginative experience, affective relations, learning to learn, etc.)." **(Council of Cultural Co-Operation: 2001. P,7)**

This implies that having variations between standard norm and colloquial is not addressed in the CEF. We can find a trivial awareness about the dialects, but not to diglossia. CEF suggests 6 levels for language proficiency: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 & C2. While A1 can use the standard norm, A2 is actually in colloquial. The global scale of the CEF states that in A2 the learner "Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need" **(Council of Cultural Co-Operation: 2001. P,24)** Native Arabic speakers usually express themselves in this level using the colloquial. And if a speaker used the standard norm in this respect, he becomes a target for sarcasm. If a learner of standard Arabic uses the self-assessment grid for this level, he will find it not applying to his knowledge of the language vocabulary and structure. S/he can not use it in the fields of shopping or local area.

If a text-book attempts to adopt the CEF, then it may face a difficulty with the A2 level. The possible alternatives are: following the guidelines with unauthentic language; or ignoring the A2 level and introduce an equivalent level instead.

2.2 ACTFL

Years before issuing the CEF, the American Council for Teaching Foreign Languages set

out its guidelines which are known as “ACTFL guidelines”. ACTFL guidelines are defined as: “The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are descriptions of what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context. For each skill, these guidelines identify five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The levels of the ACTFL Guidelines describe the continuum of proficiency from that of the highly articulate, well-educated language user to a level of little or no functional ability.” (ACTFL: 2012. P.3).

Again, there is no presence for the issue of diglossia in the ACTFL guidelines. And although stating several times that with NOVICE level “Conversation is restricted to a few of the predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture” (p:9), “notes. They are able to express themselves within the context in which the language was learned” (p:14) and so on. Still the NOVICE level is dealing with the Survival, Everyday, basic need level of the language. And the most part of this, in the case of Arabic is not using the Standard Arabic.

Both CEF and ACTFL focus on the proficiency side, they both ignore the difficulties that may arise while learning language that have different writing systems and scripts. Yet, ACTFL gives some attention to the learning process and materials used.

Arabic Language textbooks:

3. Arabic Language textbooks

After about 14 centuries of efforts in teaching/learning Arabic in an organized way, we can not see accumulated achievement in the field from the Arabic speaking side. We know that effort have been made across many ages, but without theoretical framework. Recently, European and American guidelines came to fill the gap globally. These guidelines can not be adopted in the case of Arabic unless being modified.

Curriculum designers and book authors of Arabic language textbooks do not seem to be paying attention to the available guidelines, not to mention modifying or adjusting them to the case of Arabic. Most textbooks use terms like: Beginner, Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced in a foggy way and without clear definitions. So, some books are for the elementary level while others for the intermediate level in general without clear methodological justification.

There are Arabic native authors and foreigners of different backgrounds. Some of them do not have more than the experience, no study or training. Some others are researchers in near fields. But recently, there are new graduate programs for Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language. The results are yet to appear on the textbooks and curriculum designing.

There are some attempts to produce textbooks for skills like reading and/or writing, while it is rare, if not no, attempts to produce books to train learners on speaking and conversation skills. Such skill-oriented textbooks do not pay real attention to the problem of diglossia. They also fail to find their real position regarding proficiency levels. A book like HOW TO WRITE IN ARABIC by El Mustapha Lahlali claims on its back cover that it “is designed to help learners of Arabic at all levels” which seems unrealistic, methodologically inappropriate and unachievable target. (Lahlali: 2009. back-cover)

Another attempt in reading skill is MEDIA ARABIC by Alaa Elgibali and Nevenka Korica. In this book there are reading texts from modern Arabic print and internet media. Although it has some exercises for speaking and writing but it is to support reading, and not intended for writing or speaking skills. The books is “to students of Arabic seeking to reach the advanced level”, but it does not directly mention the students level before or during the study period. The book also does not mention the issue of diglossia although it is so much expected to faced the reader when reading authentic material. (Elgibali: 2014. P,1-2).

Diglossia and its contradiction with guidelines can be clearer seen and deeper discussed when reviewing general Arabic textbooks. This is because the contradiction is more related to the A1 and A2 levels of CEF and the Novice levels of ACTFL. It seems that many textbooks’ authors have been aware of the difficulty or it was, at least, in their sub-conscious while designing the books. The result was avoiding many frequent vocabulary and situations. The learners using such textbooks are able to recall vocabulary, read, listen and talk about political and economic topics, while they fail to recognize high frequent vocabulary such as days of the week. This is the case, for example, with a dated textbook named ELEMANTARY MODERN STANDARD ARABIC which was used for a long time as the most commonly used textbook to study Arabic in many countries. (Abboud & others 1983). Although the book was revised and reprinted two times, but it wand not closer to the frequent vocabulary in any of its editions. The book was not concerned with the guidelines as well as it used another method which was claimed to be Audio-Lingual, but it is more adopting the Grammar and Translation Method. This can also be said about al-Kitab al-mufid by Manfred Woidich and Rabha Heinen-Nasr. Although it was published in 2011, it does not refer to any proficiency guidelines and gives more focus to Grammar. The authors were aware of the diglossia and they have even tried to compare the standard norm to one dialect (Egyptian) as the first author had a book for teaching/learning Egyptian dialect years before. Al-Kitaab fii Ta’aalum al-‘Arabiyyah by Kersten Brustad Mahmoud Al-Batal and Abbas Al-tonsí is the most used textbook for last two decades. The authors demonstrated clear awareness concerning the diglossia in Arabic Language. They addressed the teachers using their book –in Arabic- about it and how they should be open

to teach both as they are not inventing linguistic reality but they are presenting it to the learners. They have also mentioned that their book is not grammar-centered. It is rather skill and proficiency oriented. (Brustad: 2004. P, xx-xxi) But they did not mention any guidelines. They just stated in their introduction to the learners – in English- that by the end of studying the first part they will be in the intermediate level. (ibid. P, xvi). Although the first part is expected to be the A1/A2 level in CEF or Novice in ACTFL, they presented in the 2nd unit of part I a lesson using language that is not for concrete types as they had a story talking about Loneliness. The presence of the standard norm and the colloquial was presented separately in every unit. They presented the Egyptian dialect only in the second edition, but add more dialects in the third edition and presented the vocabulary of the standard norm and the different dialects in comparative tables ahead of each unit.

MASTERING ARABIC by Jane Wightwick & Mahmoud Gaafar – like ELEMENTARY MODERN STANDARD ARABIC – uses an English title and is printed to be read from left to right, which is opposite to the direction of Arabic books. It has two editions: 1990-2007. The authors of Mastering Arabic showed awareness of the diglossia from the introduction by mentioning the different levels of Arabic, and stated that they “have chosen to teach the Modern Standard in Mastering Arabic as it is a good starting point for Beginners” (Wightwick: 2009. P, xii). The authors do not give equivalent attention to proficiency and guidelines. The conversation sections in are presented in the book to introduce the learner to “conversational Arabic in social and everyday situations” to help him communicate right from start. (ibid). But the “social and everyday situations” do not witness conversations in standard Arabic. So, awareness was not reflected in practice.

Lughatuna al-Fusha by Samia Louis is, to the best of my knowledge, the only Arabic textbook that claimed to be “designed according to the guidelines set by the American Council for Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The book helps build students’ reading and writing abilities, gradually taking them from “novice low” to “novice high” (over three beginner levels).” (Louis: 2010. P,xi). Although the author has published a textbook for colloquial Egyptian Arabic few years before, but she demonstrated no awareness of the diglossia. She has designed some units that seems parallel to her colloquial textbook titled “Kallimni ‘Arabi”. She mentioned learning outcomes including: “ask for and give limited instructions and directions to taxi drivers, and to be able to read simple instructions”

“shop for personal needs”

“read about Arab Culture and friends” (ibid).

Most of the above mentioned situations can not be expressed or received except in colloquial, and reading about the culture can not be achieved at this level. It seems that guidelines were

not really adopted by the author and were not put in practice. That may explain how a textbook adopting ACTFL is sponsored by, and used for International Language institute (ili)- currently known as ih Cairo- as the main textbook while they follow the CEF guidelines.

4. Concluding remarks:

- Diglossia is a phenomenon in Arabic.
- Communication situations are divided between the standard norm and the colloquial of each regional part of the Arabic speaking countries.
- There are no guidelines set by any Arab organization for teaching/learning Arabic. This fact contradicts with the long history of teaching/learning Arabic for many reasons since the 7th century.
- ACTFL & CEF do not have clear solution for the diglossia in Arabic – or any other language.
- Textbooks of Arabic do not have clear and deep adoption of guidelines in designing language textbooks.
- Many authors of Arabic Language textbooks do not have strong awareness and methodological solution for diglossia.
- Any real attempt to produce a well designed textbook or successful curriculum may require having a special set of guidelines for the Arabic Language or, at least, a modification of a current one.

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