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Negotiating Arabic

Diglossic Language and Intercultural Proficiency in American Education

NATALIE PARSONS

Negotiating Arabic

Diglossic Language and Intercultural Proficiency in American Education

NATALIE PARSONS

An Honors Thesis
Presented to the Department of International Studies
Macalester College
Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA
Advisor: David Chioni Moore
May 1, 2023

Cover art by Natalie Parsons

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّمَّنْ مِثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ٢٣

And if you are in doubt about what we have revealed to our servant, then produce a surah like it and call your helpers other than Allah, if what you say is true.

Qur'an 2:23, Surah al-Baqarah

“Only a prophet is able to have perfect command of the Arabic language.”

Ibn Faris, Al-Sahibi fi Fiqh al-Lughah

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ABSTRACT

Diglossia refers to the coexistence of High (H) and Low (L) varieties within a language (Ferguson 1959). Arabic, a diglossic language, struggles with this division. Native speakers of Arabic communicate via their dialects (L). Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) in the US focuses on Modern Standard Arabic (H), neglecting the dialects. US government investment in Arabic as a critical language since 9/11 has continued to prioritize the instruction and professionalization of the H variety, suppressing intercultural proficiency. Arabic Language curricula in the US must evolve to teach meta-linguistic awareness between the H and L forms of Arabic.

Key words: diglossia, Arabic, language, dialect, Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL), Critical Language Studies, national security, sociolinguistics, arabophone

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INTRODUCTION

In the midst of my research for this paper, an informant told me about the three miracles of the Abrahamic religions: In the Judaic tradition, Moses split the Red Sea; for Christians, Jesus resurrected; and, in Islam, the Prophet Muhammad revealed the Divine word of God with an eloquence unmatched before in the Arabic language. Scholars and speakers of the Arabic language following the time of the Prophet believe that this was the foundational language for the Arabic we know today. Although poetry in the pre-Islamic period exhibited its own eloquence, no other form of Arabic has rivaled the clarity, beauty, and complexity of the Classical Arabic codified in the *Qur'an*, in the conventional view. By these standards, the time before the Classical Arabic from the *Qur'an* is referred to as the Age of Ignorance, or *al-Jahiliyyah*.

So during a discussion of spoken Arabic, inter-dialect communication, and the Teaching of Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL), why does the Arabic of the *Qur'an* become relevant? The answer lies in the sociolinguistic phenomenon called *diglossia*. Diglossia refers to the coexistence of two (or multiple) varieties within one language, typically referred to as the formal/ high language (H) and the low/ vulgar language (L) (Ferguson 1959).¹ The H and L forms serve different purposes according to context. For example, a native speaker (NS) would use the H variety during a sermon in a church or mosque, or in a university lecture, while they would use the L variety when talking with their friends or ordering food at a restaurant. Diglossia

¹ Although this terminology is outdated, I will use the distinction of High (H) and Low (L) throughout my paper to expand upon the initial scholarship introduced about diglossia in the Arabic language. These names in no way serve as value-based descriptions of the formal and informal spoken Arabics, but rather a set of terminology proposed by a well-respected scholar and pioneer in the field of diglossia, Charles A. Ferguson.

exists to some degree in any language, but the differences between the H and L varieties of Arabic are sharper. The H variety outlined by Ferguson and the subsequent scholars in this paper refers to the Classical Arabic (CA) and its subsequent derivations, namely Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), both referred to as *al-Fusha*, or *Fusha*,² in Arabic. The L varieties refer to the various dialects that have emerged throughout the Arabophone region.

As CA spread under the Umayyad Caliphate of the Islamic Empire through conquest, conversion and commerce, the “pure” Arabic of the *Qur’an* saw a great deal of mutation. Since the Golden Age of the Islamic Empire, the Arabic language has mingled with the indigenous languages of Northern Africa, has been deconstructed and reconstructed by colonial powers, and has impressed upon itself new tendencies in an overbearing relationship with the globalization of the English Language. In many ways, the varieties of Arabic spoken today have strayed far from the CA of the *Qur’an* and the H variety of spoken Arabic, reflected uniquely and independently in the L varieties that challenge our understanding of a singular “Arabic” language. Language is wont to mutate and change as it spreads and grows in popularity throughout the world. Geography can impede consistency within language, nationality can create divisions in identity-based language practices, but for a dialect to behave as its own language, as in the case of Arabic, is unique.

After completing all the available Spanish courses at my high school, I decided I wanted to learn a new language, particularly one with a different alphabet. Arabic caught my attention, even though my high school did not offer language courses other than Spanish, French, and

² Pronounced fus-Ha

Latin.³ One of my mentors at the time was a NS of Arabic from Egypt. On a sunny afternoon I stumbled into her office and asked for her best advice to start learning Arabic. She responded to my seemingly simple question by asking, “Well, *which* Arabic do you want to study?” This question seemed so foreign to me. *Which* Arabic do I want to study? I want to study *the* Arabic. I knew that if I wanted to study Spanish, I would take a Spanish class. If I wanted to study German? German. Russian? Russian. Italian? Italian, and so forth. My mentor followed my perplexed look by breaking down my options: “For example, do you want to learn *Egyptian* Arabic or *Moroccan* Arabic or *Jordanian* Arabic?”

I began my Arabic studies at Concordia Language Villages (CLV) Arabic immersion camp, *Al-Waha*, in the Summer of 2018 in Northern Minnesota.⁴ Going in with knowing “hello” and numbers 1-10, I left the camp with a substantial base of Arabic knowledge. I continued my study of Arabic at Macalester College for a year and then at the Middle East Institute in Washington D.C. before studying abroad in Amman, Jordan. Despite what my mentor in high school had said, the instruction I received for the first four years of my Arabic learning was solely in MSA, or the H variety derived from the *Qur’an*, *al-Fusha*, neglecting any of the L varieties she

³ Given the information unpacked later in this thesis, one might find it surprising that my school did not offer an Arabic program, considering the increase in funding from the federal government to offer Arabic courses at the grade-school and university levels as a ‘critical language’ since 1958, and with new vigor in 2006. The answer to this question rests in the distinction that I went to a private school, and therefore we operated independently from the US government’s investment in Critical Language Studies.

⁴ CLV is a consortium of 15 immersive language summer camps. Established in 2006, Arabic is one of the more recent additions to the consortium. All of the camps’ names are some variation of “lake by the forest”, given the beautiful location of the camps in the forest around a pristine collection of lakes. *Al-Waha*, however, means “oasis” in Arabic, reflecting the geographically appropriate landscape of the Middle East.

enumerated.⁵ It was not until my arrival in an Arabophone country that I encountered how unforgivingly irrelevant MSA was to my daily life outside of the classroom.

The first time I took a taxi in Amman, Jordan depicts the discontinuities between the H and L forms of Arabic well. Due to much anxiety about the new endeavor in a new city and a new language, I meticulously rehearsed what I was going to say to the driver before hailing down one of the yellow cabs zipping through the intersection where I found myself on the first day of my study abroad program. After the thrill of waving down a car, I entered through a rusted door and nervously spit out the two sentences I had practiced: *šbāḥ al-ḥīr. arīdu an aḍḥba i-la al-jāmi‘aī l-‘urdnīye min fḍlk*. After a pause, the driver whipped his gaze around to the back of the car where I was seated and delivered a response that was equally as startling as my attempt at speaking: *mn wayn enti?! Where are you from?!*

Although probably exclaimed with a tinge of shock that a visible foreigner, let alone an American, was trying to speak the local language, the exchange that took place primarily points to the perceived disconnect in the H and L varieties of Arabophone society. I entered the car assuming the Arabic I had studied for the past four years would be appropriate for any given conversation I might encounter on the streets of Amman. In reality, the Arabic that I had used could be equated to the English of Shakespearean England, in a comparable Anglophone context. That is, I had said something similar to the formality ubiquitous to the now-archaic speech of Shakespeare’s plays: *Dear good sir, would you kindly take me to the reaches of the road that doth*

⁵ Throughout this paper, I will refer to the H and L Arabics with different terminology, depending on context. For “H Arabic/ variety/ form” you can expect to see it called Standard Arabic (in relationship to the other dialects), H arabic (the sociolinguistic distinction), Classical Arabic/ Modern Standard Arabic (referring to the Arabic that comes from the *Qur’an* and then the modern revival of it) and/or *al-Fusha* or *Fusha* (the Arabic term for CA/MSA). For “L Arabics” you can expect to see them referred to as “vernaculars” or “dialects”, in addition to “L Arabics/ forms/ varieties”.

travel to that place where the University rests? This is an exaggeration, but it sheds light on an important distinction in the Arabic language. *No one* speaks using the formal Arabic I had used, or at least in the setting that I found myself in, especially native speakers (NSs). The humorous part of the story to me is that the driver had responded with language that I came to associate as purely colloquial. The brief exchange had both me and the taxi driver chuckling, and delivered a foundational distinction for me in the difference between the formal and colloquial varieties of Arabic and their appropriate, or inappropriate, contexts.

The aforementioned analogy helps depict the sociolinguistic conundrum between the H and L varieties in the Arabophone world, but it pales in comparison to the level of nuance that is required for studying the H and L varieties. The H variety unites the region, but the L varieties divide. In the middle of these poles exists an endless continuum of hybridized Arabics. The challenge for NSs exists in choosing which L variety to use when many of them are mutually unintelligible. That is, a Moroccan will have a difficult time speaking in their dialect with an Iraqi, a Lebanese may struggle with speaking to a Saudi, and a Tunisian might be at a loss speaking to a Yemeni, and vice versa. Although these seemingly insurmountable barriers of intelligibility between dialects are often overstated, they point to the political and national distinctions that fuel identity-based divisions within the region. Within the Middle East and North African (MENA) region,⁶ the Arabophone world spans from the Eastern borders of Iraq

⁶ The de-colonized term for the Middle East/ MENA region is *the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region* and is a term that I have recently been introduced to. Given the historic and consistent use of the term “Middle East” to describe this region, I will maintain this identification in my paper, acknowledging that this name falls into the West’s categorical distinction that is highly political and Western-centric, using Western Europe and the US as the epicenter of geographical proximity in the world. I also acknowledge that the term “Middle East” is ambiguous at best and exclusive at worst (i.e. do we include often neglected countries like Chad, Djibouti, and Somalia in this regional distinction? How about non-Arabophone countries like Israel, Iran, and Turkey?) For the purpose of this paper, when I say the “Middle East” I am likely referring to the Arabophone world, and in some cases the larger region as a targeted geographic location of apprehension and fear-based foreign policy for the US government post-9/11.

and Iran to the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen, to the coast of the Red Sea in Somalia, to the shores of the Mediterranean of Lebanon, to the Western reaches of Morocco on the North African plane; there are a *multitude* of identities at play. As NSs struggle to know how to communicate with each other within the vast and diverse language of Arabic, the non-native speaker (NNS) will struggle to know where to even begin.

Since the late 1950s, scholars have investigated the matter of diglossia in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL). After preliminary scholarship that detailed the matter of diglossia within the Arabic language (Ferguson 1959), scholars began to identify Arabic as sitting on a spectrum of spoken language, from H to L (Blau 1960, Badawi 1973, Meiseles 1980, Mitchell 1986). In the United States (US),⁷ what has aided and complicated directions of TAFL is the surge of government funding and interest in Arabic as a critical language for maintaining national security following the attacks of September 11th, 2001.⁸ The US government's investment in TAFL is "as much about peace building as it is about national security," says Alina Romanowski, the former Deputy Assistant Secretary for the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs during the Bush Administration (Robertson 2006). However idealistic the first part of her statement is, the last part is of more concern. With billions of dollars invested in Critical Language Studies since 1958 out of federal departments like the

⁷ Throughout this paper I refer to the people of the United States as "Americans." I acknowledge that this name monopolizes the American identity by privileging those in the United States and in doing so excludes other North and South Americans from this classification, like Brazilians and Mexicans, for example. Throughout this article I use the term "American(s)" as a national distinction for those belonging to the US in keeping with the identification of these people in previous scholarship about TAFL in the US.

⁸ Despite my inherent knowledge of what a "critical language" is in the eyes of the US government, I could not find a formal definition of what a critical language is on any US government website, most notably the DoS website or their specific page for Critical Language Scholarships.

Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of State (DoS), one would think the latter goal of national security would dominate the U.S. government's political agenda over the lofty and ambiguous goal of "peace" (National Defense Act).

What I argue in this paper is twofold. First, the sole instruction of H Arabic in TAFL in American classrooms, or anywhere, is incomplete. This is not a widely contested statement; anyone who studies a diglossic language knows that the two varieties co-create the entirety of the language, and both H and L forms must be taught, acquired, and used by any competent speaker of Arabic (Ferguson 1963). The instruction of the L variety should not be reserved for the study-abroad experience (Ryding 1995), and must be taught earlier in any Americans' education. Without understanding or knowing how to use the L varieties, an American will fail to make any sustainable and authentic connections with their Arabophone interlocutors. This discrepancy is consequential for US-MENA relations, which leads to my second argument: The current structure of the Critical Language Study of Arabic in the US, primarily focusing on the instruction and professionalization of the H variety of Arabic, suppresses *intercultural proficiency* for American students studying the Middle East. I use the term "intercultural proficiency" to signify the cross-cultural understanding and diplomacy that Romanowski calls "peace", a soft goal that hangs in the balance of the harsher realities of military occupation and US national defense missions abroad. I suggest that TAFL curricula evolve beyond the sole instruction of the H Arabic and learn to emphasize the skill that scholar Emma Trentman calls *meta-linguistic awareness*, or the ability to access and employ both H and L varieties based on

any given context (Trentman 2022). This is an intuitive skill employed by NSs of Arabic, and must guide how government interest and funding shapes TAFL curricula.

The rest of the paper will explore these themes and arguments through previous scholarship and my own interview-based research. Each section of this paper seeks to answer the question: “What does Arabic mean to the scholar/ NS/ American?”. By way of a more in-depth introduction, *Part I: Arabic to the Scholar* focuses on previous literature on the history of diglossia in the Arabic language and TAFL pedagogy in the US and will give a greater theoretical framework to understand the structure of my argument in subsequent sections. *Part II: Arabic to the Native Speaker* explores eight interviews I conducted with NSs of Arabic. In this section I reflect on the conversations I had with NSs on the application of H Arabic in Arabophone society, written versus spoken Arabic, cross-dialect communication, and linguistic diversity versus ethno-linguistic unity in the region, all of which inform how we adequately relay the nuances of the Arabic language to second language (L2) learners. These conversations reveal directions TAFL must consider in pursuing the widely accepted audio-lingual method, which uses the NS as a model for acquiring and using the language. *Part III: Arabic to the American* focuses on the interviews I conducted with a student, three Foreign Service Officers of the US Department of State (DoS), and two educators of TAFL in US higher education institutions and their perspectives on teaching, learning, and using Arabic as a critical language. Although not all of my informants in Part III were American, they all have been touched by US government funding and involvement in TAFL, whether that be in American classrooms or abroad. After discussing US government interest in TAFL, I begin to offer my recommendations for a revitalized TAFL pedagogy that amplifies the instruction of the L varieties and prioritizes

linguistic avenues for obtaining intercultural proficiency of Arabic for a L2 learner. Following Part III, I offer my concluding thoughts.

With this introduction in mind, the reader may ask, why focus on TAFL *in the US*? The simple answer to this question is that this has been my experience; I am an American and I have learned Arabic through the lens that my country created for me. Since the beginning of my language studies, I have been fed the subliminal, and at times explicit, message that learning Arabic is a career-enhancing opportunity and is in high demand for US national interest. Although I do not remember the September 11th attacks (I was only nine months old at the time), this moment has defined my experience of learning Arabic as a critical language as a high-schooler, college student, and now as a soon-to-be young adult in the “real world”. It is no surprise that US departments, like the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), have messaged me on job-search platforms simply because I am an American that shows an interest and (humble) knowledge of “Middle Eastern Studies” and “Arabic” on my profile.

My brief semester in Jordan has certainly inspired this project as well. One day, towards the beginning of my time in Amman, I was walking with my Jordanian professor through the tree-lined paths of the University of Jordan. She asked me why I was studying Arabic and I responded somewhat vaguely that I was interested in learning languages, that I had studied Spanish, Arabic, and Russian in the past and was excited to now be studying abroad in the Arabophone world. She jokingly responded to the list of languages I had supplied by saying, “So you want to get to know the enemy?” I was startled by this comment. Granted, my professor had

somewhat of a dark humor, but her words staunchly pointed to the narrative of US Critical Language Studies that have been building since 2001, and perhaps the implicit reason why I was drawn to languages like Russian and Arabic in the first place.

I encourage the reader to approach the following pages with a critical eye towards the “critical language” study of Arabic in the US. Sociolinguistics affects us all. As NSs of *at least* one language, we all have skin in the game. How we choose, or are forced, to engage with a second, third, or fourth language speaks volumes to the power that language holds in our societies and in the world.

PART I: ARABIC TO THE SCHOLAR

This section would be fruitless without the work of Charles A. Ferguson, a pioneer in the study of diglossia in the Arabic language (Huebner 1998). A L2 learner of Arabic and Bengali and an acclaimed sociolinguist, Ferguson was a scholar of “unusual depth, breadth, integrity and kindness” (Huebner 1998:431). His scholarship spanned over 30 years, ranging from language acquisition, to pidginization and creolization of languages, to the sociolinguistic landscape of South Asia. In 1959 Ferguson published his best-known work on register variation within the Arabic language, *Diglossia*, a term he borrowed from the French Arabist William Marçais’ *la diglossie arabe* (Marçais 1930). The scholarship in this paper is in direct dialogue with the fundamental distinctions in the Arabic language outlined by Ferguson in 1959. Since *Diglossia*, arabists have defined a spectrum of spoken Arabic and various pedagogical approaches to TAFL. In the aftermath of World War II, the intentional and targeted teaching of modern foreign languages became of interest for the US government, and towards the end of the 20th century a gradual focus shifted towards the Middle East and Arabic, with 2001 urgently solidifying US interest in TAFL.

Majority of the scholarship presented in this section comes from the late 20th century (1960-90s). Although interest in TAFL has found a renewed interest post-2001, scholars like Mahmoud Al-Batal, Kees Versteegh, and Charles Ferguson still serve important roles in defining the parameters of diglossia in Arabic and TAFL. Since 1959, Ferguson’s work has been affirmed and challenged by arabists and scholars. Namely, scholars of the Arabic language continuum (Blanc 1960, Badawi 1973, Meiseles 1980, Mitchell 1986, El-Hassan 1997) have pushed back on Ferguson’s binary of H and L Arabics. In response, Ferguson has contributed new work to

expand upon his initial frameworks of diglossia in Arabic (Ferguson 1959, 1963), which will be discussed in detail throughout this section.

CHAPTER 1

DIGLOSSIA IN ARABIC

When we learn a foreign language, we expect there to be clear and logical steps in our progress. After hours to years of memorizing conjugations, basic grammar and vocabulary, we hope that our learning will lead us closer to the speech practices and intuition of a NS of that language. Although we may never reach the fluency of a NS in the target language, the proficiency of a NS is aspirational, and anything close or near-native to that marker will be considered a success for the L2 learner.

Chomsky refers to the intuition and speech practices of a NS as “competence” and “performance”, respectively (Chomsky 1965:4). Competence signifies the speaker’s subconscious knowledge of the language, whether that be intricate grammar systems or levels of formality within speech, and performance is the direct reflection and application of that knowledge. In the case of Arabic, competence of a NS grapples with the immense nuance of diglossia within the language. When multiple varieties of a language co-exist within the one titular language, like Arabic, the NS’s competence “covers an extraordinary spectrum of of social, cultural, and geographic variants” where their performance “has him or her tapping into these vast realms of competence developed over many years and responding spontaneously to whatever the dimensions of the speech situation require” (Ryding 1995:225). The prerequisite for linguistic competence in Arabic requires a profound understanding of the diglossic nature of the language. That is, an understanding of the H and L forms, and all the shades of gray in between. This is a major undertaking for a NS speaker of Arabic, let alone an L2 learner.

Diglossia of the Arabic Language has been of interest to scholars across many disciplines. From linguists (Ferguson 1959, Mitchell 1986, Versteegh 1997) to educators (Al-Batal 1992 & 1995, Abboud 1993, Ryding 1995, Younes 1995) to historians (Ibn Khaldoun 1377, Meiseles 1980) and philosophers (Moustafa 2020), the issue of a splintered language has called many brilliant minds to understand and reckon the sociolinguistic consequences of Arabic. Although mentioned in foundational accounts of the region (Ibn Khaldoun 1377), the diglossia of the Arabic language has received larger recognition over the past century (Ferguson 1959, Versteegh 1997).

Beginning with Charles Ferguson's account after the second World War, the two dominant forms of Arabic are categorized as the High (H) variety, referring to the standardized Arabic of the *Qur'an* and formal speak, and the Low (L) variety, referring to the everyday vernaculars used by Arabic speakers (Ferguson 1959). Ferguson's work emphasizes the need to use the appropriate variety with the corresponding context. Below is an adapted table from Ferguson detailing the appropriate context for each register (Ferguson 1959:329).

	H	L
Appropriate Use of Registers in Arabic (Ferguson 1959:329)		
<i>Sermon in church or mosque</i>	X	
<i>Instructions to servants, waiters, workmen, clerks</i>		X
<i>Personal letter</i>	X	
<i>Speech in parliament, political speech</i>	X	
<i>University lecture</i>	X	
<i>Conversation with family, friends, colleagues</i>		X
<i>News broadcast</i>	X	
<i>Radio "soap opera"</i>		X
<i>Newspaper editorial, news story, caption on picture</i>	X	

<i>Caption on political cartoon</i>	X
<i>Poetry</i>	X
<i>Folk literature</i>	X

In addition to pointing to the cases where diglossia occurs, Ferguson lists the three conditions in a given speech community that merit the presence of diglossia within a language (Ferguson 1959:338):

- (1) There is a sizable body of literature in a language closely related to (or even identical with) the natural language of the community, and this literature embodies, whether as source (e.g. divine revelation) or reinforcement, some of the fundamental values of the community;
- (2) Literacy in the community is limited to a small elite; and,
- (3) A suitable period of time, on the order of several centuries, passes from the establishment of (1) and (2).

He notes that these occurrences exist within the Arabic language and several others, including Modern Greek, Swiss German and Haitian Creole (Ferguson 1959).⁹ However, Arabic is known as the archetypal language of “sharp” diglossia (Meiseles 1980:120). Of course, within the categorization of L Arabic, there exists a plethora of dialects, most of which struggle to be

⁹ To some extent, diglossia exists in every language. For American English, Ferguson gives the examples of *illumination* (H) v *light* (L), *purchase* (H) v *buy* (L), *children* (H) v *kid* (L), but notes that these words are drastically more interchangeable in any given context than in their corresponding pairs in diglossic languages (Ferguson 1959:334).

mutually intelligible. That is, a speaker from Morocco who speaks their L variety of *darija* will struggle to understand a Syrian speaking their L variety of *ammiya*.¹⁰

When faced with the challenges of inter-dialect communication, one might assume that the two speakers could switch to Standard Arabic, the H variety that all dialects descend from. The process of dialect mixing and “classicizing” or “leveling” language (i.e., incorporating more Classical/ H Arabic in speech) is called koineization (Blanc 1960, Meiseles 1980, Mitchell 1986). However, many NSs of Arabic struggle to realistically use and understand the H variety in daily life (Ferguson 1959, Meiseles 1980, Mitchell 1986, Soliman 2014). In fact, speakers who use the opposing variety in an inappropriate context, are often seen as an object of ridicule (Ferguson 1959). That is, if a NS checks out of a grocery store using H Arabic, they will likely be met with confusion from their interlocutor. Likewise, if a King gives a speech in the L variety he would not nearly be received with the same amount of respect.

The primary language of Arabic instruction in the US, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), seems to suggest that this H variety may be the “standard”. However, it is widely known across the Arabophone world, and to the surprise of an MSA-educated American, that MSA, or *Fusha*, is “no one’s mother tongue” (Shendy 2019:124). In other words, “the low variety is the mother tongue of all speakers, whereas the high variety is a second language that is almost never used in improvised speech” (Versteegh 1997:190). So, can we consider any of the L varieties of Arabic the standard language? With so many to choose from, this option seems dubious.

¹⁰ Within the colloquial sphere of L varieties of Arabic, the divide between the linguistic features of North African dialects and all other Arabic dialects is the most notable. Although both have their own distinct L varieties that differ in varying degrees from the standardized H variety, they are called by different names. L varieties of North Africa are referred to as *darija* and all other L varieties are referred to as *ammiya*. The standard is referred to as *al-Fusha* regardless of the L variety used in the region.

Scholars and NSs of Arabic may note that certain L forms have dominated over others in cross-dialect communication (Blanc 1960, Mitchell 1986, Abd El-Jawad 1987, Versteegh 1997). For example, when speaking across dialects, NSs will often centralize, or koineize, their language to the Cairene dialect¹¹ (Mitchell 1986). Some suppose this is the case because of the historical widespread exposure NSs have had to the Cairene variety through Egypt's film industry (Versteegh 1997). Other times, NSs may choose to incorporate elements of the widely understood Levantine dialect¹² (Blanc 1960), or NSs may shift their language based on the dominant religiously affiliated dialect of the speech community they find themselves in (Abd El-Jawad 1987, Abu Haidar 1994). Even gender can determine which standard might have more prestige. For example, men are found to use MSA more than women (Abd El-Jawad 1987, Amara 1995). Some scholars hypothesize that this is due to lower education rates among women than men (Blanc 1960), but others disagree, stating that "sex-based variation in Arabic is the same as reported for other speech communities" and therefore does not affect the assigned standard value of the Arabic language based on sex (Ibrahim 1984:12).

Prestige can be associated with the urban dialect, in the case of the Amman dialect within Jordan, or the Baghdad dialect within Iraq. A famous example of urban koineization of speech pertains to the speech patterns of the former Iraqi, President Saddam Hussein. When speaking to the Iraqi public, he would alter his speech to the Muslim Baghdadi dialect, the local prestigious form, despite being a speaker of the non-prestigious village dialect of Tikrit. The prestigious religious vernacular of a speech community can also supersede the more standardized form. For example,

¹¹ The dialect of Cairo, Egypt

¹² The Levant region includes Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon.

in Bahrain the Shiite dialect is closer to MSA (the “standard”), but is used less frequently than the Sunni dialect. As such, the Sunni dialect of Bahrain is seen as more prestigious, despite deviating from the standardized quality of the Shiite dialect (Holes 1983).¹³

Given all these preferences and nuances for which L variety to use, it becomes apparent that “standard” and “prestige” are not synonymous when referring to the sociolinguistics of Arabic, as is often the case of Western languages (Ibrahim 1984). Across the board, NSs of Arabic will admit that MSA is the prestigious form of the Arabic language, second to the pure CA of the *Qur'an* (Abd El-Jawad 1987). However, given the “passive” study and application of MSA in the Arabophone world (Ibrahim 1984:5), there exists a complex relationship between “prestige” and “standard” where Abd El-Jawad describes it as a preference for “nonstandard but locally prestigious features to standard but locally non prestigious features” (Abd El-Jawad 1987:360). Locally prestigious varieties, whether tied to urban centers, regional hegemony, or religious dominance, still exist today in the Arabophone world. These preferences challenge our definition of the “standard” variety of Arabic and what we choose to teach in the classroom.

¹³ For more information on diglossia and religion see (Blanc 1964) for Baghdad and (Holes 1987) for Bahrain.

CHAPTER 2

DIGLOSSIA AND BILINGUALISM: TWO LANGUAGES IN ONE

Given the visible linguistic differences and uses of the L varieties in Arabic, one may ask whether they merit the distinction of independent languages. Oftentimes the debate between dialect versus language is silenced by the politically charged quip: “a language is a dialect with an army and a flag.”¹⁴ In keeping with this rule, the Scandinavian languages have earned their own languages of Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish despite being more or less mutually intelligible. The same can be said for the independent nation states of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan who decided to name their Persianate dialects as their own languages to distinguish national identity from one another, using Farsi, Dari and Tajiki respectively. However, this distinction fails in the case of the 23 sovereign states and territories of the Arabophone world that differ greatly from one another. So, can we not map these national linguistic patterns onto the nation states and territories within the Arabophone world too? That is, why do we not refer to the various Arabics in Oman, Lebanon and Morocco as Omani, Lebni, and Maghrebi respectively, as if they were their own languages?

In the *Extended Discussion* section of Ferguson’s “Problems of Teaching Languages With Diglossia” (Ferguson 1963), Pimsleur argues that a language deserves that distinction if a “sufficient number of levels of discourse [exist within the language in question] so that it is still functioning as a language and evolving as a language” (Ferguson 1963:175). Given this criteria,

¹⁴ Often called the Weinreich witticism, named after Yiddish sociolinguist Max Weinreich, this saying has also been repeated as “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy,” however I use the distinction of the army and a flag, as this is how it was introduced to me by one of my college professors. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_language_is_a_dialect_with_an_army_and_navy).

the dialects of Arabic could not exist on their own as languages because they lack the formal capacities of the H variety (Ferguson 1963). Ferguson counters Pimsleur's claim by noting that we still consider Syriac a language, even though it is a dying language with limited functionality (Ferguson 1963). The case of Arabic remains ambiguous, with scholars divided on the issue of whether Arabic dialects should be considered their own language. Regardless of the label we give dialects, the sharp diglossic nature of Arabic mimics linguistic patterns of bilingualism. As such, two questions arise when discussing the relationship between diglossia and bilingualism: 1) Is diglossia comparable to bilingualism?; and 2) Should we include bilingual tendencies in the spectrum of spoken Arabic?

To address the first part of the question, Ferguson maintains that the difference between bilingualism and diglossia exists within the context of "function" versus "structure" (Ferguson 1963:173). 'Function' refers to the spectrum of formality that exists within one language. That is, within one language, different forms serve different purposes. For example, Parliament would deliver their speech in the H variety of Arabic, while a customer and shopkeeper would communicate with the L variety. 'Structure' refers to the categorical language or dialect the speech community in question uses. Ferguson maintains that because function exists within one structure in Arabic diglossia, we cannot consider it a form of bilingualism. Alternatively, in the case of bilingualism, function exists across two structures, or two agreed upon languages (Ferguson 1963). An additional layer in this discussion takes into account the difference between diglossia as a sociolinguistic and/or linguistic term (Ferguson 1963). When isolated from its sociolinguistic context, "diglossia" does not make sense because linguists originally created the term to describe language in relation to society, not as an entity separate from it, which is what

the field of linguistics tackles. Ferguson supposes that once more work is done on the sociolinguistic nature of diglossia, the linguistic structure imposed on this term will take a “relatively unimportant role” and bilingualism and diglossia will become more synonymous than their linguistic differences make them appear (Ferguson 1963:174).

Although Ferguson ultimately concludes in his paper that diglossia is not synonymous within bilingualism, he fails to take into account the severe divisions between the H and L varieties of the Arabic language that rival our understanding of what is a *language* or a *dialect*. In conversation with Ferguson, Einar Haugen of the University of Wisconsin describes the difference between “bilingual” and “bidialectal” (Ferguson 1963:176). A bilingual individual exists in the space where they can access two separate structures (or languages) that equally have a full range of function (e.g., like a French/ English speaker in Canada). A bidialectal speaker accesses different ranges of function within one structure, like in the Arabic language. The term “bidialectal” takes into account the finite differences within language and the knowledge that a speaker needs to access in order to have full-fledged proficiency of their titular language.¹⁵ It is in this instance that we can call many NSs of Arabic bidialectal in addition to the cases where they might be bilingual (either with French, English or another foreign language).

However, Arabic diglossia is unique because the H variety is not used in everyday conversation.

Ferguson points out that diglossia exists in a variety of languages, like Bengali, Italian, and

¹⁵ Haugen exemplified the case of French and Haitian Creole to describe the bidialectal nature of speakers within a diglossic society. In 1963, when Ferguson presented his research on “Problems of Teaching Languages With Diglossia”, Haitian Creole had not received recognition as a language, and was considered a dialect of French. In 1987, Haiti decreed French Creole as their national language and the Creole dialect of French received international recognition as an independent language from French. Despite the promising labels of “bilingual” and “bidialectal”, the natural evolving landscape of languages will always challenge their boundaries, and will undoubtedly affect our definitions of Arabic in the future.

Persian (Ferguson 1963), but in each of these speech communities, the speakers will learn the standard H variety and access it in daily communication, given the appropriate context. In the case of Arabic, speakers are not using the standard H language with the same functional fluency. The same is the case for other languages with sharp diglossia, like Swiss German speakers (Ferguson 1963). The next question then becomes, what language(s) or dialect(s) are NSs of Arabic using to overcome the functional gaps in their speech. What role does bilingualism play in overcoming issues of diglossia?

To tackle the second part of this question, we must acknowledge the landscape of spoken foreign languages in the Arabophone world. In part due to the legacies of colonialism, and other times attributable to the global rise of English, many Arabic speakers are bilingual (not taking into account the fluency across multiple dialects of Arabic). Within the H and L forms of Arabic, scholars have built a spectrum to represent the diglossic, or multiglossic varieties, which will be discussed in a later section of the paper (Blanc 1960, Badawi 1973, Meiseles 1980).¹⁶ These spectrums vary in detail, purpose and quantification of levels of Arabic, but all of them exclude bilingualism as part of the overarching use and influence in the Arabic language. The results of Haim Blanc's premier study on the "variations of style" within the Arabic language represent the "scale of stylistic functions" discussed in Ferguson's roundtable conversation (Blanc 1960:85, Ferguson 1963). Blanc lists his variations of style in ascending order from the L to the H variety: *1) plain colloquial, 2) koineized colloquial, 3) semi-literary or elevated colloquial, 4) modified classical, and 5) standard classical*. These variations are consistent with Ferguson's

¹⁶ see Chapter 5

single-structure mindset and the functions, or that “styles in variation” comprise the entirety of the Arabic language.

However, there is scholarship that shows the importance and influence of bilingualism in the region. In his study of speech patterns within the Arabic language, Abu Melhim found that NSs tended to code switch when communicating across dialects rather than koineizing their speech within the Arabic language (Abu Melhim 1992). His study consisted of 10 participants, 5 female and 5 male, from Jordan, Morocco, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Abu Melhim found that participants code switched within the Arabic language 2.12 times/ minute and code switched between shared foreign languages (French and English) 2.65 times/ minute. Critics of this study argue that the results were skewed because all of the participants were graduates from American universities, which would highly influence their rate of codeswitching to English (Soliman 2014). Regardless of opposition to Abu Melhim’s findings, his research speaks to the larger influence of foreign languages’ role in the Arabophones’ methods of overcoming challenges in cross-dialect communication.

The shortcoming of any kind of spectrum offered by scholars to detail the varieties that exist within the Arabic language is that not all NSs have equal command of these varieties. As Dutch Linguist Kees Versteegh notes, “In extreme cases, most speakers know only one variety, a non-prestigious colloquial kind of language, whereas a small elite uses a stilted variety of a cultural language, mostly an imported one” (Versteegh 1997:190). A primary example of this observation is the case of former French colonies in the region. In colonial Algeria and Morocco, the majority of the Arab population spoke Arabic and possibly only a “smattering of French,”

while the elite had been raised and educated in French and lost fluency in Arabic (Versteegh 1997:190). In addition, French colonial power had suppressed the education of H Arabic, banning CA courses from Algerian school systems and replacing them with Algerian dialect curriculum (Salomone 2022). During this time, the French introduced the Latin script to replace the Arabic script in places like Egypt during the nineteenth century (Versteegh 1997). This de-Arabization of education during the colonial period threatened pan-Arab unity under the shared H variety and script of the Arabic language. I will explore in more depth the themes of external language influence in the post-colonial francophone countries of the Middle East in *Part II: Arabic to the Native Speaker*. The next chapter will speak to the evolution of the Modern variety of CA, MSA, which Arabophones consider the uniting language of the region, despite its limited use in daily life.

CHAPTER 3

THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN STANDARD ARABIC

In 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt bringing with him the ideas of the French Enlightenment. Previously isolated from the political and cultural revolutions of Western Europe, the Middle East had not grappled with the ideas of constitutional government, man-made laws, or citizenship to a nation-state (Versteegh 1997). These new political, legislative and nationalistic concepts contradicted the monarchical, religiously-oriented law and pan-Arab stateless *umma*¹⁷ that had represented this region since the *Jahiliyya*. In reaction to the French Enlightenment, Arabs created the word *wāṭān* to describe the nation-state, a word that had not existed in Arabic before the 19th century (Versteegh 1997). This new vocabulary threatened the supra-national *umma* that dominated the pre-Napoleonic period in the Arabophone world (Versteegh 1997). This perceived divide in the cultural and political practices of the West and the Middle East, often called *orientalism*, or a curated distancing from “the other” by the West, suggests that there are insurmountable differences between the West and Islam, a theoretical debate that has continued well into today (Said 1978).

The introduction of the French Enlightenment to the MENA region led to a restructuring of the Arabic Language and a rise in nationalism. Under Ottoman rule, CA lost its role as an administrative language. With an aversion to Turkish (less than 1% of Arabs under Ottoman rule learned Turkish), Arabic speakers were siloed into speaking their own dialects and using translators to overcome communication barriers with Turkish officials (Versteegh 1997). By the

¹⁷ The greater Muslim Community

end of the 19th century, ideas of self governance and civil rights informed by the revolutions in Western Europe, prompted a rise in nationalism among Arabs and a demand for Arabic to see a greater presence in the legal and political systems of the Ottoman Empire. Eventually, the Arabs would overthrow the Ottomans in the Great Arab Revolt in 1916 with the help of the British and reinstate the *de jure* application of Arabic in society (Versteegh 1997).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the revival of the Arabic language had turned a new page. Commonly referred to as *al-Nahda*, or the “awakening” or “revival”, Arabs started to implement the modern ideas of the French Enlightenment into their political systems and modernized their language to reflect those changes (Versteegh 1997). Modeled after the Académie Française, the Academy of Cairo and the Academy of Damascus established themselves as pioneers to modernize the Arabic language. The goals of the Academies were two-fold: 1) to guard the integrity of the Arabic language and preserve it from dialectal and foreign influence, and 2) to adapt the Arabic language to meet the needs of modern times (Versteegh 1997:178). The Academies of Iraq and Jordan, more recent additions, strive to maintain the integrity of MSA, but are often of secondary importance to the Cairo and Damascus Academies. These academies rarely see pan-Arab collaboration and prefer to work individually (Versteegh 1997).

The restructuring of the Arabic language to reflect modern times has been met with a general plea to simplify the grammar and language from its tedious Classical form. However, these wishes have been met with little resolve. Aside from the lexical changes made by the Academies over the past three hundred years, MSA is still notorious for its linguistic complexities and intimidating grammar (Versteegh 1997). Given the frail educational systems that emerged after

the fall of the Ottoman Empire, few Arab students acquired the standard H language with ease (Versteegh 1997). The high rates of illiteracy in MSA across the Arab world have continued to contribute to the pervasive issues of diglossia in the Arabic language (Amara 1995). MSA has seen a passive role in Arab society, where the “overwhelming majority of Arabs...have made no serious or meaningful attempt to make this variety of Arabic become the most prestigious variety in [their] daily life,” (Ibrahim 1984:5) instead relying heavily on their individual dialects or mixed varieties of Arabic, known as Educated Standard Arabic, to complete most linguistic skills.

CHAPTER 4

EDUCATED STANDARD ARABIC

In the face of unintelligibility across dialects and inutility of the formal Arabic, arabists have identified a third form of Arabic that incorporates the fundamental aspects of the H and L varieties. This variety has received various names, including the Educated Spoken Variety (ESV) (Amara 1995), Formal Spoken Arabic (FSA) (Ryding 1995), Cultured Colloquial (*Aamiyyatu lmuthaqafin*) (Badawi 1973), or Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA) (Mitchell 1986). This middle Arabic, regardless of name, relies heavily on the process of koineization, or the mixing of varieties. Oftentimes koineization will be associated with classicizing, or assimilating speech to the H variety of Arabic (Blanc 1960, Meiseles 1980), but the process of koineization as seen through ESA does not always abide by any kind of standardization. ESA is fluid and is always changing based on the immediate needs of a speaker and their interlocutor. ESA does not exist in a standard form, as is the case for the H or the L varieties of Arabic, and instead exists on a continuum (Blanc 1960, Badawi 1973, Meiseles 1980, Mitchell 1986).

ESA seeks to actualize pan-Arab communication and overcome intelligibility gaps between speakers of different dialects. The mixed variety is typically reflected in the spoken form of the language, and requires an educated population with knowledge of the H variety (Mitchell 1986).

Mitchell summarizes the goals of an ESA speaker:

- 1) To proclaim themselves as educated men and women and therefore to converse on topics beyond the scope of a given regional vernacular;

- 2) To 'share' or commune sympathetically with with other Arabs of similar background, whether of their own or other nationalities;
- 3) To promote the forms of the inter-Arabic koine that are required to meet the pressures of modernization, urbanization, industrialization, mass education, and internationalism;
- 4) To fulfill the more private functions of speech and to satisfy the requirements of local patriotism or loyalty.

(Mitchell 1986:8)

These goals require a certain degree of education from the interlocutors to converse at a higher level than the L varieties can afford. As for the pan-Arab ideal, ESA offers a hopeful solution to some of the intelligibility issues faced in pan-Arab settings (Schulties 2014). The famous pan-Arab Children's TV show *Iftaah ya Simsim* employed the lexicogrammatical structures and goals of ESA and succeeded in overcoming barriers between the H and L varieties in spoken Arabic (Versteegh 1997). In regards to the third goal, the call to modernization, Mitchell fails to take into account foreign languages that may already be compensating for Arabic's lack of continuity in these expressions. For example, the English language has taken the world by storm. Arabophones of the younger generations have turned to English in order to communicate about topics that are inarticulable in their colloquial varieties (Abu Melhim 1992).

Although the mixed varieties of Arabic outlined by arabists inherently rely on a certain amount of variability (Blanc 1960, Badawi 1973, Meiseles 1980), Mitchell offers some standard practices for ESA. For example, ESA seeks to exclude the more unforgiving grammatical structures of MSA like case endings, dual verbal forms, and indication of gender in the 2/3rd

person plural. In addition, ESA prefers the colloquial numbers, negation structures, and modal clitic prefixes in the non-past tense (i.e., the *b* of the Levantine dialect or the *n* of the Maghrebi dialect) (Mitchell 1986). The inclusion of these vernacular standards contributes to a unique dimension of ESA that strives to include national or regional identity across standardization efforts (Mitchell 1986).

The practice of creating and speaking a mixed variety is most intuitive among NS of the language. L2 learners of Arabic will have to navigate an indeterminate amount of variability in the language to utilize and understand a mixed variety (Meiseles 1980, Mitchell 1986). An important part of this navigation for a L2 speaker is understanding the threshold between stigmatized and unstigmatized pronunciations and lexicogrammatical features of the Arabic language (Figure 4.1). Often this threshold will take into account sociolinguistic differences as it relates to class (Mitchell 1986), religion (Abd El-Jawad 1987, Versteegh 1997), or the rural/urban divide (Ferguson 1963, Mitchell 1986, Abd El-Jawad 1987).

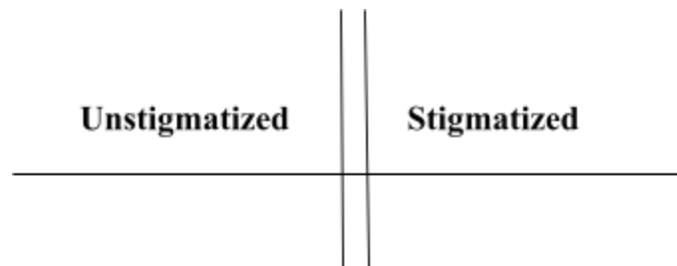


Figure 4.1 Threshold between unstigmatized versus stigmatized language (Mitchell 1986:16)

Within this diagram, a speaker of ESA will seek to avoid all stigmatized language and maintain their register and style of speech on the ‘unstigmatized’ side. However, within unstigmatized

language there exists a range of nuance as it relates to levels of formality. Mitchell assigns these terms as Formal (F) and Informal (-F). Within the -F, there exists a subdivision, or gradient, of Careful language (-Fa) and Casual language (-Fb), where each step strays further from the pure F (Mitchell 1986). This is the challenge for ESA speakers; too informal and their speech will start to reflect the tendencies of the L vernaculars and too formal and they will rely too heavily on the H vernacular. This indication of “high-flown” language is showcased on the far left of the diagram.

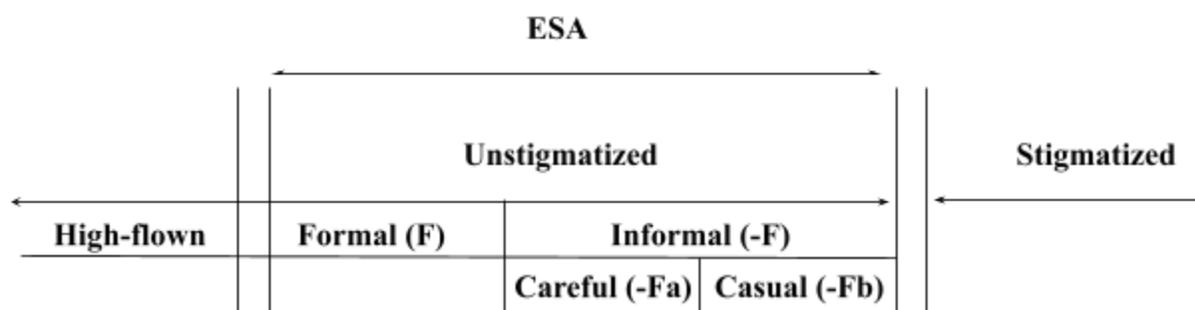


Figure 4.2 Formal (F) versus Informal (-F) and additional language subdivisions under the ESA spectrum (Mitchell 1986:17)

Considering the unique feature of sharp diglossia within the Arabic language and the intricate hybridization of ESA of the H and L varieties, the acquisition and application of such a profound language is a daunting task for an L2 speaker. ESA seeks to soften the conflict of intelligibility between H and L varieties, but in turn it has created more complexity for the learners of the Arabic language. Arabists have tried to establish uniformity for the mixed variety of Arabic (Blanc 1960, Badawi 1973, Meiseles 1980, Mitchell 1986), but there will always be an inherent amount of diversity in ESA, as is wont for improvised speech among NSs (Mitchell 1986). This lack of standardization, or divergence from the H variety of the language, has historically angered prescriptivists and purists of the language (Abu Absi 1986). The boundaries set by

Mitchell bring an ESA-centric perspective to the acute degrees of change that exist within diglossic language. The next chapter will explore the continuum that ESA exists on based on three scholars' defined spectrums of spoken Arabic.

CHAPTER 5

THE ARABIC LANGUAGE CONTINUUM

Between the H and L varieties of Arabic exists an abundance of mixed varieties that have constituted an Arabic Language Continuum in the eyes of many scholars (Blanc 1960, Badawi 1973, Meiseles 1980, El-Hassan 1997). Each scholar's outlined continuum attempts to mark the titular differences between the kinds of Arabic that make up the space between the pure H and L varieties, but each differ slightly in recognition of which mixed varieties merit markers on the spectrum.

Haim Blanc's continuum emerged from an auditory study conducted on several educated NSs of Arabic at the Army Language School in Monterey, California (Blanc 1960). Of the four speakers, two were Iraqi, speaking predominantly in the prestigious Muslim Baghdadi dialect; one was from Jerusalem; and the final speaker was from Aleppo, Syria, speaking a highly koineized dialect borrowing from Beirut and Damascus dialects. The five categories of Arabic derived from Blanc's study include:

- 1) *Standard Arabic*. Any variety of Classical Arabic without dialectal admixtures.
- 2) *Modified Classical*. Classical Arabic with dialectal admixtures.
- 3) *Semiliterary* or *Elevated Colloquial*. Any plain or koineized colloquial that is classicized beyond the 'mildly formal' range.
- 4) *Koineized Colloquial*. Any plain colloquial into which leveling devices have been more or less liberally introduced.
- 5) *Plain Colloquial*. Refers to any local dialect, within which the speaker may select 'informal' or 'mildly formal features.'

(modified from Blanc 1960:85)

Some scholars have questioned the accuracy of the ESA studied by Blanc, criticizing his sample size of NSs as representing a “homogeneous corpus” (Meiseles 1980:118). That is, his selected speakers represented similar regional varieties and failed to take into account the Maghrebi, Egyptian or Gulf Dialects that represent further divisions within the L varieties of spoken language. Because of this narrow scope in his research, El-Hassan argued that Blanc’s ESA was not an accurate indicator of a mixed variety between the H and L types (El-Hassan 1997). El-Hassan proposed another ESA, which Meiseles has critiqued as being too formalized. Meiseles called El-Hassan’s ESA *Oral Literary Arabic* (OLA) (Meiseles 1980).¹⁸ Meiseles incorporates the rifts between Blanc and El-Hassan’s mixed Arabics in the following continuum:

1. *Literary Arabic* or *Standard Arabic*. No difference is recognized for practical purposes between CA and MSA. Blanc’s ‘Standard Arabic’.
2. *Oral Literary Arabic (OLA)*. The spoken variety of a somewhat infelicitously termed ‘substandard Arabic’, infelicitous since ‘substandard’ has unintended pejorative connotations. OLA has a written counterpart in informal written Arabic (IWA). OLA is an ‘Arab’s attempt to speak classical Arabic’ and is not to be identified with any orthoepic rendering of CA, which belongs to (1).
3. *Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA)*. A vernacular type characterized by the aspirations of its speakers to get rid of local features through a process of koineization and/or borrowings from literary Arabic (cf. Blanc). It is the current informal language used among educated Arabs, fulfilling their daily language needs, also the main means of inter-regional communication. The variety is marked by a liberal introduction of leveling and classicizing devices to basic vernacular structure.
4. *Plain Vernacular*. Exclusively spoken but widely ramified and common only in lowly informal conversation. Often abandoned in favor of any ‘higher’ variety of Arabic, first of all ESA.

(Meiseles 1980 as adapted by Mitchell 1986)

¹⁸ For more information on the differences between OLA and ESA see (Meiseles 1975).

Similarly, Badawi's five varieties of Arabic as are represented in his study of the spoken Arabic in Egypt:

1. *Fusha tturatha*: 'The classic of the literary (Arabic) of the heritage', otherwise *classical Arabic*. Traditional classical as taught, for example, at Al-Azhar.¹⁹
2. *Fusha lzaSar*: 'the classical of the times' or 'modern literary Arabic' or *modern standard Arabic*. Classical as modified in response to the demands of modern civilization. Appropriate for radio news bulletins, political speeches, scientific writing etc.
3. *Aamiyyatu lmuthaqafin*: 'the colloquial of the cultured' or *cultured colloquial*. Formal speech used for serious discussion without reference to any written text.
4. *Aamiyyatu lmutanawwariin*: 'the colloquial of the enlightened' or *educated colloquial*. Influenced by contemporary life but not by CA/MSA grammar. The everyday conversational style of educated persons with family and neighbors.
5. *Aamiyyatu lummiyyiin*: 'the colloquial of the illiterate' or *plain colloquial*. 'Mother tongue'. Uninfluenced by CA/MSA or by modern civilization. Occurs on tv in children's shows and in situation comedies.

(Badawi 1973 as adapted by Mitchell 1986)

Across each of the major outlined spectrums, the named scholars seem to start and end in relatively synonymous places, reflecting Ferguson's overarching diglossia (Ferguson 1959). They start with the H variety, although differing in whether they combine CA and MSA (Blanc 1960, Meiseles 1980), or divide the styles into two levels (Badawi 1973), and predictably they all end with the L varieties, which are recognized unanimously as the last level in the continuum. In painting the gradient of Arabic from H to L, each scholar tackles the continuum with different degrees of differentiation. Blanc introduces the infiltration of the L varieties earlier on than his counterparts. Meanwhile, Meiseles offers a clear divide between H influenced (1 and 2) and L

¹⁹ Located in Cairo, Egypt, considered the most prestigious university for Islamic learning

influenced (3 and 4) varieties. All continuums are concerned with the divisions that occur when speaking is the vehicle for language use, and offer diversions based on the style. As Mitchell notes, some continuums are more concerned with descriptive aspects of the language (Blanc 1960), while others detail the sociolinguistic aspects of each level (Badawi 1973), of which I would add Meisele's spectrum to the list of sociolinguistic work as well.

As most scholars have created a spectrum of Arabic varieties that name around four to five distinct spoken types, Blanc makes an important distinction about the acute variability of any represented continuum:

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that, once one gets beyond homespun conversation in relaxed colloquial within a single dialect, it is the exception rather than the rule to find any sustained segment of discourse in a single one of the style varieties alluded to. Speakers tend to pass from one to the other, sometimes within a single sentence, so that over-all stylistic characterization of a given segment of discourse is a complex and delicate matter, quite beyond the usual techniques of descriptive linguists.

(Blanc 1960:85)

It is with this spirit that all scholars are in agreement. Variability and diversity will always exist between the poles of H and L Arabic. This deeper understanding of the varieties of Arabic has added greater detail to Ferguson's initial binary of diglossia (El-Hassan 1997). The infinite amount of variability that exists within and between each level has angered purists and classicists of the language (Abu Absi 1986) and has caused greater confusion for L2 learners of Arabic. Given the articulation of the multitude of Arabics that exist in the Arabophone world, educators

and scholars must devote their attention to vigorous language planning for current and future learners of the language (Meiseles 1980).

CHAPTER 6

TEACHING ARABIC AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE US

"The post-9/11 era represents the Sputnik moment for Arabic...An era of increased national attention to Arabic as a language vital to national interest and security."

(Al-Batal 2007:271)

From the conclusion of WWII to the aftermath of 9/11, the landscape of TAFL has seen the immense influence and direction of the US government (Daughery 2011, Moustafa 2020). During the Cold War, the US perceived the Soviet advancements in ideology, science, and space as a threat to American security and values on the world stage. In response to their apprehension, the Eisenhower Administration passed the 1958 National Defense Education Act. Under this act over \$1 billion was directed towards the advancement of American education in the fields of science, mathematics, and modern languages that would prioritize and maintain a sense of national security (National Defense Education Act, Daugherty 2011). This act was responsible for creating several of the well known TAFL programs today, including The National Language Flagship Program, The Boren Scholarship, the National Security and Language Initiative and other Foreign Language and Area Program grants (Daughtery 2011).

In 1958, the US government prioritized the increase in domestic studies of Russian, but following the events of September 11, 2001, this hyperfocus shifted towards TAFL (Al-Batal 2007). Following Al-Qaeda's attacks, certain political parties believed that 9/11 was a result of the "inadequacy of human resources equipped with the necessary language skills to protect the

country's national security" (Kramersch 2005:35). As a result of the serious deficit in foreign language learning and application in the US education system, the Bush Administration launched the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) in 2006. The advancement in the funding and establishment of critical language programs²⁰ came out of a conference in Washington D.C. attended by higher education professionals and the US government officials to engage federal interest in the American education post-9/11 (Daugherty 2011). Many scholars believe that increased federal funding in foreign language instruction threatens academic freedom and agency (Dawson 2007, Bowman 2010, Legucha and Tierney 2010, Daugherty 2011, Moustafa 2020). Equally of concern is that the US government's funding of TAFL perpetuates US dominance and ideological tendencies that fail to benefit the goals of intercultural communication and diplomacy that the NSLI and critical language programs sought to create in the first place (Pratt 2009, Rafael 2009, Moustafa 2020).

In bolstering Critical Language Studies, educators under the guidance of federal funding have implemented proficiency-based language learning models in their curricula to fast-track students' learning (Al-Batal 1992, Abboud 1993, Moustafa 2020). More often than not, a proficiency-based pedagogy has been synonymous with the sole teaching of MSA, excluding the L varieties that showcase a wider array of variability and diversity in the language (Dickins and Watson 2006, Soliman 2014). ESA has seen less attention in schools as a form of Arabic that fosters all four skills of language learning (i.e., reading, listening, speaking, and writing) and has seen continuous debate from scholars whether to be included in the American education or not (Belnap 1978, Al-Batal 1992, Ryding 1995, Younes 1995). Although enrollment in Arabic

²⁰ Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, Farsi, among others

courses has seen an increase since 9/11, students' proficiency levels have still struggled to meet a near-native level (Holes 2003).

Moustafa refers to the negligence of realistic acquisition and application of Arabic in American classrooms as perpetuating the growing “neo-liberal” and “terror rhetoric” in the US post-9/11 (Moustafa 2020:2). Because the relationship between Foreign Language Instruction (FLI) and national security has intensified, stereotyping and prejudiced beliefs against those from the Arabophone world have persisted (Moustafa 2020). The US government and federal funding initiatives have paid little attention to understanding the ethical implications of training students with skills that have the potential to assert harmful US dominance abroad (Daugherty 2011).

Historically, language learning has reflected the ideological interests of governments (Janks 2010). Following the inciting events of the Cold War, the United States perpetuated their ideal of capitalism, and its modern relative, neoliberalism, has persisted in the 21st century with a prioritization of open markets and creating environments and policies for the gains of maximum profit. This has led to the marketization of social fields, including education and FLI (Bernstein et. al 2015). For example, the proficiency movement in TAFL has neglected larger and more comprehensive understandings of the Arabic language and culture that are reflections of neoliberal values (Moustafa 2020). In place of curricula that explores the diglossic nature of the Arabic language, federally funded TAFL has prioritized MSA, standardized tests, and vocabulary sets revolving around tourism, business, and political debates (Moustafa 2020). Although useful up to a certain threshold, this teaching style has lost sight of the students' interests in learning Arabic (Ferugson 1963, Belnap 1987, Al-Batal 1992).

In the face of the challenges that diglossic language instruction and the proficiency-based pedagogies pose, students' intentions and goals behind learning Arabic have been a salient guiding force for TAFL educators (Belnap 1987, Al-Batal 1992 & 1995, Ryding 1995). A well-known study conducted by Kirk Belnap explores themes of students' desires, feedback, and curiosities in the sphere of TAFL (Belnap 1987). Although this study was conducted before 9/11, the landscape of TAFL has changed only slightly since then. Educators still predominantly use the textbook that was released only a couple years following Belnap's survey (*Al-Kitaab*, Brustad et. al 1994) and TAFL curricula still assumes that students will learn the L variety during their study abroad experience (as detailed by Ryding 1995). In place of the instruction of L varieties, students are still predominantly, and *only*, learning MSA through the proficiency-based methodology (Moustafa 2020).²¹

The students surveyed by Belnap came from top institutions in the US and Canada in FLI, including Brigham Young University, Georgetown University, Indiana University, McGill University, and University of California Berkeley. Among the findings from the survey, Belnap seeks to understand *why* students are taking Arabic. The most popular reasons among students for taking Arabic included a desire to learn more about literature and culture and to travel in the region and to talk to NSs. Other reasons included the desire to read the *Qur'an*/religious texts, to prepare for a career, to get in touch with one's heritage, or for a graduation requirement. Students stressed the importance of speaking, reading, and listening skills over writing (Belnap 1987:33-34). A staggering statistic from Belnap's study sheds light on the gap in diglossic language teaching. With most colleges and universities prioritizing or solely dedicating

²¹ I explore the modern landscape of TAFL in greater detail in Chapter 12 and 13.

instruction to MSA, students missed out on exposure and proficiency in the various spoken dialects of the Arabophone world. Nearly 50% of students reported that instruction of the colloquial language was “important” to “very important” in their Arabic education. Most students expressed an interest in Levantine or Egyptian Arabic (Belnap 1987:39).

Another important statistic gathered from Belnap’s study is that of high attrition rates. That is, more than 50% of students indicated that they had dropped out of their Arabic course between the first and second year (Belnap 1987). This disengagement with Arabic is often attributed to the heavy grammar-based style of instruction that MSA warrants (Al-Batal 1995). And to further frustration, many students found that their instruction in MSA failed to give them the tools needed to communicate with NSs (Belnap 1987). MSA has benefitted students in immersive settings, such as the Middlebury Arabic Language Program, where students have successfully acquired colloquial Arabic with ease after a rigorous education in MSA, but this style of teaching is still not serving the general needs of students across Belnap’s institutions (Belnap 1987).

Belnap stresses the importance of the instructor’s due diligence in understanding their students’ motivations for studying Arabic:

Beyond the pros and cons of teaching spoken MSA, which certainly needs to be better researched, the individual instructor needs to come to terms with the students' wishes and their purposes in taking Arabic. A student's third year of MSA is hardly the time to discover that the program is not going to help him or her to develop the ability to conduct field interviews for dissertation research... Clearly, Arabic will never be everyone's favorite course. However, it seems there is much to be done that could make learning Arabic more palatable and interesting to those who are truly interested in using Arabic

but who are not necessarily given to rapture over grammatical details. It is not that the details are unimportant; it is how they are presented.

(Belnap 1987:41)

Although Belnap's study was completed before the rush of government funding post-9/11, its findings are still indicative of the larger trends and frustrations with TAFL from students' perspectives. The next chapter will look at historical pedagogical methods that have informed the feedback of L2 students in Belnap's survey.

CHAPTER 7

PEDAGOGICAL METHODS FOR ARABIC AS A DIGLOSSIC LANGUAGE

The most well accepted pedagogy for TAFL in the US over the past sixty years has been the audio-lingual approach, or the communicative method (Ferguson 1963, Daugherty 2011). As a method that prioritizes communicative practices of language learning, this method prioritizes several factors:

- Initial emphasis on listening/speaking, followed by reading/writing;
- NSs used as model speakers;
- Drills focused on basic phonology and grammatical patterns are used for learners to develop automatic responses similar to that of NS;
- Instructor knowledgeable about sound orientation in linguistics and drills are prepared on the basis of sound linguistic analysis;
- Intensive learning basis with at least ten contact hours per week; and
- Audio-visual materials constitute a great part of the coursework.

(adapted from Ferguson 1963:165)

The major shortcoming of this model is that it does not take into account the issue of diglossia within the Arabic language, or the idea that two (or an infinite number of varieties) exist in one language (Ferguson 1963). Although the primary TAFL methods practiced in the US solely focus on the teaching of MSA (H variety), the past forty years has seen massive production from scholars who wish to bridge the gaps in diglossic language teaching and implement colloquial instruction into their pedagogy (Belnap 1987, Al-Batal 1992 & 1995, Younes 1995, Ryding 1995).

Often, scholars will explore three tracks in TAFL for achieving the integration of colloquial instruction:

- I. Dialect First and MSA Later
- II. MSA First and Dialect Later
- III. MSA and Dialect Simultaneously

I. Dialect First and MSA Later

This approach is rarely seen in TAFL, and has only seen growing popularity since after WWII (Al-Batal 1992). This approach models how a NS learns the Arabic language; they learn their dialect at home and then upon enrollment in schooling, they will acquire MSA instruction. This sequence of instruction would also solve the large disconnect in TAFL that many students face when communicating with NSs during their time abroad. Ryding describes this as the great “assumption”:

Whether or not it was ever explicitly stated, the assumption was that “when the student gets to the Arab world, she will ‘pick up’ the dialect of whatever region she visits, and develop ‘fluency’ on her own.” We now know that what we were doing was having the students “learn” one language variant in the classroom, and expecting them to “acquire” another variant in the real world.

(Ryding 1995:226)

However, promising this solution to prioritizing dialect may be, with the restriction of time that most TAFL courses must abide by (less than 10 hours of instruction per week), students will be limited in their language subskills. That is, they will be able to speak and listen in the L variety

well, but will struggle with reading and writing, which are typically the skills associated with the H variety (Younes 1995).

II. MSA First and Dialect Later

This is the most common approach in TAFL. Supporters of this approach argue that by teaching students the “harder” variety first, they will be able to acquire the “easier” dialects later with much more ease after knowing the grammar and structure of the language through the H variety. Al-Hamad, an avid supporter of this approach, compares learning MSA first to summiting “the peak of a mountain” with the ability to access any of the “low sides” of the mountain, or dialects, with great ease after establishing a strong base in the H variety (Al-Hamad 1983:95).²² Purists would commend the sentiment made by Al-Hamad (Abu Absi 1986), but the MSA-favored approach still has not proven to provide these benefits of acquisition from the H to the L varieties (Younes 1995). Scholars even argue that oral reinforcement of MSA is “artificial”, and fails to mimic any tangible benefits of learning the language in the same way the colloquial varieties facilitate (Williams 1990:46).

III. MSA and Dialect Simultaneously

This approach can be achieved in one of two ways: either through two separate courses or through one course which integrates the two varieties through the same curriculum. The simultaneous approach is often what is used during study abroad programs and is the main approach at the early stages of the language instruction at the Foreign Service Institute, the DoS’s foreign language school for diplomats and Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) (Younes 1995).

²² I will critique this analogy in greater detail in Chapter 14.

In his proposed *Integrated Curriculum for Elementary Arabic*, Younes favors the simultaneous approach. He prefers a communication-based approach over the heavy grammar of MSA instruction, and prioritizes the acquisition of language sub-skills in the following order: listening, speaking, reading, writing (Younes 1995:238). Actions of receiving (listening and reading) are prioritized over their producing counterparts (speaking and writing), and fronting skills that reflect the communicative-model coming first (listening and speaking). Colloquial instruction is given in the Levantine dialect and MSA instruction is interspersed throughout. The main drawback of this style of teaching is the inherent amount of overwhelm and confusion students will encounter through the simultaneous approach (Parkinson 1985, Younes 1995). Of particular importance is the boundary between written and spoken forms of language that Parkinson describes through the negative particle “not” in Arabic: “It is *very* difficult to incorporate the colloquial into a Standard Arabic class without leaving the students hopelessly confused. Arabic is hard enough without having to remember from the first day that you *say* ‘msh’ but you can’t *write* it” (Parkinson 1985:27, emphasis mine). Through his Elementary Arabic simultaneous learning instruction, Younes found these errors in his students’ work, typically with the L variety occurring in H variety contexts and among high frequency words like “but”, “good” and “not” or in Arabic, *bs*, *kwais* and *msh* (Younes 1995:240).

Regardless of which approach educators use, there has been a common belief among TAFL educators that the sole teaching of MSA has been a “very serious shortcoming” for proficiency-based learning models (Al-Batal 1992:295). Colloquial language will need to be integrated into TAFL with more intentionality. Al-Batal adds that all learning should be maintained in the same script (Al- Batal 1992). That is, transliteration should not be used outside

of early introductions to pronunciation of the language. The Arabic script should be the primary tool for written communication to “[help] students maintain the sense that they are dealing with one language, not two” (Al-Batal 1992:299) as TAFL educators navigate the diglossic language space.

As for the question of which kind of L variety to teach in Arabic courses, opinions differ. The Foreign Service Institute, the premier space for the simultaneous approach to TAFL in the US, has taught a wide range of L vernaculars based on regional preferences, including the Levantine, Syrian, and Iraqi dialects (Al-Batal 1992). Although factors like availability and quality of instructional materials, relative number of NSs, intelligibility across the Arabophone world, and ease of transition to the H variety should be taken into account when choosing which L variety to teach, Ferguson suggests the dialects of major urban centers as a focal points and a compromise among these concerns (Ferguson 1963). The L varieties include: Cairene (Egyptian), Baghdadi (Iraqi), Damascus-Beirut-Jerusalem (Syrian), and Rabat-Sale-Fes-Meknes (North Moroccan) (Ferguson 1963:168). Further recommendations for university-level instruction suggest focusing on the first three L vernaculars listed, and when possible, alternating between the three to give a well rounded understanding of L varieties (Ferguson 1963). In the case of the Moroccan variety, instruction of this L vernacular can be reserved for a more specific focus on North African studies, as the Maghrebi dialect is characterized by conspicuous degrees of incomprehensibility with the other dialects (Ferguson 1963).

Despite the critical tone of TAFL showcased thus far, the US has seen a great deal of progress over the years as it relates to diglossic language teaching. In 1993, Georgetown launched the first

Formal Spoken Arabic (FSA) program for students who have completed one to three years of MSA. This course offered a rigorous opportunity for L2 learners of Arabic to engage in greater depth with spoken Arabic and its realistic applications in the Arabophone world (Ryding 1995). In addition, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines have changed to include a broader recognition of H and L varieties in the Arabic language. Now, students of the higher and superior levels of proficiency are expected to “show ability to comprehend and to communicate in both [MSA and colloquial dialect], with at least partial awareness of appropriate choice depending on the situation involved” (Ryding 1995:226-7). This differs however in the context of the professionalization of Arabic, which I will explore further in Chapter 12.

The momentum made in expanding TAFL to the instruction of L varieties in the past forty years has also caused some scholars to discourage introducing diglossia to L2 learners at all:

It is my personal opinion, and that of a number of colleagues here and elsewhere, judging from conversations with them, that we should call for a *moratorium* for the time being on further discussion of [diglossia]. There is so much that still remains to be done that we cannot afford to spend our energies on this single issue. This is not that it is not important; it is, and critically so. However, full-blown discussions of diglossia in Arabic language teaching should await more data, new insights, and the results of further and more widespread experimentation.

(Abboud 1993:31, emphasis mine)

This claim was made in the early 90s by Abboud after a surge of progress made in TAFL (Abboud 1993). The 80s and 90s saw a massive output of scholarship and direction from the American Association of Teachers of Arabic (AATA)’s leading journal *Al-Arabiyya*, and the

creation of prestigious TAFL programs like the Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) and Middlebury's Arabic Language School. 1993 saw the first TAFL instruction of a hybrid variety course at Georgetown, and 1994 would see the publication of the premier TAFL textbook *Al-Kitaab* (Brustad et al. 1994, Ryding 1995). In many ways, Abboud's focus was in service to building the momentum TAFL had built over the past twenty years through proficiency-based learning models. When scholars include the complicated matters of diglossia in the conversation about TAFL, the path remains unclear (Ferguson 1963, Al-Batal 1992, Younes 1995, Ryding 1995). Regardless of the uncertainty of how to teach a diglossic language, staunch supporters of its inclusion in TAFL speak to larger truths about authentic teaching practices:

The recent movement toward proficiency-based instruction in Arabic raises some serious questions. How can we reconcile the principles of proficiency with the facts of diglossia in our classrooms? Can we claim that our programs are truly proficiency-based when we continue to emphasize the teaching of only one variety of Arabic, namely, MSA, in contexts that are sometimes inauthentic?

(Al-Batal 1992:303)

Intent and ideology of practice are necessary factors to consider when understanding what the motives of TAFL are in the US, and how authentic and applicable the education of MSA is for students. This issue, however isolated it is in the Arabophone sphere, is one of serious concern for the integrity of Critical Language Studies in the US.

The following section engages with the perspectives of NSs and their use of the Arabic language. The nuances in language use that I explore with my NS informants must guide the directions for TAFL in the US in following with the ideals of the communicative, or audio-lingual pedagogies of the aforementioned scholars. Part II seeks to answer questions like:

How is H Arabic used by NSs in Arabophone societies? What are the perceived differences of written and spoken Arabic for a NS? How do NSs communicate across dialects? And, what does ethno-linguistic unity of the H variety in the Arabophone world look like in competition with the endless linguistic diversity of the L varieties?

PART II: ARABIC TO THE NATIVE SPEAKER

“I think I can reasonably speculate that the competence and performance of a native speaker of Arabic may represent the most elaborate psycholinguistic capacity in the world today.”

(Ryding 1995:225)

The initial stages of my research focused on the ways NSs of Arabic use their language. As the audio-lingual and communicative methods have informed FLI, it is important to understand what the basis for Arabic language production and use for a NS is in the context of TAFL. I had the pleasure of speaking with eight NSs of Arabic during my research. In our conversations, we explored a broad range of themes ranging from inter-dialect communication to questions of Arab identity in post-colonial francophone countries to the nuances of spoken and written forms within diglossic language.

Of course, the audio-lingual logic of TAFL pedagogy stands in the face of the abundance of linguistic diversity represented by NSs of Arabic. My NS informants hail from six countries and territories in the Arabophone world: Ahmed, Alae, and Kenza are from Morocco; Omar is from Yemen; Zaina and Tariq are from Palestine; Noura is from Lebanon; and Yacoub is from Egypt but spent most of his life in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). All NS informants that I interviewed were college students studying in the US during the time of their interviews. All interviews were conducted in English and followed the protocol and guidelines of Macalester College’s Institutional Review Board. As such, their names, and the names of all my informants in this paper, have been altered for the sake of anonymity.

CHAPTER 8

FUSHA AND THE NATIVE SPEAKER

Given that my studies of the H variety of Arabic before my arrival to the Arabophone world yielded little practicality in communicating with locals, I was curious to learn *how* NSs use and interact with this variety in their day-to-day lives. Throughout all eight interviews with NSs, there was an overwhelming chorus of distaste or inutility of the H variety for daily communication. NSs used their individual dialects (Palestinian, Lebanese, Yemeni, Egyptian, or *darija* from Morocco) to communicate with other speakers of their dialects. Themes in cross-dialect communication proved fascinating for identifying other communicative measures within the NSs' linguistic sphere, which will be discussed in Chapter 10. *Fusha* was reserved for a few contexts, which included academics, cartoons, the news, and religious contexts.

NSs learn the H variety in school. Similar to L2 speakers' frustrations with learning Standard Arabic's stringent grammar and pronunciation rules, NSs occasionally acquire a strong dislike for the H variety. "Mostly everyone hated it," says Noura, referring to the instruction of Arabic in her Lebanese grade-school education. Tariq, a student from the West Bank agrees, "I don't think it's anyone's favorite course... like when you're in the fourth grade struggling with Arabic grammar and being punished by getting bad grades for it, it's really hard to enjoy because you don't use it." And even in Standard Arabic classes, most lessons devolved into the L varieties. Tariq comments, "None of my teachers probably speak [*Fusha*] fluently, except for my Arabic teachers, and they don't use it all the time." Zaina, another student from the West Bank agrees,

“We speak *ammiya*, even in Arabic class.” That is, in classes taught in “Arabic”, whether it is a Standard Arabic course or not, the spoken element of the course relies on the L varieties of Arabic over the H variety. Another student summarizes this divide well in response to the question *What language are subjects taught in?* within the Moroccan context: “Officially Arabic, realistically *darija*”.

The exception to the use of the H variety in spoken Arabic is television. Not only are most Arabophone news networks operating in the standardized H variety, but children’s cartoons have been some of the first interactive and engaging avenues for young NSs of Arabic to learn the H variety. “That’s how we all, as far as I can tell, like everyone in the Arab world knows *Fusha*,” says Tariq, reflecting on the cartoons of his childhood. “But everyone has a hard time speaking it because you *never* speak with it.” Some exceptions include, Kenza, a Moroccan, who jokingly recounts narrating scenes, somewhat facetiously, on family vacations in the *Fusha* she had learned through the cartoons on the pan-Arab channel *Spacetoon*. However, outside of the oral commentary of her family’s trips, Kenza notes that in her daily life she is only speaking *darija* in Morocco.

There is a disconnect between what L2 learners study as communicative Arabic and what NSs actually use. That is, an L2 learner, like me, had spent four years learning the “Arabic” language, only to be unable to communicate appropriately with NSs once I traveled to the Arabophone world. “Even if you’re saying it right, it just doesn’t *sound* right,” says Yacoub, an Egyptian who spent a predominant number of his years living in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE is known for its expat population. Foreigners from Western Europe, the US, and the MENA region

relocate to the small Gulf country for its large economic opportunities, particularly in the petrol industry. Although Europeans or Americans can find themselves in high-ranking positions in the UAE's private sector, "It's generally [more] accepted to have Arabs [in these positions] because it's easier for communication," says Yacoub. He adds, "It's just easier, especially if these Middle Easterns and North Africans know how to speak English *and* Arabic [because] it's better than just speaking English or trying to teach Europeans and Americans to learn Arabic because a lot of [Emiratis] don't speak English properly, or they would rather have an Arabic speaking person to communicate with." And in the case of L2 learners, like an American, trying to employ misplaced H Arabic in colloquial situations, Yacoub admits, "I would rather just speak to you in English. Because, like, I would try to understand your Standard Arabic, which is not perfect because you've only been taking it for so many years, and I will try to speak in Standard [Arabic], and dumbed down Standard Arabic." Without knowing the local dialect, an L2 learner is lost and unable to practically speak with NSs in Arabic.

So, as an L2 learner of the language almost entirely learning MSA, I posited the range of scenarios I could participate in within this register: I can watch cartoons, listen to the news, read pre-Islamic poetry, and perhaps wrestle my way through a couple surahs in the *Qur'an*. In response to my pitifully short list of linguistic scenarios, Tariq adds jokingly, "You'll probably also get robbed!" He goes on to elaborate, "I have never had someone come up to me and speak *Fusha* back home, like a foreigner... Like if you ride a taxi and speak to [the driver] in *Fusha*," he pauses and then laughs at the absurdity of the situation and questions, "Would that stress them out?" I can tell you for a fact, it did. I quickly learned the utility of the L variety in a taxi, and left my H variety for the news and pan-Arab cartoons.

NSs also noted the couple of other instances where *Fusha* might be used, but continued to state that it had no substantial presence in their daily lives. Ahmed confirms the absence of *Fusha* in the colloquial Moroccan context, “*No one* is speaking *Fusha*. The only time I hear *Fusha* is in the news. Sometimes politicians use it, but they mix it up with *darija*... Actually, I can tell you I’m more confident in my oral English skills than I am in my *Fusha* oral skills just because I never use it. Never, ever.” Alae, another Moroccan, adds “It feels a bit slow to speak in Standard Arabic, honestly. For me, personally, I only use that language when I pray. I use that language in class. Otherwise, I do not use this [language] at all.” He goes on to say, “So I can speak Arabic, like I can do this interview in Standard Arabic, I would be fine. It’s just when I’m talking to someone in a friendly way, I’m trying to make some joke, I’m trying to do this and that, it’s hard to do that in Standard Arabic.”

If they are not speaking the H variety of Arabic, when are NSs using this register? It appears to be almost *never*. Granted, all of my informants are from the younger generation, and noted that the older generations in their respective countries showed more fluency and use of Standard Arabic. Undoubtedly, both registers pertain to the titular “Arabic” language, and as discussed by scholars like Meiseles, Mitchell, and Badawi, coexist with a multiplicity of hybridized variations on a spectrum of formal to informal language. NSs in my research noted the divide in instances where each register independently deserved recognition. The H variety was reserved for listening to the news, reading the *Qur’an*, or engaging with the material in a textbook. Each informant reserved all other communicative tasks, namely speaking, for their L variety of Arabic. However, this divide between spoken and written Arabic has gained more nuance in the age of the internet

and colloquial conversation via platforms like social media and texting. The next section will explore this divide between written and spoken language, perhaps both supporting and challenging the definition of a singular Arabic “language”.

CHAPTER 9

SPOKEN VERSUS WRITTEN ARABIC

After my rough linguistic transition to Jordan, I came to the conclusion that there was a rigid binary between spoken and written Arabic. Given that my studies of formal Arabic were not a viable option for communicating with Jordanians on the streets of Amman, I learned to associate the L variety, or *ammiya*, with the spoken language. While studying Jordanian *ammiya* for the first time, I also learned that the L varieties do not have a standardized orthographic system. My conclusions led me to create this diagram:

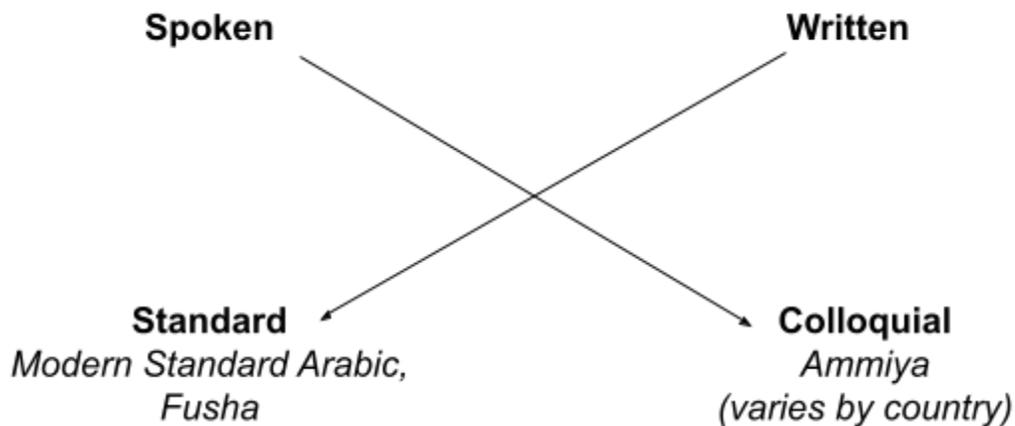


Diagram 9.1 *The disconnect between spoken and written Arabic*

My confusion of diglossia in the Arabic language existed at the intersection of spoken and written Arabic. What if I want to send a text message in colloquial Arabic? What if the word I want to say only exists in the higher register of the language? Would it be appropriate to use it in spoken form? And in what circumstances? Luckily, Kenza brought more clarity to this division I had made in my mind between spoken and written Arabic. As it turns out, there is not *quite* as

sharp of a division between the two as I was once inclined to believe: “On television, the news reports are all done in *Fusha*. They’re not speaking *darija*... When the King is speaking to his people, all the religious sermons, they’re all done in *Fusha*. And if I’m texting my parents, I’m not going to suddenly switch to Shakespearean English. I’m texting them in *darija*. And what that entails is just the Latin alphabet plus numbers to replace sounds that don’t exist in the Latin Alphabet.” This style of writing where individuals communicate in written Colloquial Arabic through the Latin or English Alphabet, is often referred to as *Arabizi* and is frequently used among young people (Cantillo 2021).

Arabic Sound	Associated Number	Standard Arabic	<i>Arabizi</i>	English
ح (Haa)	7	حلوة كتير!	7elweh kteer!	Very beautiful!
غ ('ayn)	3	تعي عندي!	t3ai 3andi !	Come over!
ص (Saad)	9	صباح الخير	9ba7 el 5air	Good morning
خ (khaa)	5	خلص!	5alas!	Stop it!
ط (Taa)	6	انت طالب بالجامعة ؟	Ente 6albeh bel jam3a?	Are you a university student?
ق (qaaf)	8	بدي ٥ دقائق	bidi 5 da8aye8.	I need five minutes.
أ & ء (aalif & hamza)	2	أنا جعان.	2na je3an	I am hungry.

Table 9.1 Numbers used in Colloquial Arabic written communication, know as *Arabizi* (adapted from Cantillo 2021).

Kenza attributes the use of *Arabizi* to the rise of technology and the internet. Inventors of the first telecommunication systems spoke languages using the Latin alphabet, and as a result, the creation of phones and computers evolved to reflect these preferences (Thussu 2018). Kenza notes, “Arabic keyboards didn’t get to Morocco until very recently... so people already had established a way to communicate with each other using the Latin alphabet.” Tariq attributes the

use of the Arabic alphabet to higher class people with “fancy” or “good” Arabic, or those who have more knowledge of the English language. The majority of my NS informants also agreed that the Latin Alphabet was easier to use. Tariq attributes this to his greater exposure to English on the internet and the greater accessibility of the Latin alphabet: “If I’m on the internet, I’m probably consuming things in English. And I’m googling things in English. And I’m much faster at typing in English. So if I need to switch to typing in Arabic, it would be really hard because I rarely ever do this.” Yacoub agrees by noting that for him, it is easier to speak in Arabic, and easier to read, write, and type in English. He only uses the Arabic script when communicating with people from older generations.

Given my renewed understanding, a more complete diagram showcasing the *intersections* between spoken and written Arabic would look like this, aligning well with the list originally outlined by Ferguson (Ferguson 1959:329):

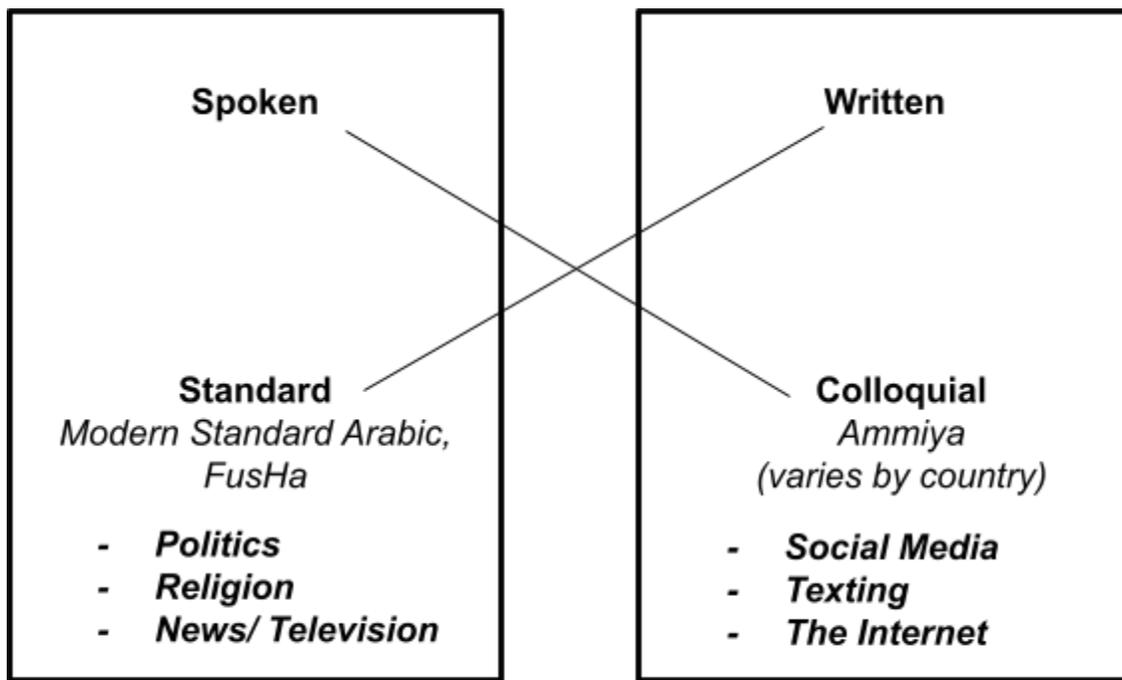


Diagram 9.2 The *intersections* between spoken and written Arabic

Of course, these boundaries of written and spoken are not as strict as they appear in Diagram 9.2. There are nuances to every situation in Arabic that may require written or spoken language. I include this chapter in my overall argument about TAFL to demonstrate my own intellectual exercise of navigating the complexities of a diglossic language across written and spoken forms as an L2 learner of Arabic. The intersections showcased in Diagram 9.2 were not apparent to me until *four* years after I had started learning Arabic. I offer these diagrams within the context of the pedagogical methods for teaching a diglossic language to illustrate where the divisions between spoken and written Arabic occur and where the intersections exist between the two linguistic tasks. These diagrams take into account the application of both H and L varieties in modern Arabophone societies. The next chapter will explore the nuances in accommodation and koineization among the L varieties of Arabic for NSs.

CHAPTER 10

INTER-DIALECT COMMUNICATION

Dialects of Arabic are commonly mapped on to the various nationalities that are represented in the Arabophone world. For example, there is a Moroccan dialect, a Lebanese dialect, a Palestinian Dialect, and a Kuwaiti dialect. Some of these dialects, or L varieties, are more mutually intelligible than others. Intelligibility also exists within regional and national distinctions across the Arabophone world of more than 300 million speakers across 23 countries and territories in the Middle East and North Africa. The three predominant regional dialect distinctions are Maghrebi (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and sometimes Libya), Mashreqi (Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and sometimes Egypt), and Khaliji (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Qatar, and sometimes Iraq) (Schulthies 2014:4). However, despite these regional boundaries seeming rigid and insular, speakers of Arabic are constantly exposed to other varieties of Arabic. Tariq describes this intermingling of dialects well: “I wake up, go to school by bus, say good morning to my bus driver in [Palestinian] Arabic... We’re probably listening to Fairuz on the bus.²³ That’s why I understand [the] Lebanese dialect, because of Fairuz. So we go to school, we learn in my accent. Let’s say, when I go back home, we watch Egyptian plays, which are in the Egyptian dialect... which is *quite* different, like a different language. And [then], let’s say at night, we watch Syrian shows... that’s why I understand the Syrian dialect.”

Tariq makes important distinctions between language, dialect, and accent in his short anecdote. In this instance, Tariq identifies the method of instruction in Bethlehem, where he attends school,

²³ Famous Lebanese singer

as being spoken in his “accent”. By this, he is referring to the slight difference in pronunciation, but not necessarily the lexico-grammatical differences that he alludes to by assigning the Egyptian dialect as a different “language”. Tariq elaborates, “So like each city, let's say in the West Bank, has its own dialect. So, I have the Bethlehem dialect. I don't know how to compare it to anything else, because it's hard to compare dialects, but this is the one that we use in Bethlehem. And you could easily tell if someone is from another city just by their dialect within the West Bank.” Zaina agrees, “The dialects in Bethlehem are *way* different. Like, Tariq speaks a different dialect than I do... He's from the camp. I'm from Beit Sahour – two different dialects... There's Beit Sahour, Bethlehem, Beit Jarrah, and then there's the camps. All these different areas have different dialects. So wherever I go, I have to adjust to their dialect, because otherwise they'll make fun of me.”

“Ridicule” is often the word associated when interlocutors of different dialects or accents in the Arabophone world attempt to communicate with one another (Ferguson 1959). For example, when Noura speaks with non-Lebanese Arabic speakers she shares, “There's a lot of mocking me. There's a lot of *Oh, you're so cute. You're Lebanese, you have a cute accent.* So there's a lot of bugging me with this over and over.” Yacoub notes a similar context in the UAE where the Emiratis make fun of the Egyptian dialect and accent, and vice versa. My informants made clear that this ridicule was all in good fun, even if issues of intelligibility arose in cross-dialect communication.

But, sometimes intelligibility can point to larger political and sociolinguistic tensions in the Arabophone world. Yacoub describes the general way NSs tackle inter-dialect communication:

“So, how it goes is most people speak their own dialect. And when there’s confusion, they try to dumb it down or say it in English, but you speak your own dialect. *No one* speaks Standard Arabic, that’s just not a thing.” Although most of my NS informants agreed they would rarely, if ever, switch to some form of Standard Arabic to communicate, they still expressed a fair share of dialect accommodation to Mashreqi dialects, specifically Egyptian, Lebanese, and Syrian dialects. The one glaring exception to the mutual intelligibility within the Arabophone region is Morocco. “No one can speak with Moroccans,” says Noura jokingly. She notes that she often chooses to speak to Moroccans in French, their common colonial tongue, rather than try and manage a conversation in their splintered Arabics. Zaina agrees, despite her tendency to accommodate other dialects, “Moroccan [*darija*] is hard to understand.” In many instances, Zaina prefers to speak English with Moroccans, if it is a common language between her and her interlocutor. Omar from Yemen confers, “I get lost [when listening to Moroccans].”

After learning about this rift in intelligibility in the Arabophone world, I asked my Moroccan informants what I prefaced as a “loaded” question: “How does it go when you speak with other Arabic speakers? Where do you default? Where do you *centralize* your language?”²⁴ Ahmed responds with a knowing grin, “I think I know exactly what you mean when you say this is a loaded thing for Moroccans... If I’m speaking with an Egyptian, I try to do the Egyptian dialect. If I’m speaking to a Lebanese, I try to do the Lebanese dialect. So I just kind of do that because [then] they understand and I can do it. So why not?” Kenza, on the other hand, expresses a greater frustration towards the perpetuated “black sheep” quality of Moroccans in the

²⁴ I used the word “centralize” in my research to refer to what previous scholars have called “leveling” or “koineizing” (Blanc 1960, Versteegh 1997). The common understanding between these words is that some form of accommodation is being made on the part of one or many interlocutors to find common ground in their dialects of Arabic. I preferred the term “centralize” to visually understand what geographic regions NSs chose to gravitate towards in inter-dialect communication. Quite often, this centralization is in the Mashreq region, namely the Egyptian dialect, and increasingly more towards urban centers, like Cairo, Beirut or Amman.

Arabophone world. “[It’s] an overplayed joke... Like, really, if you try just a little bit you *could* understand.” Kenza notes that when she speaks with NSs outside of Morocco, she is not as accommodating as Ahmed. She speaks to her interlocutors with a mix of *darija* and English: “I hit them with the easiest words in *darija* so that I’m like transmitting the message *I am one of you*, and [then I use] English for the harder stuff because it’s just easier to speak in English than it is to repeat yourself three times.” Ahmed agrees with Kenza’s frustration, “I can’t [speak Egyptian or Lebanese] for a long time though. It gets very tiring because they ask me something in Arabic, and I get it, and my brain short circuits, because I hear it and I understand in Arabic, and I’m like, *Well, if I respond to you in my dialect, you’re not gonna get it. If we speak English, why are we even bothering?* And so I just kind of make the effort to speak their dialect.” Kenza says she can do the same, but she doesn’t feel good doing that, “I’m like, well, why don’t they do it for me?... Again, it’s easier to switch the way you speak than it is to repeat yourself three times when you’re saying a simple sentence. So, really, with Arabs, I usually find myself bending over backwards to get them to understand me, which in some cases means I give up and speak English [with them].” That is of course *if* the interlocutor speaks English.

I noted to Kenza that I thought that “to give up” meant to speak English and abandon any kind of Arabic completely was indicative of the larger sociolinguistic situation in the Arabophone world. In the wake of Pan-Arabism movements following the colonial period, Arabophone countries chose Standard Arabic to unite the region (Salomone 2022). After the colonial powers left, the question of unity for Arabs after years of oppressive and assimilative occupiers in their land became apparent. Alae frames this reflective process in a post-colonial world bluntly: “What’s uniting us? Islam. And what goes with Islam? Arabic.” Particularly in the case of countries that

had then fallen under the *francophonie*,²⁵ Arabic became the only option for linguistic unity against an oppressor. However, as conversations with speakers in the previous chapters prove, no matter how much the region desires ethno-linguistic unity, the sociolinguistic landscape of the Arabophone world will always be marked by a distinct amount of diversity. Be it diversity of accent, dialect, or inclusion of external languages like French and English, the incessant battle between intelligibility (i.e., *will you understand me?*) and identity (i.e., *does my language reflect who I am?*) comes to the forefront and complicates the directions TAFL should take in modeling the practices of NSs.²⁶ The next chapter will explore the tensions between identity and intelligibility as it relates to diversity versus unity in the Arabophone world.

²⁵ The general collection of countries where French is a first, official, or culturally significant language.

²⁶ I borrow and expand upon the framework of “identity” versus “intelligibility” from David Crystal’s *English as a Global Language* (Crystal 2003).

CHAPTER 11

DIVERSITY VERSUS UNITY IN THE ARABOPHONE WORLD

In her ethnographic article, *Do you speak Arabic? Managing Axes of adequation and difference in pan-Arab talent programs*, Becky Schulthies digs deep into the competing narratives of linguistic diversity and ethnolinguistic unity in the Arabophone world. In 2003, Schulthies started her research on the metadiscourse of pan-Arab talent shows (i.e. her own analysis of the inter-dialectal exchanges between contestants, judges, and audiences in talent competitions like *The Voice/Ahla Sawt*, *Arab Idol*, and *Star Academy Arabia*). In Schulthies' words, her "analysis of pan-Arab talent contests describes the slow expansion of legible Arabness through the range of accommodation practices that developed from 2003 to 2013" (Schulthies 2014:3). The primary conclusion of her research defines a Mashreq-Maghreb hierarchy, where the Mashreqi dialects are prioritized in pan-Arab spaces and are deemed the most "legible" or understood in comparison to their Maghrebi counterparts. Her research definitively shows that pan-Arab competitions favored contestants that could "scale jump" or code-switch into the Mashreqi dialects, some koineization of MSA and Mashreqi dialects, or English and/or French. If a non-Mashreqi individual spoke only their dialect, they often would not advance to subsequent rounds. Despite these talent competitions boasting an inclusive "pan-Arab" identity, this kind of "diversity talk" fails in Schulthies' analysis of the competitions (Schulthies 2014:5). When talking about "legible Arabness", non-Mashreqi individuals were often excluded from this grouping, particularly North Africans (Schulthies 2014:3).

Kenza, a Moroccan, experienced this kind of exclusion in her international school in Italy. She notes that at her school students tended to stick with other students who shared their linguistic identity: “all the Latinos stuck together because it was easier to speak Spanish to each other than it was to speak English... All of the Arabs stuck together. Not me though because ‘I don't speak Arabic,’ according to them,” says Kenza with an incredulous laugh. Outside of friend groups and social dynamics, Kenza experienced academic discrimination too within Arabophone spaces. She enrolled in an Arab Literature course for NSs taught by a Lebanese-Armenian. Kenza recounts, “[The teacher] refused to have me in her class. She said, ‘I can't understand you. If I can't understand you. I can't teach you.’” In Kenza’s case, the Mashreq-Maghreb hierarchy permeates outside of Schulthies’ pan-Arab talent competition analysis; linguistic diversity impedes pan-Arab unity.

These distinctions of intelligibility in the Arab world rely heavily on the identity politics of the region. Ahmed puts it this way: “I mean, I really like the diversity that we have within all the dialects. But I’ve come to realize this recently: *Darija* is a kind of creolized version of Arabic. And when I say creolized, I mean like a combination and a mix of Tamazight, or the Amazigh language,²⁷ and Arabic. And that's what makes it so difficult for the rest of the Arab world to understand us, because they don't share that background.” Without this shared background, non-Moroccans will choose alternative ways to speak with Moroccans. Noura from Lebanon says she will often choose to speak to Moroccans in *French*, instead of Arabic.

²⁷ The indigenous people of North Africa, often called “Berber” in English

The name “Arabic” suggests that there is *one* Arabic; from Rabat to Riyadh to Baghdad, all Arabophones speak the same language. But, if a Lebanese is choosing to speak to a Moroccan in French instead of Arabic, a Palestinian has to shift her dialect from neighborhood to neighborhood within *one* municipality of the West Bank (let alone the dialectically diverse region), and rarely anyone speaks the Standard Arabic, MSA, that all dialects more or less descend from, what *is* our definition of the singular “Arabic”? The next two subsections of this chapter explore diversity (acceptance of different intralinguistic identities) and unity (the goal of cross-dialect intelligibility) as it relates to a singular “Arabic”. The first part will dive deeper into the monopoly the Egyptian and Mashreqi dialects have over intelligibility in the Arabophone world and how they threaten the use and acceptance of diverse identity-based dialects outside of the Mashreq. The second part investigates the presence of French and English in Arabophone societies, which challenges ethno-linguistic unity for Arabophones.

REGIONAL HEGEMONS: THE MASHREQ AND EGYPT

Egypt is to the Arabophone world as the US is to the Anglophone world; this is the analogy Yacoub and I created during our conversation. An obvious reason for these similarities is the sheer amount of media output each country creates, but Yacoub says it is much more than that: “[It’s] dominance and other assets, it’s not just media, it’s like military power, history, all of it, and mostly the film industry for sure.” And perhaps, this is where the analogy between the US and Egypt ends. Unlike the US’s strong individualism, Egypt has created a stark vision for Pan-Arabism over the last century with leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser. Although his vision for a United Arab Republic did not sustain itself past 1971, his actions speak volumes to the

historical role Egypt has played as a cultural and political hegemon in the region, both embracing and challenging pan-Arab unity.

During conversations with my NS informants, many of them shared the role the Egyptian dialect has played in their life. Ahmed recounts how he learned the Egyptian dialect, and to a greater extent the Mashreqi dialects: “We grow up watching their shows and we grow up listening to them speak their dialects... and at some point, I never had to learn [their dialect], I just could understand an Egyptian whenever they spoke. I probably couldn't imitate them very well, but I understood it perfectly.” Tariq from Palestine, who speaks a Mashreqi dialect, agrees, “I can understand Egyptian. I don't speak [it]. I can try to speak it. It does sound very funny. And I break the structure of every sentence. But I understand Egyptian, and Lebanese. So that's cool. And they understand me. Because I think my dialect is probably, as far as I understand... the closest to the traditional Arabic dialect.” Although, Tariq's Arabic probably *is* one of the dialects closest to the traditional Arabic, Ferguson makes the observation in his article *Myths About Arabic*, that if you ask a NS where the “best” Arabic is spoken (i.e. which Arabic is closest to the *Qur'an*), they will undoubtedly say it is their Arabic (Ferguson 1959).

Omar from Yemen *also* makes the claim that his Arabic is the closest to the traditional Arabic, despite having a different dialect from Tariq. Given that Tariq's Palestinian dialect falls under the Mashreq-Maghreb hierarchy, he notes he often does not switch his speech patterns to accommodate his non-Mashreqi interlocutors. Omar, on the other hand, does koineize his speech to an Egyptian or Mashreqi variety when speaking with other Arabophones. Omar shares that when he speaks to Alae, a Moroccan, the two typically attempt to speak in an Arabic that is

“almost formal, or something in common, like Egyptian or Lebani.”²⁸ This is the common narrative for cross-dialect communication; NSs will centralize their language to the dialects of Egypt and the Mashreq, even if it means sacrificing part of their linguistic identity. For Omar, this incessant assimilation to Mashreqi dialects in cross-dialect communication “leaves a big impact.” He continues, “[Yemenis] don’t have anything outside [of our country]. Our culture is between us, our songs are between us. No one listens to Yemeni music outside of Yemen.”

This hyper-focus on the Mashreq’s culture, politics, and language not only leaves an impact on how non-Mashreqi Arabophones shape their identity, but it threatens linguistic diversity and representation in TAFL classrooms as well. Vanpee argues that these Mashreq-dominated practices create a *center-versus-periphery* schemata where Egypt and the Mashreq are the idolized center of the Arab world, and all other diverse cultures and dialects of the Arabophone world are pushed out of sight (Vanpee 2022:140). This erasure of heterogeneity in the region has significant consequences for adequately educating L2 learners of Arabic on the vast range of customs, speech, and peoples that belong to the Arab world (Vanpee 2022). I would add that this narrow approach to studying the region linguistically and culturally distorts the possibility for a holistic approach to cross-culture understanding from the American perspective, and developing the necessary skills of intercultural proficiency. This type of exclusive learning has consequences in attempting to understand an already misconstrued part of the world. The discussion of representation of diversity in TAFL will continue in Chapters 12 and 13.

²⁸ the Lebanese dialect

THE NON-ARABICS: EXTERNAL LANGUAGES, INTERNAL CONFLICT

In the post-colonial reality of Arabophone states, it is fair game to assume that French and/or English might play a role in cross-dialect communication. In the case of Morocco, not only does French play a significant role in Moroccan society, but it divides people. Ahmed puts it this way, “There are these Moroccans now that live, in my opinion, completely separate lives, from Moroccans whose native languages or whose household language is either Tamazight or Arabic. If you speak [French] in your house, my initial idea about you is that you're very wealthy. And it usually checks out.” After Morocco gained its independence from France in 1956, the country entered into a gradual process of Arabization, particularly in education (Salomone 2022). This process coincided with a larger pan-Arab movement across previously colonized Arabophone states to reinstate the language of instruction as Standard Arabic in their schools (Salomone 2022). The Arabization movements in Morocco made progress in the public school systems, leaving the French-instituted private schools, *les missions françaises*, still teaching in French. It is within this history, along with others, that higher socioeconomic status and use of French became highly correlated in Morocco (Salomone 2022).

This, however, does not mean that only students of private schools speak French in Morocco. All of my Moroccan informants, regardless of their education in private or public schools, spoke French fluently, but they preferred to use Arabic. Ahmed shares, “Yes, I'm fluent in French, but I'm not as comfortable with it. I don't know the slang... I don't know how to interact with these kids who have grown up in French households. And that's an obstacle. Second of all, it tells them where I come from, and that I don't come from the same socioeconomic background. Third of all, I don't like speaking French to other Moroccans.” Ahmed goes on to share that he feels most

Moroccan when he speaks, or tries to speak, Tamazight, the indigenous language of Morocco. “I also very much like speaking purely in *darija*,” he says. However, given that *darija* is heavily influenced by French, Ahmed notes, “There *is* a threshold, after which it no longer becomes *darija*, it just becomes French with some *darija*.” Kenza agrees, “It feels annoying [when people speak French]”. As much as possible, Kenza tries not to speak French with other Moroccans. When Moroccans speak to her in French, she chooses to respond to them in English. She explains her rationale, “If we’re not [speaking in] *darija*, which is the language of the land, then I’m going to speak English.”

Kenza’s comment introduces the second key player of non-Arabics in the region, English. The globalization of English in the 21st century has seen a massive increase on the world stage (Crystal 2003), and in the Arabophone world (Salomone 2022). English is widely taught throughout the Arabophone world, and some of my informants even attended International Baccalaureate (IB) programs in English in their home countries. Given how widely spoken English was during my time in Jordan in the Spring of 2022, I thought English might be used as a means to tackle challenges of cross-dialect communication. Few of my informants pointed to English as the remedy for this issue, but all of them noted the major role English has played in their lives. NSs like Tariq noted that sometimes it *is* easier to speak with other Anglo-Arabophone speakers in English across dialects, “because it’s faster. It’s easier for [his] brain.”

Although not central to the themes explored by scholars in TAFL, in keeping with the NS-centered approach to FLI, the roles that external languages play in the Arabophone world are

important to understanding how NSs use and negotiate their own varieties of Arabic. The growing numbers of L2 speakers of English on the world stage²⁹ warrants the question whether we should pursue TAFL to NSs of English at all. Of course, my bias is towards TAFL. Bilingualism is not a crime, and should be embraced by any American who aligns themselves with values of cultural diplomacy and cross-cultural understanding.

The larger aim of these subsections is not to discourage the instruction of Arabic as a foreign language in place of other commonly spoken languages in the region (French and English), but to expand the aperture of linguistic diversity across Arabophone spaces. Despite the L varieties of Arabic posing challenges of intelligibility, typically French and English are *not* the answer to bridging gaps of understanding to create a unified understanding. The use of dialects and Standard Arabic have strong ties to identity-based practices for NSs and must be prioritized in a comprehensive instruction of TAFL in the US. What I argue is not to commit heavily either way to Egyptian Arabic, or Levantine Arabic, or a highly formalized Standard Arabic, but to strike a middle ground, employing many of the frameworks outlined by scholars of ESA and middle Arabics (Blanc 1960, Badawi 1973, Meiseles 1980, Mitchell 1986). I discuss this approach in more depth in Chapter 15.

²⁹ Currently estimated at 1.5 billion speakers by *Statista* (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/>)

PART III: ARABIC TO THE AMERICAN

“The East is a career.”
– Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred*

This section is the heart of my thesis. The previous sections have established in-depth that the diversity of linguistic practices in the Arabophone world are endless and do not limit themselves to the H variety of Arabic taught in American classrooms. In 2006, Arabic became a critical language in the name of maintaining national security and exercising American ideals and influence on the world stage. Aside from American students who study Arabic under government funding, key representatives of this policy are Foreign Service Officers stationed abroad in Arabophone countries.

In this section, I detail the conversations I had with L2 learners and educators of Arabic as a critical language of the US government. This section is largely critical of US government interest and investment in Arabic and area studies of the Middle East. I begin with an anecdote from Christopher Stone, a Professor of Arabic in the US and his larger discussion on the weaponization of language post-9/11. Then I transition to the perspectives of the student (Sofia), the educators (Professor Wilson and Professor McKay), and the professionals (John, Hassan, and Peter) in regard to the intersections of current and historical pedagogical practices in TAFL, their preference for the H or L varieties, and their intersections with US government funding and interest.

CHAPTER 12

WEAPONIZING LANGUAGE: TAFL AFTER 9/11

In May of 2013, Christopher Stone, an American, was stabbed by an Egyptian in front of the US Embassy in Cairo. His attacker was a college-educated Egyptian male from the outskirts of Cairo who had made it his mission on May 9, 2013 to go into the city and “kill an American in revenge over US policies in the Middle East” (Stone 2014). Hospitalized from the attack, and still very much alive, Stone reflected that his attacker “could not have picked a less appropriate target, given [his] love of Arabic and Arab culture.” Stone, an Associate Professor of Arabic at Hunter College of the City University of New York who was in Cairo in 2013 for his research sabbatical, was in the final year of his PhD program in Near Eastern Studies when Al-Qaeda led four orchestrated aerial attacks aboard US commercial airlines, killing upwards of 3,000 Americans on September 11, 2001.

As an enthusiast of the Arabic language and culture, Stone was the opposite of the malevolent Middle East-hating American his attacker had intended to target. However, as a professor of the Arabic language under the exponential increase in US government funding for the study of Arabic as a “critical language”, Stone questions his role in the onslaught of weaponizing language and area studies that perpetuated after the 9/11 attacks. He even admits that he may not have found himself in Cairo in 2013 if it were not for the Middle Eastern studies “tenure-track job that comes with a luxury period of sabbatical” that became innumerable following the US government’s response to the September 11th attacks (Stone 2014). Not only did professionals

see new opportunities for jobs related to the Middle East post-9/11, but students were given novel opportunities to study the Arabic language as well.

Following President Bush's National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) of 2006, the Department of Education (DoE) and Department of Defense (DoD) invested over \$800 million during the initiative's first two years to prioritize the instruction of government-deemed "critical languages", like Pashto and Arabic (Stone 2014). Foreign language instruction had not seen this amount of attention and funding from the US government since nearly half a century earlier as a result of the 1958 National Defense Education Act during the Sputnik Era. The primary difference between these waves of funding was the federal departments who funded the initiatives. In 1958, the Cold War language initiative program was funded by the Department of Education, while the post-9/11 NSLI was funded by a collaborative effort of the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of State (DoS), and Department of Education (DoED) (Stone 2014). As a result of this funding and piqued interest in career opportunities for Americans, the Modern Language Association (MLA) reported a dramatic *doubling* of students enrolled in Arabic between 1998-2002, a trend unparalleled in other language studies at the time (Welles 2004:10). Upon selective admission, many of these students participated in a various array of fully-funded government programs: The Language Flagship Programs (DoD), Critical Language Scholarship (DoS), Fulbright (DoS), and the Boren Scholarship (DoD).³⁰ Students as part of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) are further incentivized by the US government's yearly \$3,000 stipend awarded to individuals who complete an allotted number of credits in Arabic (The University of Scranton). Many of these students who receive a funded education from the government go on to pursue careers in the various departments who initially funded their

³⁰ Acronyms following US federally-funded programs indicate which department sponsors the program.

language education, as Foreign Service or Intelligence Officers. These programs and trends in the name of the NSLI continue today. Students of Professor Stone could very well be participants in any number of these programs and go on to serve in US embassies, consulates, and military bases in the Middle East, employing their Arabic skills. Although government funding of language-learning initiatives is not inherently bad, the fundamental linking of language learning with national defense is problematic.

In the aftermath of his stabbing, Professor Stone reflected on his ethical responsibility as a teacher of Arabic to stand against weaponizing language in the name of national security. He certainly did not want his love and instruction of the Arabic language to be interpreted the way his attacker had understood the American perspective; as a general distaste and fear of the Middle East that makes itself known in neocolonial foreign policy in the region, namely George W. Bush's War on Terror. Stone offers the following metaphor in reflecting on his own experience:

After my stabbing, an Egyptian friend tried to counter some of my doubts by telling me that a knife-maker is not responsible for the uses his knives are put to. Perhaps not, but what if that knife maker happens to be sponsored by the military?

(Stone 2014)

These entanglements between the ideals of education and the agenda of government funding are inseparable, and raise concerns about how we are adequately using or shaping TAFL in the US. The next three subsections will focus on three perspectives of TAFL: from the student, from the educator, and from the professionals. These subsections will particularly focus on the prioritization, securitization, and professionalization of the H variety of Arabic as it relates to US

government interest and funding in facilitating the education and practices of Arabic as a foreign language.

THE STUDENT

Ahmed was surprised when he met Sofia; she was the first American he had met that spoke *darija*, and with a distinguishable amount of fluency. Being from Morocco, Ahmed, along with my other Moroccan informants prided themselves on their unique dialect of Arabic, often noting in their interviews that they speak *darija* AND Arabic. Sofia agreed with this distinction, “*darija*, in my opinion, is another language... I wouldn’t consider it Arabic really.” Much of this departure of *darija* from other dialects is due to the historical and contemporary influence of the indigenous Tamazight language, as well as the post-colonial presence of French in high society and government.

Despite the divergent dialect of Morocco from its dialectal counterparts in the region, Morocco is often chosen as a study abroad location for American students. However, it has not always been this way: Damascus was a hot spot for Arabic Language studies before the Syrian Civil War; Cairo boasted highly-attended prestigious language learning academies before the Arab Spring; and, Beirut beckoned Americans to come explore and study in the glamorous Lebanon before the Civil War and ongoing economic crisis. Since questions of safety for Americans and stability of local governments have been brought into question, the US government has had to close programs and reopen them in other countries. Vicki Valosik, a freelance writer for the international education non-profit NAFSA, calls this a game of “musical chairs” the government has had to play in maintaining their NSLI opportunities abroad (Valosik 2015:8). As of today,

Jordan and Morocco are the countries of choice for these initiatives (Valosik 2015). As an American who studied abroad in Jordan, I noticed the diglossic gaps in my education between H and L varieties of Arabic, but Morocco is a different ball game.

Sofia was a participant of the US DoS's Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Abroad program in Rabat, Morocco from 2019-2020. In their own words, YES Abroad facilitates exchanges between Americans and students from “countries with a significant Muslim population” (YES). YES Abroad's goal is to “promote mutual understanding between the United States and their host country by forming lasting relationships with the local community” (YES). Put simply, Sofia identified the goal of YES Abroad as “friendship”.

Upon learning that she would travel to Morocco for her senior year of high school, Sofia frantically began looking up words in Arabic, a language she had never studied before: “I immediately was googling [how to say] *marhaba*³¹... and then I showed up and I said *marhaba* and nobody says *marhaba*,” says Sofia with a laugh looking back on her time in Rabat. What she is referring to is the division between H and L varieties of Arabic that have been detailed in this thesis; *marhaba* is the generic catch-all phrase that is used to say “hello”, but quite often speakers will use more informal and colloquial words to greet one another. Despite the misguided help of Google Translate that Sofia experienced at the beginning of her Arabic learning journey, she quickly recovered. Each day YES Abroad students would immerse themselves in *darija* instruction for 12 hours a day– or *darija* “boot camp”, according to Sofia.

³¹ “Hello” in formal Arabic

Having learned only dialect, Sofia's *darija* was strong when she left Morocco, but her *Fusha* was lacking. She recounts her experience with YES Abroad: "I learned so much. I was able to communicate with everyone really well by the end [of the program]. And my *darija* is really good, but my *Fusha* was horrible... I couldn't understand the news. I couldn't understand books, because even though I could read the letters, the vocabulary is *so* different that... I just couldn't get anything from them." Meanwhile, Sofia's counterparts at NSLI-Youth (NSLI-Y), a sister study abroad program funded by the DoS, had nailed their *Fusha* skills. Sofia described their program as less focused on friendship, and more intent on language acquisition with a "rigorous language immersion program" predominantly based in *Fusha* (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs). However, Sofia notes that the students in the NSLI-Y program, "were frustrated because very little of what they were learning was transferring to their everyday experience". This is an accurate reality when considering the anecdotes shared by my Moroccan informants. As Ahmed told me, *no one* is speaking *Fusha* in the streets of Morocco.

Sofia's instruction in *darija* led her to afternoons on the beaches surfing with locals, or roaming the open air markets with new Moroccan friends; she had little to complain about her lack of *Fusha* training. Outside of listening to the news or reading novels, Sofia's *darija* created strong connections between her and the locals. In her own words, "unless you're reading a lot of things, or listening to very formal news in Morocco, *darija* is the way to a Moroccan heart, or Tamazight... those are the languages of the people. And you'll make way more friends if you're speaking [*darija*]. If you speak *Fusha*, they're going to think you're quoting the *Qur'an*."

After learning the Moroccan dialect, Sofia learned *Fusha* through the Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) funded by the DoS. She was a participant in the remote Arabic language program in Oman during the Summer of 2022. To her disappointment, CLS did not teach any Omani dialect. For Sofia, this was a shame: “Coming out of Morocco, I was like, *Dialect is awesome! Screw those Fusha people. I’m not one of them. I never want to be a Fusha person,*” says Sofia jokingly. Although her government-funded education in Arabic did not begin with *Fusha*, the introduction of *Fusha* into her Arabic language arsenal was inevitable. Without knowing how to read the news, or listen to the King’s speech, she would have failed all measurements of fluency prioritized by the US government, and ultimately would not have been able to access all parts of the Arabic language. Despite her zealous attitude towards a dialect-centered education, Sofia admits, “Unfortunately, you just have to be a *Fusha* person to study Arabic on government money.”

THE EDUCATORS

From the perspective of creating curriculum for TAFL, Professor Wilson would agree with Sofia’s sentiment: “Other than the Boren Scholarship (DoD), what the government money mostly is for is strengthening Arabic programs. What [they] are mostly interested in is 1) Are you developing a program in which students graduate with a strong proficiency level?, 2) Are they advanced level learners when they finish?, and 3) Are they able to function professionally when they finish?” Certainly an American student who can *only* speak the lower register of the language would fail by the US government’s standards for funding these critical language

initiatives. In addition to their preference for H Arabic, the learning materials for TAFL that are funded by the government indicate what *kind* of language within the H variety they want students to learn.

Take, for example, the premier Arabic-language-learning trilogy of textbooks, *Al-Kitaab fii Ta'allum al-'Arabiyya*, by Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud Al-Batal, and Abbas Al-Tonsi. The first edition of *Al-Kitaab* began publishing in 1995 and has since seen second and third editions following September 11th, 2001, with the most recent revisions published in 2011 and 2013 for Part One and Part Two, respectively. *Al-Kitaab* emphasizes the learning of *Fusha*, with a brief glance at colloquial Arabic, namely the Egyptian dialect, through the tables of colloquial vocabulary that they offer as a brief supplement to the spotlighted *Fusha* vocabulary presented in each chapter. Among the first words introduced to an L2 learner of Arabic is *United Nations* on page two of Part One (Brustad et. al. 1994:2). In the same chapter the student learns *my mother, my father, I live in, I study, and she/he works*. In the first three chapters, students learn *army, officer, specializing/ specialist in..., translator, and political science* (Brustad et. al. 1994). These vocabulary terms are introduced through the stories of Maha and Khalid, two Egyptian youth that serve as cultural ambassadors and guides for the L2 learners through their studies in *Al-Kitaab*. This is not to say that these select words are *never* useful, but they definitely do not compare with the introductory vocabulary of choice used by language learning apps like Duolingo in their units like “Family”, “Clothing”, or “Introduce Yourself”, or even the words I used most frequently during my time in Jordan speaking with locals. As with most textbooks, *Al-Kitaab* has seen the influence of government funding, with specific support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, “an independent federal agency” (Brustad et. al. 2007: ii).

Another problem perpetuated by textbooks like *Al-Kitaab* is the narrative of Egyptian and Mashreqi hegemony, or, “linguistic superiority that for many people in the Arab world is not pleasant,” notes Professor Wilson. Maha, Khalid, and their respective families are predominately the representatives L2 learners interact with in *Al-Kitaab*, representatives that Professor Wilson describes as “Sunni muslim, upper middle class, urbanites, [and] highly educated”, using the Egyptian colloquial Arabic from Cairo. The largest threat that these representatives of the Arab world pose in *Al-Kitaab* is making these identities and linguistic traits appear as “neutral, and all the other dialects and their features as different, peripheral, *not* normal, *not* neutral,” says Professor Wilson. She adds, “There’s the fact [among Arabic teaching resources and textbooks] that you inevitably overgeneralize not just about the language use of people in the Arab world, but also about their cultural practices.” As showcased by the NSs I spoke with, the Arab world is a *tremendously* diverse place. By only showcasing a small sample of traits and linguistic features of the Arab world, students are hindered from achieving the intercultural proficiency and awareness that is needed to navigate the diversity of a vastly intermingled region. Professor Wilson argues that expanding the narrow channels of information and identities that are communicated to L2 learners about the Arab world is not only practical (i.e., if they learn more about different dialects, traditions and beliefs in the region, they will be more well-versed in the nuances of the region as a whole), but it is also “so that we really show the people that we engage with that any of their cultural practices, any of their languages, we all value them the same way.”

Although the federal government's funding avoids these complexities within an Arabic learning textbook, Professor Wilson notes that federal funding is not *necessarily* the issue; in many ways it has helped TAFL. She continues, "We've benefited a great deal from the fact that the government considers Arabic a critical language... they consider it a critical language, in our opinion of course, for all the *wrong* reasons." Professor Wilson adds that this money, although originating from the ulterior motive of enhancing national security, has helped immensely. Large public universities, like the University Professor Wilson works at, have benefited from Title VI grants from the US DoED that provide domestic funding for hiring new instructors, developing new teaching material, and funding students' study abroad experiences. Particularly as it relates to the last component of study abroad opportunities, Professor Wilson is optimistic about turning the narrative on Critical Language Studies away from an exclusive focus on national security:

When students go to the Middle East, that lens of... *I'm an American, and I'm going to learn Arabic because I'm going to defend my country...* it's going to fall right off, right? Because students learning Arabic and spending time in the Middle East come to see very quickly all the amazing cultural practices, all the regular daily life things that people deal with that are the same preoccupations that people have [in the US]... So studying Arabic for many students, makes them develop a better understanding of people in the Middle East as whole persons with an entire culture and all those various things that make up their humanity.

Professor Wilson is hopeful that her students will make it to the Middle East. Even though Arabic enrollment spiked after 9/11, trends of attrition remain similar to Belnap's observations made in 1987 (Belnap 1987). Professor Wilson notes that she often only has students in her Arabic class for two years, maybe three if they are majors, and rarely ever four. The prospect of going to the Middle East is not even on the table for some of these students, let alone staying

enrolled in Arabic courses in the US. Students like Sofia and myself have been beneficiaries of the life-changing experiential learning opportunities study abroad can provide in supplementing a domestic, textbook-based education.

Sofia's story gave shape to the government's interest and influence in shaping an education of Arabic abroad, Professor Wilson articulated her critiques about ideologies represented in Arabic learning textbooks, but one piece of the puzzle is still missing: those who work on the inside.

THE PROFESSIONALS

For my research, I had the opportunity to speak with three Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) in the US DoS who have been stationed in the Arabophone world. All of them spoke a discernible amount of Arabic, be it formal or colloquial, and had benefited from government-funded programming for Arabic as a critical language, predominantly in the higher register of Arabic, before their employment in the DoS.

John, a graduate of Williams College, started learning Arabic out of an interest in the region's history. With full transparency, he said he found his two years of *Fusha* instruction at Williams "to be sorely lacking" due to the limited amount of instruction hours a collegiate class can afford. After graduating, John went to Amman, Jordan on a Fulbright Research Fellowship (DoS) that also funded six months of intensive Arabic training in *Fusha*. In 2017, he was selected as a

Boren Fellow (DoD) and served in the Sultanate of Oman. He became an FSO in 2020 and completed his first consular tour in Beirut, Lebanon.

Hassan, a polyglot and world traveler, has seen immense opportunities from federally-funded programs. As a high schooler, he participated in NSLI-Y (DoS) in Egypt (2009) and Morocco (2010) and later, as a college student, he was selected for the Critical Language Scholarship (DoS) in Jordan (2012). After graduating college, Hassan became a Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellow (DoS) in 2013 and joined the DoS as an FSO in 2016. He completed his second tour in Algiers, Algeria.

Hassan describes Peter as “probably the best [non-native] speaker [of Arabic] in the entire US government.” The two were colleagues in Algiers at the US Embassy. Peter began learning Arabic in high school when he took courses at the local university; this was before 9/11 when Arabic instruction was not as widely available. In 1999, when he matriculated to his undergraduate institution, Swarthmore College, Arabic was not offered, so Peter decided to study abroad in the Arabophone world during his junior year. Peter was in Amman, Jordan on an extended study abroad program when the hijacked planes collided with the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. “At that point, you know, after 9/11, Swarthmore, like many other institutions, suddenly was scrambling to offer Arabic, and I became a teaching assistant for the first Arabic class,” says Peter. Upon his return to Swarthmore’s campus, he co-taught a class with a Moroccan professor who was recruited internally from the French Department to teach a non-credit class in Standard Arabic for 20 enrolled students. Peter

recounts that there was no textbook, and the professor did not speak English. “It was a very chaotic first attempt at teaching Arabic at Swarthmore,” Peter recalls.

After graduating from Swarthmore, Peter picked up his bags and moved to Cairo, Egypt on a whim. He found a job at *Al-Ahram Weekly* as a copy editor and journalist and quickly learned Egyptian Arabic after solely having an education in *Fusha* in the US. He continued his Arabic education in Egypt at the world-renowned Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) funded by the DoED for a year-long intensive program with key figures in TAFL like Kristen Brustad and Mahmoud Al-Batal. After working as an Arabic Instructor at premier Arabic language-learning institutions in the US, Peter joined the Foreign Service in 2013.

All three FSOs that I interviewed started learning the Arabic language almost exclusively through *Fusha*, and often through programs funded by the US government. After two years of Arabic instruction at Amherst, John found himself, quite literally, at a loss for words in Jordan. After interacting with taxi drivers, shop keepers, and people on the streets of Amman, “very shortly I was like, okay, so *Fusha* is not really terribly useful for like getting around which, you know, I intellectually already knew, but like I saw it, I *felt* it,” says John. As part of his Fulbright Award, John studied at the acclaimed Qasid Institute where he noted that his Arabic education had a “really intense grounding in *Fusha*” with a subtle “nod at *ammiya*.” Although Qasid attracts many accomplished American students, a lot of his classmates were Turkish Salafis who were studying to become Imams,³² and therefore had a high interest in the formal Arabic taught at the Institute. Later, John worked for the White Helmets, a Syrian Civil Defense Group, that

³² Selected leader of prayer in the Sunni sect of Islam

operated completely in *ammiya*. After exposure to the dialect and hiring a private tutor, John was able to add the lower variety of dialect to his linguistic tool kit.

As FSOs in the Arabophone world, each of these individuals have had to walk the line between H and L Arabics. As diplomats, they must be able to speak with locals in their specific country in L Arabic *and* they must be able to adequately access the news, political speeches, and written articles that appear in Standard Arabic. Some FSOs noted a greater need for L Arabic in their job, while others noted a greater need for H Arabic. John speaks primarily to his work in Beirut and the need for L Arabic: “American consular work is interview-based... You’re standing there behind bulletproof glass, basically asking the same rote questions... it’s highly formulaic... and so actually, in ironic ways, my Arabic got worse doing that, because you’re really just having the same conversations over and over again.” If it was not for his Lebanese co-workers, John admits that he may not have been able to maintain his proficiency in the Lebanese dialect. Hassan, on the other hand, put more stress on H Arabic in his job:

So you know, when, unfortunately, with the earthquake, and following the news of what is happening in Syria, it’s all being done in the media in Standard Arabic. So being able to keep up with what’s going on there, you have to have that Standard Arabic vocabulary and grammar... In Algeria, it was *absolutely* a requirement to have [Standard Arabic], if you are working in public affairs, keeping track of the news, keeping track of what the government is saying. And I was, you know, my main portfolio was cultural work, but I was also really involved in social media and the press, giving interviews, so I had to have Standard Arabic.

As formal, public-facing representatives of the US government, and as working professionals in Arabophone spaces, a majority of Standard Arabic and a limited capacity of dialect were the primary requirements for an FSO position abroad.

It is important to note that none of the FSOs that I spoke with were recipients of instruction in Arabic at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) before their placements in the Arabophone world; all of them tested out of this training in Arabic. However, both Hassan and Peter received training in Azerbaijani and French, respectively, from the FSI before their tours in Azerbaijan and Algeria. Hassan recounts his nine month language training in Azerbaijani: “So in my experience with the Foreign Service Institute... languages are not taught for daily life, they are taught for professional life in the State Department, and without consideration for what kind of work you'll be doing... So, one week, you'll be learning about the economy, and then next week, you'll be learning about climate change, women's and gender issues, and health.” While in Algiers, Hassan did take a supplemental language course with a local teacher contracted by the FSI in Colloquial Arabic, but he found it of little use for his job. He recounts, “so while [the Algerian colloquial course] helped me make new friends and get used to pop culture and all that, it did not help much with understanding the news or literature.” The US government predominantly expected Hassan to have a larger proficiency of the H variety, over the L variety of Arabic, when working in the Arabophone world.

The US Foreign Service ranks Arabic “proficiency” based on the Inter-Agency Language Roundtable (ILR) scoring system.³³ Individuals who test their foreign language proficiency on

³³ An equivalent scoring system is used in TAFL programs called the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Their five possible scores for any given OPI, with additional distinctions within each of the first three major scores, are: Novice (1, Low - High), Intermediate (2, Low - High), Advanced (3, Low - High),

the ILR scale are given a score based on their performance in an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). The scores exist on a 0-5 scale with assigned levels of proficiency and further distinctions on scores 0-3. Given that the most common form of spoken Arabic resides in the lower registers of the language, and that ACTFL accepts both H and L Arabics to assess proficiency in the Arabic language (Ryding 1995), logic would infer that the L forms of Arabic would heavily influence the decision of an ILR score following an OPI. Testimonies from FSOs suggest otherwise, shedding light on the *kind* of Arabic that is deemed the more appropriate, or prestigious form, that is worthy of recognition in defining Arabic proficiency for Americans.

0	No Proficiency
0+	Memorized Proficiency
1	Elementary Proficiency
1+	Elementary Proficiency, Plus
2	Limited Working Proficiency
2+	Limited Working Proficiency, Plus
3	Professional Working Proficiency
3+	Professional Working Proficiency, Plus
4	Full Proficiency
4+	Full Proficiency, Plus
5	Native or Bilingual Fluency

Table 12.1 ILR proficiency scores used to assess the proficiency of Foreign Service Officers in any given language.

Superior (4), and Distinguished (5, which is typically only attainable for NSs with doctoral degrees in Arabic Literature). After doing an OPI in my time in Amman, Jordan, I received the score of Intermediate High. The main reason I did not receive the score of Advanced Low - High was because I did not employ as many words in *Fusha* as I did in Jordanian dialect, according to the teacher administering my OPI.

Peter helps break down who succeeds, and who does not, in advancing through the ILR proficiency levels. After an intensive and immersive education at CASA with a “strong foundation in *Fusha*,” Peter and John tested out of the FSI Arabic training with a score of 4/4: “Distinguished” according to ACTFL guidelines. “And then I had to retest in Arabic five years later, because basically, if you get the 4/4 score twice, five years apart, then it’s good for life, and you don’t have to test again,” he says. On the other end of the spectrum, Peter shares the story of his Algerian-American colleague who only received a 2+ on her OPI. She had grown up in Algeria, attended Arabic high schools, and moved back and forth between the US and the Middle East in her early twenties. As a NS of Arabic who specifically tested in Algerian Arabic, how could she have tested *significantly* lower than a NNS? Peter explains, “[The FSI’s] language tests will, in a way, kind of fail with native speakers sometimes, or with a very good heritage speaker... It’s partly because they’re prejudiced against dialects. Even though they are supposed to be grading her in Algerian dialect specifically, they are looking for someone who can code switch into pure *Fusha*, and really just stick with that.” This trend is common in determining Arabic proficiency by US government standards. Peter notes that if an individual cannot break the threshold of register into the H form of Arabic, they often will not receive a score of above a 2+ level (Limited Working Proficiency).

In the context of a professional working environment, this scoring is logical. John makes sense of the ILR logic by reflecting on his own score of 4/4 by ILR standards: “[When I tested 4/4], what that meant is that’s the kind of level where you’re gonna have like, a fairly long conversation with somebody about, you know, nuclear non-proliferation,” explains John. But, as a consular fellow in Beirut adjudicating visas and interviewing passport candidates, John was

definitely not using H Arabic to talk to everyday Lebanese people, let alone bring up heated topics like nuclear non-proliferation behind the bullet-proof glass that separated him from the public. John says that given his use of mostly Lebanese dialect during his consular tour, if he were to re-test in an OPI, he would probably only get as high as a 3, or 3+. “So all of which is to say that ironically, despite using Arabic all day long in my Foreign Service job, I think my proficiency, as defined by the testing scale of the State Department, probably decreased,” says John.

In the US DoS, proficiency of Arabic is equated with proficiency of *Fusha*, discounting the value of knowing and speaking dialect. Peter speaks to Hassan’s excellence in Algerian dialect: “[Hassan’s] Algerian Arabic is *so* good. It’s definitely better than mine in terms of accent... On the phone, he could pass for like a francophone Algerian... but the thing is, his *Fusha* deteriorated somewhat while he was in Algeria, just because he was never using it.” Peter recalls Hassan only having a 2+ “in the books” for the FSI test, “even though his Algerian is *fantastic*... our testing system does not recognize how good he is in the local dialect.” What is recognized by the DoS in terms of proficiency comes with monetary value too: “If you’re in a job where you use Arabic, you get a language bonus, depending on how high of a score you got,” explains Peter. For individuals with a score of 4/4, this can mean receiving a bonus of anywhere from \$5,000 - \$15,000 a year, according to Peter.

These stories exemplify what the government wants out of their investment in TAFL; how they envision it to be used and maintained “in the field”, so to speak. Although knowing the H variety is important, it does not represent the whole language, and in fact will limit an L2 speaker to very

specific, highly formalized, and professional settings. These are not the avenues where sustainable people-to-people diplomacy happens. Fortunately, educators of TAFL are thinking about this disconnect in their instruction. If anything can be surmised from this paper up to this point it is that TAFL is complicated. The next three chapters detail the approaches my informants Professors McKay and Wilson have employed and the challenges they have encountered during their careers as educators of the Arabic language.

CHAPTER 13

PEDAGOGIES AND IDEOLOGIES: THE APPROACH OF TAFL EDUCATORS

To understand the intricacies of TAFL more, I spoke with two Arabic Language educators in the US. Both professors are L2 learners of Arabic. Professor Wilson teaches Arabic at a large public university while Professor McKay works at a small Liberal Arts college. I asked Professor McKay during our interview where she saw improvements for TAFL. After a pause, she looked at me and whispered, “That’s a big question.”

Professor McKay is a woman of many languages; she admirably speaks upwards of ten languages. Aside from Arabic, she also studied Persian: “[What] was amazing about Persian [was that] I learned something and then I just could go outside [of the classroom] and people understood what I said.” Sounds like a reasonable desire for real-world application of learning any foreign language. However, Professor McKay adds, “So that’s just not the way with [Classical] Arabic, [and] with Arabic in general, right? So it *is* a diglossic language... it’s a reality we have to accept.” Professor Wilson agrees about the challenges that diglossia creates in TAFL, “So, the differences between *Fusha* and the [dialects], that is the *only* thing that puts Arabic in the category of ‘Hardest Languages to Learn.’” Aside from diglossia, Professors Wilson and McKay found time, resources, and quality of available textbooks to add to the complexities of TAFL in their respective institutions.

At Professor McKay’s small Liberal Arts college, the Arabic department is a one-woman show. With limited funding at a smaller institution, and a limited student body to pull interest from,

Professor McKay is the sole professor of Arabic under the Classical Languages Department.³⁴ She typically teaches two Arabic classes per semester, accounting for all the Arabic language courses available at any given time at her college. Similar to Professor Wilson, she will likely only have each student for an average of two years, three hours per week. Irrespective of the quality of available textbooks for Arabic, three hours per week is simply not enough. At McKay's previous institution, the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin), where many of the students were taking Arabic courses to fulfill their language requirements to join the Foreign Service, students had *double* the instruction hours of Arabic per week. "What we cover here is basic, very basic, and you know, we [only] have three hours per week... We will only barely cover the sort of basic grounds for *Fusha* so I don't have the space to add the logic of the spoken language," says Professor McKay. And even if she *did* want to teach dialect in the classroom, there are not widely available and standardized textbooks for teaching spoken Arabic, let alone *Fusha*. McKay notes that she is still trying to find the perfect textbook for teaching Standard Arabic, given that she finds premier textbooks like *Al-Kitaab* to be "not very organized in presenting material and grammar." Both Professor McKay and Wilson have taken to constructing their own extracurricular avenues for teaching dialects, whether it be through songs, poetry, or research assignments for their students.

In the case of teaching dialects in the classroom, many TAFL institutions will follow a MSA + 1 dialect model. That is, they will teach one chosen dialect in addition to the widely accepted

³⁴ Another important distinction to be made in TAFL is the *department* Arabic language programs are housed in. At Professor Wilson's large research university, Arabic is placed in the Asian & Middle Eastern Studies department, while at Professor McKay's small Liberal Arts college, Arabic is placed in the Classical Languages department alongside Ancient Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Arabic (and Hebrew), unlike Ancient Greek and Latin, are *modern* languages, not ancient. They have applications and value in a modern context, as well as an ancient history that informs the modern context. These distinctions can silo Arabic into a category that is a misnomer for its function in modern society, and give further reason to ignore the spoken varieties of Arabic in comparison to the overwhelming attention placed on the Standard form.

Standard Arabic instruction. For Professor McKay and Wilson's ad-hoc instruction of dialect, the question becomes *which* dialect do you teach? Professor McKay countered this question by asking if dialect is even warranted based on student interest: "So you have the students who studied the *Qur'an* [and] who want to improve their [Standard] Arabic...you have the students who want to go into [the] Foreign Service, and you have the students who want to just speak to Syrian refugees." Given those three distinct motivations for studying Arabic, you already have three different teaching patterns to follow: for the student studying the *Qur'an*, you teach Classical Arabic; for the student joining the Foreign Service, you teach a mixed form of dialect and Modern Standard Arabic; and for the student interviewing Syrian refugees, you ditch Standard Arabic (almost) completely and focus on instruction in the Syrian dialect. If all those students are in the same class, it will be difficult to establish a curriculum that meets all the specific needs of each individual student, particularly if they study in a smaller institution, like Professor McKay's, with only one instructor and limited classroom hours.

To tackle *which* kind of dialect to teach at the university level, some may point to the ultimate regional hegemon, Egypt and their dialect, as the answer. That may be useful for prioritizing intelligibility across dialects, but as Hassan notes, "Egyptian is a very useful dialect to know, but it won't get you far if you want to get close to people living in Lebanon, for example, or Oman." To get to know the local people of any country, you will have to connect on the level of *identity* over *intelligibility*. That is, you must speak the Lebanese dialect in Lebanon, the Omani dialect in Oman, and *darija* in Morocco. Outside of the Egyptian dialect, Professor Wilson works hard to promote dialects other than the ones found in the Mashreq region: "I tried to really remove the

Nancy Ajrams,³⁵ the Mohammed Abdel Wahabs,³⁶ and even Fairuz... I really don't want everybody to know *just* them. And even the heritage speakers in our classes, that's the people they usually know. But there are thousands of other artists that they don't know [or] they haven't heard yet. So I tried to incorporate that music in class.” Professor Wilson admits that, despite her greatest efforts, there is no escape from prioritizing certain dialectal features over others. Egyptian dialect still dominates the “+1” category in the MSA +1 dialect pedagogy.

When instruction of the dialect is warranted based on the students’ intent for studying Arabic, and the dialect has been selected based on a study abroad location, country of interest, or family heritage, the next crossroads is determining which kind of Arabic to learn first: H or L Arabic? In Chapter 7, “Pedagogical Methods For Arabic as a Diglossic Language”, I outlined the three primary avenues for teaching both H and L Arabic: Dialect First and MSA Later, MSA First and Dialect Later, and MSA and Dialect Simultaneously. The next chapter will parse out these pedagogical routes as it relates to Al-Hamad’s analogy of the mountain (Al-Hamad 1983:95).

³⁵ Lebanese singer; dubbed by Spotify as the “Queen of Arab Pop”

³⁶ Prominent 20th Century Egyptian singer, actor, and composer

CHAPTER 14

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN: WHERE TO START ARABIC INSTRUCTION

Teaching MSA First and Dialect Later is the predominant TAFL pedagogy in the US. Educators in support of this approach will often argue that “if one learns MSA first, then he/she can easily learn any Arabic dialect afterward” (Younes 1995:235). Furthermore, this choice of pedagogy has been metaphorized as a journey up a challenging mountain, with H Arabic at the top, and the L varieties at different locations below the summit of Standard Arabic:

My students who showed a desire to study a dialect [after learning MSA] found wonderful psychological relief when I gave them the analogy of the high language [being] like the peak of a mountain and the dialects like its numerous low sides, and [when] I showed them that we seek to take them to the peak because after that they could descend to the lower [sides] if they so desired. Our interest in one dialect over another makes reaching the peak difficult.

(Al-Hamad 1983:95)

This analogy, although at times useful to ascribe the difficulty of the grammatical rules of H Arabic in comparison to its more forgiving dialectal counterparts, *devalues* the L varieties of Arabic. Professor Wilson pushes back on the mountain analogy: “Dialects are not a degenerated form of Arabic... The image of a mountain I find problematic because it really suggests that *Fusha* is the hardest.” However, Professor Wilson does admit that for a long time she did subscribe to this teaching sequence, saving instruction of dialect for a later date or for the study abroad semester. Now, Professor Wilson introduces the study of dialects as early as the second semester. She staunchly points out that her instruction *begins* in formal Arabic, but it is equally

necessary to include dialect instruction in a student's Arabic education, especially if they only take the language for two years. From her perspective, there is immense benefit in establishing grammatical structures, writing, and pronunciation in formal Arabic, but then to adequately provide exposure and instruction in various dialects alongside an education in H Arabic. "And so far, no terrible confusion," she says, "I don't ever want students to look at *Fusha* as this huge heavy load of rules and this very difficult thing, just as I don't want them to ever think of adding a dialect to *Fusha* as difficult... I just take that [rhetoric] out of my vocabulary. I don't speak to students in that way."

Some students, like Sofia, were never subjected to the pedagogical philosophy of "the mountain" because they started learning a dialect before ever touching *Fusha*. "I hate the idea that *Fusha* is the end goal," states Sofia. Her knowledge of *darija* was foundational to her experience in Morocco, and the absence of *Fusha* did little to hinder her life in an Arabophone country other than understanding the news. In her own words, Al-Hamad's metaphor fails: "You can't start a mountain at the top. When you climb a mountain, you have to *climb* a mountain." When Sofia did start studying *Fusha* formally in her first semester of college, she noticed that she was able to acquire the H register much easier than if she had learned the two forms of language in the reverse trajectory. Although starting in her late teens, her learning of the H and L forms of Arabic mimics the way most NSs learn the Arabic language, starting with the L form and arriving at the H form later. Now, after instruction in *Fusha* at the University level and through programs like CLS, Sofia can have in-depth conversations in *Fusha* about topics like "What makes a good dictator?" and "How to treat a Snake Bite."³⁷ Having taken the route of Dialect

³⁷ A separate project she worked on in Costa Rica during her summer taking remote classes with CLS Oman.

First and MSA Later, everything has worked out alright for Sofia. For her, “it’s so much better to try and claw your way up the mountain, even if you arrive at *Fusha* at a later date.”

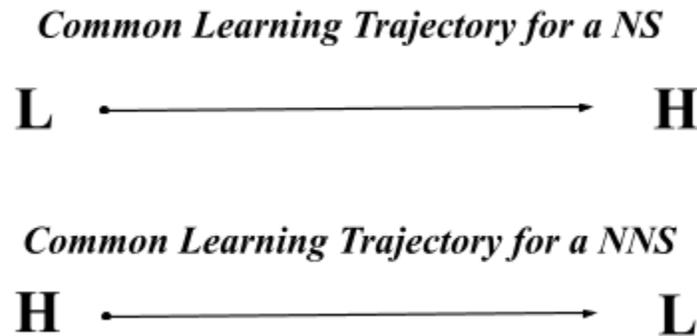


Diagram 14.1 Comparative trajectories for learning H and L Arabic for a NS and a NNS.

On the other side of the pedagogical spectrum, all the FSOs I interviewed followed the MSA First and Dialect Later path, summiting the mountain before arriving at the “lower” slopes of dialectal proficiency. Across the three FSOs I interviewed, they command proficiency in Algerian, Moroccan, Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian/ Jordanian, and Iraqi dialects. Peter attributes his proficiency in dialects to the “strong foundation in *Fusha*” he received early on and consistently during his Arabic instruction through his study abroad program in Jordan and the CASA program in Egypt. Without knowledge of the dialect when he was in Jordan, he admits, “I definitely did struggle... during my study abroad... in terms of communication, [but] I do think that having had that solid base in *Fusha* did help me diversify and be able to pick up multiple dialects while keeping my *Fusha* very strong.” John agrees that his initial education in MSA helped him acquire the Lebanese and greater Mashreqi dialects: “I am very grateful that my

Arabic is really fundamentally grounded in *Fusha*, and everything else is just an extension of that.”

Even though many of my informants benefited from learning MSA first and dialect later, the sequencing of the forms was not indicative of the form’s inherent value in the application of language. As Professor McKay reinforces, “I don’t think the dialect is just a simplification of *Fusha*, it has sort of a different logic.” She does argue that learning MSA first can make the acquisition of a dialect easier, but the extent to which *Fusha* should be put on a pedestal as the supreme form of Arabic is misconstrued. “So I take *Fusha* as an opener,” she says, “It’s what I tell students as sort of an entryway into the fascinating world of Arabic. I don’t think that, for teaching purposes, you can think about dialect and *Fusha* as two separate languages. To me, it’s one big beautiful language that is just used at different times.”

Granted, the task of teaching two languages in one is not simple, but it is necessary. Professor Wilson notes the inadequacy of limiting a student’s education of Arabic to one form or the other: “If you teach only one of them, whether only *Fusha* or only one [dialect], you are not equipping students to be fully proficient for all of the communicative tasks that they will need to do in their life with NSs and with others.” Indeed, to be proficient in any language you will need to know how to read, write, speak and listen. “You need both dialects and Standard Arabic forms to do all those,” says Hassan. On any given day, you will want to read the newspaper (in Standard Arabic), chat with family and friends (in dialect), write a formal email to a coworker (in Standard Arabic), and listen to your favorite song (in dialect). Even though these examples seem to have firm boundaries between forms (i.e., either you use the H or L form) Professor Wilson argues

that there really are no firm boundaries between what has been described as H and L Arabics: “In daily life, NSs do a great deal of mixing and are always moving on that spectrum... all these boundaries [between H and L forms] are porous.” To tackle the perceived problem of diglossia in the Arabic language, or the simple binary of teaching MSA First and Dialect Later, or vice versa, I argue that the teaching of applying Arabic across the spectrum, oscillating in and out of the “porous” boundaries of H and L Arabic based on context, must be emphasized in TAFL to produce confident and interculturally proficient L2 speakers of Arabic. We must enter a space of *negotiating* within the Arabic language. This means not restricting an L2 learner to employing the H or the L forms, but acquiring the fluency to be flexible in the understanding and application of the endless combinations of both forms that exist in a diglossic language. The next chapter explores this middle-of-the-path Arabic.

CHAPTER 15

STRIKING MIDDLE GROUND: EMPLOYING ESA IN TAFL

In the middle of Badawi's continuum of the Arabic language³⁸ he writes about *Al-Aamiyyatu lmuthaqafin*, "the colloquial of the cultured" (Badawi 1973), or what is referred to as ESA in pedagogical settings (Mitchell 1986). Although written by a scholar fifty years ago, this middle Arabic—halfway between the H and L forms—is still relevant to spoken Arabic today. In fact, that's where L2 speakers like John, who have previously tested 4/4 on the *Fusha*-centered ILR test, strive to speak in Arabophone society: "I kind of have accommodated myself to the fact [that] I'm never really going to speak, you know *darija*, slang, *shabaab*³⁹ Arabic... My bottom line is, I think having a very solid grounding in *Fusha* was always useful for me. My Arabic is much better for being grounded in *Fusha* and then moving to *ammiya*, rather than the other way around." He continues, "I'm comfortable with my *Fusha* being very good and my *ammiya*, you know, good, but no one's going to mistake me for a NS." Given that many American students start with MSA, this is the predicament they find themselves in; they cannot communicate well in the fifth marker on Badawi's spectrum, "plain colloquial", and likewise cannot employ the Arabic they are most well-versed in at the second marker on the spectrum, "Modern Standard Arabic," in daily life. By taking into account the necessity to speak lower forms of Arabic and the knowledge American students have of higher Arabics, the happy medium finds itself in what John calls, "high brow *ammiya*," an Arabic that values both H and L forms.

³⁸ Refer to Badawi's list in Chapter 5

³⁹ Young people

Mark, my final informant, an L2 speaker of Arabic who has made a career in the Arabophone news world, was a student of Badawi at CASA. At CASA, ESA was a lived reality for students and professors. Mark recounts his time learning ESA at CASA:

Yeah, I mean, [Badawi] was there, and [ESA] was very much in the air, and everyone, I mean, almost all of the instructors had advanced degrees in TAFL and exposure to training in linguistics... Not only were they preaching it, they were practicing it... Even if you had your instructor for *Fusha*, you [would] chat with them outside of the classroom [in ESA]. It [was] like, they were kind of *negotiating* the sort of levels and spaces of the movement between the two elements of diglossia.

This is the forgotten skill of TAFL in the American context. Despite the professional appeal of H Arabic for maintaining “national security” and reaching a broader Arabophone audience, where *intelligibility* is prioritized over *identity*, we fail to enter the fragile and worthwhile space of negotiating Arabic. Teaching this skill of navigating diglossic language and hybridizing speech from moment to moment is what scholars, like Emma Trentman, call developing a “meta-linguistic awareness” (Trentman 2022). And there is extreme utility, not only in comprehension, but also in forming stronger connections when ESA is used over purely the H form of Arabic. Professor McKay puts it this way to her students:

You're not going to impress a Lebanese or Syrian by ordering coffee *exactly* the way they do. But you're going to impress them if you can actually lead a conversation. But if you can lead a conversation with them, and that's where this [balance] of the language [comes in], the vocabulary you will be learning is going to get you there. The small things ‘*shu, kiif*,’⁴⁰ okay, you know, all of the foreigners know those who live there, but very few of them can actually lead an intelligent conversation with them.

⁴⁰ “What” and “how” in Levantine Colloquial Arabic, common particles of speech that differ from Standard Arabic

These skills of navigating diglossic language are hard to teach, let alone employ in everyday speech. “Simply because you don’t know how to do it in your own language,” says Professor McKay. She continues, “I don’t think you can necessarily teach it. It’s hard. I think it’s important to talk about it, but how do we teach it? I’m not sure.” Certainly, exposure to culture and how NSs employ the language is important; that is where the study abroad experience shines. But, this kind of holistic instruction cannot wait for a single semester two years after a student starts learning Arabic. Professors Wilson and McKay have put their creativity and patience to the test in designing supplemental curricula for diverse dialect instruction, but it is not easy work. More thoughtful planning and research on a grand scale, whether through the AATA or another TAFL platform, needs to integrate meta-linguistic awareness in school curricula and a greater comprehension and application of ESA and other mixed varieties like it. The instruction of H Arabic outside of the guise of the US government’s Critical Language Studies has its place in the classroom, but it does not deserve to take up every seat at the table. We must create space for a variety of dialects, registers, and linguistic practices of the Arabophone world so students can gain a holistic proficiency of other Arabophone cultures and their peoples. When this understanding comes to fruition, we can begin to imagine sustainable people-to-people diplomacy in contrast to our fraught and disillusioned conceptions of the Middle East in the US.

CONCLUSION

Ferguson described the diglossia of Arabic as producing “two languages in one” (Ferguson 1963:166). As my informants across the board have made clear, the sole instruction of one variety, namely the H variety, and the negligence of the L varieties is inadequate. For the NS informants, this style of teaching does not represent the language they use in daily life. For the student informant, although the study of *Fusha* became necessary for her to learn to access all parts of the language, her understanding of *darija* is really what connected her with Moroccans. For the educator informants, the instruction of the H variety alone does not align with their hopes for their students and how they will engage with Arabic, and the overcompensation of teaching Mashreq-centered L varieties erases the abundance of linguistic diversity they wish to share from the region. However, for the professional informants in the US government, the H variety has the most utility.

Although the proficiency guidelines of the US government reflect a prioritization of the H variety, my FSOs informed me that the interests that originally propelled them into the US government’s “full proficiency categories” did not align with the US government’s goals of fortifying national security. For Hassan, he began learning Arabic to learn more about the *Qur’an* and his faith. For Peter, he marveled at Ottoman history in high school, and decided to study Arabic to learn even more about the region. And for John, although he may have started under the lure of the career-enhancing opportunity to study Arabic, he continues to study it because he loves it:

It’s intrinsic for me now, but for people who are [studying Arabic] for career enhancing reasons, as opposed to their personal passions... I don't think people are terribly well

served by learning Arabic, to be honest. I think the only reason to get really good at Arabic is if you enjoy it, or maybe have an academic need for it, or you're an anthropologist... The main reason I still study Arabic is because I love it. Right? Whereas I started, I think, because I thought it was like a useful thing to do. But anyone in the government who thinks it's career enhancing is naive.

Government funding, at least for the time being, will always influence how Americans engage with the study of Arabic. My first experience learning Arabic at *Al-Waha* at CLV was made possible by the US government. As part of President Bush's 2006 NSLI, CLV accepted its first federal fund in its history to establish the camp. The grant of \$250,000 is one of many that were directed towards the study of Arabic for Americans after 9/11. I learned a lot from my time at *Al-Waha*, but I only learned *Fusha*, and we only used *Al-Kitaab*. There were clear shortcomings in my first experience studying Arabic supported by US government funding.

I have felt most fulfilled in my Arabic skills when I can "lead a conversation," as Professor McKay puts it, and actually connect on a personal level with NSs. This requires a true knowledge of the dialect and a balancing act between the H and L poles of Arabic, or a *meta-linguistic awareness*, which I am still working on. In a larger process of learning, the experience of studying and teaching Arabic must require a certain degree of un-learning, particularly in regard to the influence and national security emphasis of the US government and the challenges its influence creates for achieving intercultural proficiency. Sofia phrases the goal of intercultural proficiency well in reflecting on why she and others she has met began to study Arabic: "[We] just want to talk to people normally. And that's why you're learning languages, because you just want to be able to access those people... That's why I started learning Arabic in the first place."

I do not bring my critical perspective to this paper to completely disqualify learning experiences that are supported by the US government. I must admit, I benefited greatly from my time at *Al-Waha* and my continued study of Arabic. This paper would not have been realized if these kinds of programs had not nurtured my love for the Arabic language and encouraged me to study abroad for a semester in the Arabophone world. My larger criticism is directed towards the *kind* of Arabic we are prioritizing, *why* we are prioritizing it, and by *whose* standards.

At the end of the Preface of *Al-Kitaab Part 3*, the authors write, “This is the third and final volume of the al-Kitaab series. We hope that it will successfully launch you into the ‘real world’ of Arabic on your own” (Brustad et. al 2007: Preface to the Student *x*). While there is much to be said for the experiential learning that takes place in the “real world” (e.g., speaking with NSs or traveling to an Arabic-speaking country), a student must not wait to engage with the “real world” to start learning dialects of Arabic. To achieve meta-linguistic awareness and true intercultural proficiency, a comprehensive curriculum must embrace priorities beyond national security. If we are to educate competent, thoughtful, and culturally aware Americans in the Arabic language, we are going to have to change the historic pedagogy and future narrative of TAFL.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AATA - American Association of Teachers of Arabic
ACTFL - American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
CA - Classical Arabic
CASA - Center for Arabic Study Abroad
CLS - Critical Language Scholarship
CLV - Concordia Language Villages
DOD - U.S. Department of Defense
DoED - U.S. Department of Education
DOS - U.S. Department of State
F - Formal
-F - Informal
-Fa - careful language
-Fb - casual language
FBI - Federal Bureau of Investigation
FLI - Foreign Language Instruction
FSI - Foreign Service Institute
ESA - Educated Standard Arabic
FSA - Formal Spoken Arabic
FSO - Foreign Service Officer
H - High (Language, Variety, Vernacular, etc)
IB - International Baccalaureate
L - Low (Language(s), Variety(ies), Vernacular(s), etc)
L2 - Second Language
MLA - Modern Language Association
MSA - Modern Standard Arabic
NS(s) - Native Speaker(s)
NNS(s) - Non-Native Speaker(s)
NSEP - National Security Education Program
NSLI - National Security Language Initiative
OLA - Oral Literary Arabic
OPI - Oral Proficiency Interview
ROTC - Reserve Officers' Training Corps
TAFL - Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language
UAE - United Arab Emirates
US - United States of America
UT Austin - the University of Texas at Austin
WWII - World War II
YES Abroad - Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Abroad Program

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