

**Possibilities, challenges, and implications for
teaching an Arabic dialect as a basis for meeting
the communicative needs of learners of Arabic
as a foreign language**

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Workshop Overview

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- Discussion of the nature of diglossia in Arabic
- Discussion of the rationale for the need to teach a spoken variety Arabic to meet learners' communicative needs
- Discussion of which dialect most suited to function as a lingua franca among all Arabs and can generally be used for teaching Arabic as a foreign language (AFL)
- Discussion of the challenges for applying such new pedagogical direction and its implications for teaching Arabic

The nature of diglossia in Arabic

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Charles Ferguson first introduced the term in his landmark article *Diglossia* to describe the situation in which “Two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play” (Ferguson, 1959:325).

The nature of diglossia in Arabic (Contd)

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Ferguson defines diglossia as:

“... a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) super-imposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either in an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and issued for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.” [(Ferguson, 1959: 336)

The nature of diglossia in Arabic (Contd)

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- Further, Ferguson identifies two main varieties: High (H) and Low (L) used for formal and informal communication respectively.
- In terms of function, Ferguson notes that “an outsider who learns to speak fluent, accurate L and then uses it in a formal speech is an object of ridicule.
- A member of the speech community who uses H in a purely conversational or in an informal activity like shopping is equally an object of ridicule” (Ferguson, 1959: 329).
- This highlights the importance of teaching learners of Arabic more than one variety of Arabic and perhaps more importantly, teaching them to use the varieties of the language in their appropriate contexts.

The nature of diglossia in Arabic (Contd)

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- Implications of the features of diglossia on Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL)
- Ryding's (2006) concept of "reverse privilege"
- Ryding's confirmation that language learners of Arabic need to grasp both a spoken variety as well as the standard written language to achieve a well-rounded grasp of Arabic resembling that of a native speaker
- Ryding's new "roadmap" for the future of teaching Arabic as a foreign language

Teaching foreign languages and communicative functions

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- The goal of language teaching is to develop the learner's ability to communicate with native speakers in real-life situations in the target language (Spolsky, 1978)."
- Canale and Swain (1980: 2) describe communicative competence as being organized around the basis of communicative functions the learner needs to know as opposed to being organized around linguistic or grammatical forms.

Challenges of dealing with Arabic diglossia

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- Difficulty of applying straightforward definitions to Arabic strong diglossic case
- No variety of spoken Arabic being accepted as the norm or standard for the whole speech community
- Important centers of prestige and communication exerting considerable linguistic influence over a certain region (e.g. Cairo Arabic in Egypt/Cairene Arabic)

Challenges of dealing with Arabic diglossia (Contd)

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- Current lack of discourse analysis for Arabic (Ryding, 2006:18)
- Functions of the language not well defined or well researched beyond the common generalization of using MSA primarily for reading and writing, and colloquial or dialect Arabic primarily for conversation

Challenges of dealing with Arabic diglossia (Contd)

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- The spread, influence and dominance of Egyptian Arabic throughout the Arab world during the 20th century: its media, politics and socio-cultural influence
- Influence of Egypt within the region, as a bridge that socially and culturally connecting the western-most countries of North Africa with the Levant and Arab Gulf as far as Iraq.
- Media statistics to support the widely accepted view of the predominance of Egyptian media across the Arab world during the 20th century
- Egyptian Colloquial Arabic being a “lingua franca” – a language that is understood and used across borders” – within the Arab world

A matter of choice!

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- Recent literature calling for teaching spoken Arabic as it is spoken by natives (“colloquial” or a “dialect”) alongside MSA
- Not sufficient to simply advocate that communicative proficiency should include the spoken as well as written forms of Arabic
- Certain varieties have become predominant
- Cariene Egyptian becoming one of the most widely-recognized varieties of Arabic and arguably the best choice for a learner of Arabic

Implications for teaching of Arabic

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- Teaching dialects should focus on the similarities between MSA and the spoken varieties of Arabic, and treat them as one language as they are viewed in the Arab world, rather than treating them as separate languages.
- Learners who perceive learning a dialect as an additional burden should be encouraged to view it as a complimentary course of study.

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