

Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21st Century

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We dedicate this book to our students, who struggle with life's most valuable gift and most difficult challenge in the 21st century—learning another language; and to their teachers, who guide them on their journeys.

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Foreword

Arabic for Non-native Speakers in the 21st Century: A Shopping List

El Saïd Badawi*

The American University in Cairo

Given the longevity of Noah, *عمر نوح*, the patience of Job, *صبر أيوب*, and the wealth of Korah, *مال قارون*,¹ anyone, I daresay, can master any foreign language regardless of the method he or she uses for the purpose, be it communicative, audio-lingual, grammar-translation or, for that matter, the silent method.

In the early days of the Islamic empire, scholars from non-Arabic-speaking Islamic communities had the motivation, patience, means, and time to spend up to 15 years, in some cases, on learning Arabic using the memorization technique.

The modern, particularly the Western, foreign learners of Arabic are not without motivation, but are not blessed in the manner previously described. They are short on time, money, and, above all, patience.

Matters for the modern learner are complicated by the particular nature of their target and also by the lack of evaluated curricula, evaluated learning/teaching strategies, theoretically/empirically based teaching materials, and the scarcity of modern, up-to-date teacher training programs; i.e., they begin by learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) at home country institutions, and later on when they have reached a certain level of proficiency, they move into studying one of the colloquial dialects.

Unlike their predecessors, whose task it was to learn a well-defined, well-documented linguistic entity known at the time as *اللسان العربي*, which derived its name straight from the *Qur'ān* and which was clearly modeled on the medium employed in the *Qur'ān* and in old Arabic poetry, modern learners face the unenviable task of trying to learn an ill-defined, ill-researched, socially defused phenomenon whose properties and functions are badly and disparately understood by non-native and native speakers alike. The lack of clearly defined language objectives that the teaching profession is suffering from today is a function of the lack of a clear understanding (or at least appreciation) of the sociolinguistic role it plays in present-day Arab societies.

How else can anyone, for instance, explain the insistence upon the teaching of spoken *فصحى* as a legitimate language skill and on par with spoken *عامية*, or the reluctance to accept that the reading and writing skills have to be concerned with one type of Arabic, while the speaking and listening would have to be concerned with another?

The lamentably inefficient use of the limited and scarcely available opportunities of studying Arabic in its natural milieu is another unwelcome result of ignoring the sociolinguistic characteristics of the language. If MSA is mainly a written language with no native speaker of its own and the colloquials are mainly spoken ones, as it is widely described in the West², then it should follow that studying Arabic in Arab countries should be utilized mainly for studying colloquials, where the societal contexts are essential, studying MSA at home is appropriate, not only because of economic considerations, but because of the absence of the interference from colloquials that those who study MSA in Arab societies have to put up with.

Setting up teaching/learning targets, devising curricula, organizing teaching programs, and many such pedagogical activities are likewise hampered by ignoring the sociolinguistic facts of Arabic. Given that the learner of a foreign language, in the words of Lado³ is, by definition, an educated person, it follows that his or her target should be the language of his or her counterparts in the target society, namely the language of the educated. The language competence of the educated Arab consists of two sets of interrelated skills: Active, consisting of listening and speaking in colloquial but reading and writing in MSA; and, for want of a better term, Dormant, consisting of listening and speaking in MSA, but reading and writing in colloquial.⁴ Speaking in colloquial and MSA cannot, therefore, be considered as equal targets for the learner; one is basic, but the other is a skill to be learned for special purposes.

However, the proficiency movement, influenced by the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) guidelines,⁵ puts these two skills on par with each other thus promoting a "linguistic fiction," in the words of Peter Heath, who goes on to say, "They teach students what Arabs think they 'should' speak rather than what the Arabs in reality do speak. . . ."⁶ Rather than drawing their guidelines from the facts of Arabic per se, the Arabic proficiency movement allowed itself to be unduly influenced by the mother proficiency movement initiated by specialists in other modern foreign languages, particularly Spanish and French.

The strategy by which foreign adults learn the colloquial and MSA varieties, in the absence of widely accepted, standardized criteria, is left to chance. Unlike native speakers, who follow a predetermined strategy by which they learn colloquials at home, and then when they go to school, start to learn MSA, some foreign adults begin the long process with learning MSA, some with one of the regional colloquials, and others with the two together. Until the profession settles this issue one way or the other, the sociolinguistic considerations alluded to earlier suggests that adult learners should take a direction opposite to that taken by the native speakers.

In the area of evaluated curricula, the profession had been lulled into false security by the introduction of two of the best learning/teaching aids ever produced for the benefit of the foreign learner of Arabic: Hans Wehr's *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* in the 1960s and Peter Abboud et al.'s textbooks *Elementary Modern Standard Arabic* and *Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic* in the 1970s. In the absence of research-based information on which to found curricula, teaching strategies, materials development, tests (e.g., statistical research in the area of the vocabulary, morphology, and syntax of regional varieties and MSA) the "orange" and the "green" books have given the Arabic teaching profession a sense of purpose and unity, this due in large measure to the sound structuring of the two books.

In recent years, however, the two textbooks have lost ground, and, as seems to only happen in the case of teaching Arabic, they are being replaced by less structured and less focused texts. The reasons for this setback are twofold: the absence of the basic research referred to earlier and the unfortunate misapplication/interpretation of devising of teaching materials of only authentic materials. Under the guise of authenticity, pieces from various sources, mostly from printed media, are placed together in single volumes without any regard for their divergent structural levels or their lack of sharing enough common vocabulary necessary for reinforcing the learning process. The situation could have been worse but for the number of professional teachers who have been properly trained, many of them in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) MA programs such as the one at the American University in Cairo. These teachers and many others like them adapt and supplement these books with the kind of additional material that provides a less difficult transition from one component to the other.

Hans Wehr's *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* remains the only lexicographical work on which the foreign learner of Arabic relies. In spite of its initially moderate coverage of the vocabulary of MSA (considering that it is supposed to represent its regional variations as used in all Arab countries, and that the vocabulary of MSA has undergone phenomenal changes since the publication of that dictionary in 1960), no attempt has been made to continue the great work of Hans Wehr and fill this gaping lacuna. The limited updating of the dictionary in 1979, which produced 13,000 additional pieces of information ranging from complete entries to new definitions of already existing head words,⁷ is proof enough that the language is quickly changing. The development in recent years of computer programs capable of automatically analyzing connected Arabic texts into their morphological constituents should cut the basic, and indeed boring, part of the lexicographical work by at least one third. The situation is serious, and unless it is professionally remedied, learners will be increasingly faced with lists of vocabulary items subjectively gathered and interpreted. Divergent views of the language would be an inevitable outcome.

The misapplication of principles adapted from methodologies devised for other languages, is largely due, in my opinion, to the observable fact that the majority of those engaged in teaching Arabic as a foreign language are Arabists and not pedagogues. It would seem that in comparison with the teaching of languages with similar international standing, the teaching of Arabic may be one of those with the least number of pedagogically trained personnel. Hands-on experience, although it has in the past produced excellent teachers and continues to do so, is no longer sufficient to meet the demands, in quality and quantity, of the profession.

Grammar, for historical reasons, plays a greater role in the teaching of Arabic than in modern European languages. The instruction in this area, however, suffers from a few drawbacks, the most important of which are the following: The first is relying on the grammatical description of Classical Arabic (CA) for the description/teaching of MSA structure, thanks to the powerful legacy of the old Arab grammarians. The second is the adaptation of grammatical categories and terminology of European languages to the teaching of Arabic to speakers of these languages.

Attempts have been made to isolate and systematize grammatical features of MSA, noted as contrasting with, standing in opposition to, or deviating from parallel CA ones. However such attempts will not help in the systematic teaching of MSA. Only when we have first carried out a comprehensive statistical gathering of all grammatical features of MSA, whether they do or do not contrast with those of CA, and then produced a description of the structure of MSA on its own terms with no reference to that of CA—only then we can teach true MSA.

The unfortunate use of foreign grammatical terminology in the description and teaching of Arabic still persists today in spite of the often repeated linguistic "axiom" that no language should be described in terms of the structure of another. Examples of such confusing misuses of terminology abound in Arabic teaching books, and they vary from notations of single sounds to major grammatical categories: the transcription of أنا as /ana/, but not /'ana/; the labeling of verbal forms by numbers but not by their individual rhythms; and the description of المبنى للمجهول as passive are a few examples. The labeling of اسم الموصول as relative pronoun and teaching features of the Arabic category in terms of those of the English ones make it impossible for the learner to make heads or tails of many Arabic texts, thanks to the high frequency of اسم الموصول in Arabic. Often enough, the Latin terminology used, such as diptote for الممنوع من الصرف and jussive for المجزوم, means nothing in their original language to the poor foreign learner, a situation making the use of the Arabic terminology more economical and to the point. Also, the extensive use of foreign languages in Arabic language textbooks remains the norm nowadays in spite of the great strides made in the area of foreign language teaching in recent years. Such practice turns those books into talking about the language rather than talking in it and creates a barrier between the learners and their target. There is hardly a book that teaches a modern European language through the medium of another.

Materials used for training the students tend to be largely drawn from the narrowly defined political type. The reason for that would seem to be largely the influence, directly or indirectly, of the immediate requirements of foreign governmental agencies. Such narrowly focused language materials, however, can never furnish the depth, richness, and variety of language necessary for the deep internalizing of the culture. Without a basic dose of literary language, particularly in the forms of the novel and drama, no serious learning of the language can be achieved. It is through the literary genres that learners gain insight into the complexity of the language expression and social phenomena in a single package.

The computer processing of Arabic materials both for research and application, including computer-assisted learning, will remain dependent on "logics" borrowed mainly from English unless the estrangement prevalent in the educational systems in the Arab world between mastery of Arabic and mastery of hard sciences comes to an end. It could not have been a mere chance that al-Khalīl ibn Ahmed (d. 170 A.H./718 A.D.), the father of Arabic lexicography and the mentor of Sībawayhi (the author of the monumental Arabic grammar book, *Al-Kitāb*), was an accomplished mathematician in addition to being a great linguist. The absence of a modern computer was the only missing tool in carrying out his computationally based gathering of the vocabulary data for his pioneering dictionary, *Al-'ayn*. The Arabic language will not have a place in the 21st century unless an Arabist-cum-mathematician re-analyzes it and adapts it on its own terms to the logic of the computer. The present mishmash of bits and pieces drawn from here and there is no longer adequate.

The interest in learning Arabic in Europe and the United States (the West) has grown tremendously at the present, unfortunately because of the confrontation brought about between the peoples of the countries of the West and the peoples of the Arabic and Islamic worlds. Government agencies in Western countries are calling for the training of thousands of Arabists over the next decade. However, the current and future teaching of Arabic in Europe and the United States is likely to be undertaken mostly by Arabs. In the parallel situation during the Cold War, the Russian nationals who helped the language effort in the United States were—unlike the majority of the Arabs living in the West—largely defectors who were denied political and religious freedom by the communistic regime at home.

Today in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and also among Arabs and Muslims living in the West, the United States and, to some extent, Europe are the countries that,

rightly or wrongly, are seen as the ones attacking the freedom and beliefs of Arabs and Muslims. The United States and Europe need to make a serious effort to “win the hearts and minds” of the ordinary Muslim and ordinary Arab, both Muslim and Christian, and convince the would-be teachers that the language will be used to create understanding, end estrangements, and build bridges between peoples. Many of the Arabs who dedicated the best years of their lives to the improvement of teaching Arabic as a foreign language, particularly to American and European students, probably feel almost the same as those scientists who see the work they have done to benefit humankind being used for the opposite purpose. But this seems to be the nature of humankind past and present (and future too?) as the great Arab poet al-Mutanabbī (d. A.H. 354/A.D. 965) more than ten centuries ago lamented;

كلما أنبت الزمان قناة ركب المرؤ في القناة سنانا

“Every time Nature brings forth a branch, to the branch man fixes a spearhead.”

The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language in the last century has made great strides, thanks to the adoption of theories and applications originally developed for other languages. However, except for a number of outstanding Arabists in the West who, through their own talents and personal endeavors, have managed to be at home with the language, there still seems to be a barrier separating the learner from intimate internalization of Arabic in a degree similar to that achievable by serious foreign learners of say English or other commonly taught languages. If the teaching of Arabic is to meet the challenges of this century, it would have to develop its own theory for its own application. Arabic, like all other languages, has to be taught and learned on its own terms. The group of scholars that has collaborated on this book should be proof enough that there is ready expertise to see the job through.

*Dr. El Said Badawi has dedicated his career to the field of teaching the Arabic language and stands out as one of the principal pioneers in the discipline. Currently Dr. Badawi is a professor of Arabic linguistics and the director of the Arabic Language Institute at the American University in Cairo where, in addition to teaching and researching, he has worked tirelessly to establish a Master degree in teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language. He is also the co-director of the Center of Arabic Study Abroad (CASA). Dr. Badawi’s research has been instrumental in both the field of Arabic language instruction and the broader subject of sociolinguistics. His innovative model outlining the levels of Arabic language use (1973) continues to be an inspiration to scholars conducting research in Arabic sociolinguistics. Dr. Badawi has also made remarkable contributions to lexicography, most notably his Egyptian Arabic dictionary with Martin Hinds (1986) and his dictionary of Qur’anic Usage with Dr. M. A. Halēm. Dr. Badawi shines as a model of a devoted scholar committed to increasing communication with understanding between the Arab world with the global community.

NOTES

1. The *Qur’ān* tells us that Noah lived for almost 1000 years, (S29, V.14), Job bore without complaints a most terrible affliction, (S38, V42), and Korah had untold riches (S28, V47).
2. See Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, 15,325–340.
3. Lado, R. (1964). *Language teaching: A scientific approach*. New York: McGraw Hill.
4. This scheme is explained in some details in Elsaid Badawi’s (2002) article. ‘In the quest for the level 4+ in Arabic: Training level 2-3 in independent reading’. In B. L. Leaver & B. Shekhtman (Eds.), *Developing Professional-Level Language Proficiency*, (pp. 156–176). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5. Specifically, the ACTFL Guidelines state that “a Superior speaker of Arabic should have superior competence in both MSA and a spoken dialect and be able to switch between them on appropriate occasions” (Breiner-Sanders et al. [2000]. ACTFL proficiency guidelines-speaking. Revised 1999. *Foreign Language Annals* 33(1), 13–18). To the best of my knowledge, no native speaker of Arabic has superior-level speaking ability in both.
6. Heath, P. (1990). Proficiency in Arabic language learning: Some reflections on basic goals. *Al-‘Arabiyya*, 23 (1–2), 31–48.
7. Wehr, H. (1979). *A dictionary of modern written Arabic*. (4th Edition). Preface. Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, Inc. Page v.

Preface

Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21st Century

BRIEF STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21st Century* is to provide an introduction to the field of teaching Arabic as a foreign or second language. Here, we refer to the teaching of Arabic, the language in its variously identified varieties, known throughout the world as that of the Middle East and of Muslims worldwide in their reading of the Holy *Qur'ān*. When referring to the teaching of Arabic as a "second or foreign language," we consider the following: "second language learning" occurs in contexts where Arabic is spoken by most of the people who live there (e.g., across North Africa and throughout the Arabian Gulf), and "foreign language learning" takes place in settings where Arabic is not spoken by most of the people (e.g., throughout most of the United States, Europe, and Asia).

In the past 5 years, the number of Arabic language learners worldwide has grown at a remarkable pace. In North America alone, the numbers have quadrupled in the past 5 years, but the race to learn Arabic has known no national boundaries. This sudden increased interest in learning Arabic seems to have caught the profession somewhat by surprise. Unlike other languages, Arabic language teachers and scholars have been somewhat slow to identify a canon of Arabic as a second or foreign language teaching literature. Indeed, recent growth in student numbers and the demand for new and more diverse Arabic language programs of instruction, as well as the need for well-qualified professional teachers, have outpaced the ability of teacher preparation programs to provide sufficient numbers of professionally prepared teachers at the level of skill required to meet this need. Although some predict a decline in enrollments in Arabic language programs, it is clear to most active Arabic language program administrators that the increases in enrollment will continue into the next decades.

This lack of available teachers is in large part a direct result of the paucity of training opportunities for teachers. Although there are some programs for Arabic teacher education and training, even those few struggle to provide teachers with the skills the teachers need for the real world of Arabic teaching. More resources and more varied materials are desperately needed in Arabic teacher education and training. The goal of this book is to address that need.

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Professionally prepared teachers are an essential element of an effective Arabic program. In *A Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21st Century*, we have tried to create a book that we believe includes the critical information for the preparation of Arabic teachers. While addressing many of the complexities and intricacies of the Arabic language itself, the book is not about Arabic. Rather, it is about teaching Arabic in face-to-face, traditional classroom settings, as well as in contexts where electronic communication is utilized as a part of a well-designed Arabic language program. The book is intended to serve Arabic teacher educators as a tool in their important task of preparing teachers who are able to teach Arabic effectively.

Teaching Arabic as a second or foreign language involves knowledge of complex concepts as well as language teaching skills. Knowledge is required about the nature and use of the Arabic language and about second language acquisition. In addition to knowledge, teaching Arabic also requires skills learned in a teacher preparation program: classroom management and cross-cultural communication skills. This book covers these topics.

In addition to necessary knowledge and skills required for teachers, several chapters address specific contexts of Arabic language teaching. From these contexts readers will discover ways in which the skills and knowledge of Arabic language teacher education are put to use in specific programs and in several different countries.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This book, first and foremost, will be of great interest to Arabic language teacher educators and trainers. All programs designed to prepare Arabic teachers will benefit from their teachers or administrators reading this book. Graduate students who are preparing to be teachers of Arabic will also benefit from the collective expertise of the contributors to this volume. This book will create dialogue among scholars and professionals in other fields of study as well: linguists, international educators, and those interested in cross-cultural and popular culture studies. We are hopeful that this potential dialogue will create new models for curriculum and course design, materials and assessment tools, and ultimately, better instructional effectiveness for Arabic learners around the world—in both Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic speaking countries.

HOW THE BOOK IS STRUCTURED

The book is organized around nine general themes. Within each theme, several chapters deal with different topics related to it, and, each chapter deals with a specific question or an issue. The chapters, carefully selected and edited, are contributed by leaders in the field of teaching of Arabic as a second or foreign language worldwide.

Part 1: Background

Part 1 lays a foundation for the themes that follow. The focus is on critical issues, divided into three sections in the field of teaching Arabic as a second/foreign language: history, theoretical issues in the acquisition of Arabic as a second or foreign language, and issues of difficulty in Arabic language learning.

In Chapter 1, Kees Versteegh provides a background of the historical development in Arabic language pedagogy inside and outside the Islamic world, starting from the medieval ages and ending with the modern period. Versteegh attempts to shed light

on the major trends and developments in the field that have sown the seeds of the current ideological climate with which present-day thought on teaching Arabic has evolved.

In Chapter 2, Karin C. Ryding offers a brief description of the historical development of the field in the United States and sheds light on the main trends of the current challenges that face the field of teaching Arabic in the United States at present. She discusses the steps to be taken toward developing a roadmap for the field in the future and presents examples of models that have been successful in developing curricula that lead to advanced proficiency in Arabic.

In Chapter 3, Susan Gass provides the basic principles and models of second language acquisition (SLA) that Arabic teachers must be aware of and explains how those parameters relate to language teaching. Although the research in the acquisition of Arabic is limited, Gass has been able to find research that dealt with Arabic as a second language or English as a second language for speakers of Arabic as a first language. In addition, she explores the interface between skill learning (in this instance, reading) on the one hand and a grammatical domain (the Arabic root system) and lexical knowledge on the other.

In Chapter 4, Paul B. Stevens explores the issues around a widely held belief that Arabic is a difficult language to learn. This chapter reviews the classification made in the United States by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) based on the length of training required to learn Arabic. Taking the high road, Stevens addresses why some languages, for example, Spanish, are ranked as easier for English speakers to learn than a language like Arabic. He seeks to understand why these languages in particular are ranked the way they are both in terms of folk belief and by language professionals at the FSI. Stevens focuses on the linguistic factors: morphology (derivational and inflectional), orthography, and the spoken/written dichotomy (including diglossia).

Part 2: Contexts of Arabic Language Teaching

The theme of Part 2 is the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language in a variety of specific geographical, institutional, and cultural contexts. The programs described in this section are authentic examples of ways in which the Arabic language is organized and presented to learners in a variety of representative contexts of Arabic language study and learning. Contexts include programs that are located in countries where Arabic is used as a first language as well as in countries where it is considered either a second or foreign language. The issue of the context of Arabic language study is a highly important social, pedagogical and political decision.

In Chapter 5, Mahmoud Ahmad Nahla describes, in terms of curriculum, objectives, students, teachers' qualifications, and assessment of student progress, an Alexandria university program in which Arabic is taught to non-native speakers.

In Chapter 6, Muhammad Amara presents the unique case of the Arabic language in Israel, where it is taught as a first language to Palestinians and as a foreign language to Israeli learners. Amara traces the Arabic curriculum development over the half century since the Ottoman and British Mandate periods and gives a sound analysis of the Arabic curriculum in the elementary and high schools in terms of objectives and assessment. In addition, he shows how the situation and status of the Arabic language in Israel is influenced by the sociopolitical sphere in Israel.

Chapter 7, deals with the teaching of Arabic in Korea. Sah Hee-Man and Fouad El-Khazindar give the reader a historical background of the teaching of Arabic in Korea and explain how the study of Arabic was initiated by the developing economic and political relationships between Korea and the Arab countries in the second half of the 20th century. The consequent interest in learning Arabic has resulted in the establishment of four departments of Arabic in Korea. The authors also point out

how the enrollment in the four departments has been influenced by the sociopolitical economic nature of relations between the Arab countries and Korea.

In Chapter 8, James Dickins and Janet C. E. Watson present the situation of teaching Arabic in Britain and Ireland. In fact, the teaching of Arabic in Great Britain has a long history that started in 1632. The study of Arabic there has been expanding, not only at the undergraduate and postgraduate university level, but also at the school level. The universities vary in their approaches in teaching Arabic, from the classical translation approach to the modern communicative ones, depending on their objectives. The authors point out that there is a severe shortage of graduates in Arabic—a shortage that is accelerating due to the fact that many university teachers of Arabic are close to retirement age.

In Chapter 9, Nadia Anghelescu describes the situation of teaching Arabic at the University of Bucharest. She presents the issues and difficulties confronting teaching of Arabic in Romania, such as the selection of the kind of Arabic for the students to study, in terms of the literary language or its spoken form, whether students should be directed toward studying media Arabic, and the role of Arabic cultural and linguistics studies in training graduates who are majoring in the Arabic language.

Part 3: Communicative Competence in Arabic

The theme of Part 3 is communicative Arabic. When speaking of the teaching and learning of Arabic as a second or foreign language, what is the content of study? In order to answer this question, several issues are addressed.

Prior to the widespread publication and availability of both Arabic-medium mass media (newspapers, radio, television, and internet) and education in the school system, the Qur'anic variety of language defined what Arabic study was to include. In the 21st century, this may no longer be the case. The language of the media is becoming the model or the standard of spoken Arabic for both educated and noneducated native speakers of Arabic.

Now, Arabic language teachers and program administrators are faced with a significant decision about what exactly it is that they will teach. Because there is no agreed-upon description of Arabic, as it is currently used in social contexts, what is needed is a definition and a fuller, more thorough description of and discussion about the linguistic features and the sociolinguistic issues for the teaching and learning of communicative Arabic. Moving toward creating such a description will help to establish a goal or target toward which teachers and learners together can work in the classroom. This goal or target language of Arabic would also be used as part of the assessment criteria of any Arabic language program. The issue of communicative competence in Arabic is discussed in the following chapters.

In Chapter 10, David Wilmsen discusses the need for a practical definition of communicative Arabic and its implications for the field of teaching/learning Arabic as a foreign and second language. He points out that the teacher and the student of Arabic must face the fact that there is more to be learned than one language. Some progress might be made in producing graduates who really are able to communicate effectively in Arabic in whatever register and whatever dialect are appropriate.

In Chapter 11, Kassem M. Wahba examines the need for a realistic assessment of the language situation based on an adequate description of Arabic, as it is currently used in social contexts, taking into consideration the degree of interaction between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and its regional varieties. Wahba also proposes a model of curriculum for the Arabic language user that combines both MSA and the dialect in one course of instruction.

In the absence of an adequate description of what learners need in order to communicate in Arabic—both face to face and in written genres—teachers are left to identify

and then to judge for themselves which variety of Arabic will be applied. What do learners have to learn in order to listen and speak, read and write in Arabic? What do teachers have to teach if they call themselves Arabic language teaching professionals?

In this context, Munther Younes in Chapter 12 describes a program where MSA is used only for reading and writing, and the dialect is used for speaking and listening. Younes emphasizes the need to integrate both the MSA and the dialect to enable the learners of Arabic to attain a high level of communicative ability in Arabic.

As the current volume supports positive dialogue on the topic of language varieties in the classroom, this section is intended to establish a common practical descriptive framework in terms of Arabic language use in the various social domains and among language users that teachers, practitioners, and learners of Arabic can adopt in dealing with what might be called communicative Arabic.

Part 4: The Learners

Part 4 provides a description of the wide diversity of individuals and groups who choose to study the Arabic language. Who are they? What purposes do they have for engaging in Arabic study? In what ways do they apply their learning strategies to effectively acquire Arabic as a new language? What social factors affect their learning? To what extent is Arabic language learning in a classroom different from learning other languages?

In Chapter 13, R. Kirk Belnap presents the results of a survey representing a sample of institutions of the National Middle East Language Resource Center of Middle East Learning and Teaching in the United States. It covers demographic information, learner motivation, instructional preference, and metacognitive strategies.

An important question is whether instruction can be provided to less successful learners to help them cope with their difficulties in studying a second or foreign language. In Chapter 14, Raghda El Essawi explores how the desire to compose readable texts in Arabic represents a challenge for Arabic learners. She points out that getting over such difficulties requires the presence of a form of written input that learners of Arabic can depend on to fulfill their needs as composers of Arabic texts. By highlighting the lexical, syntactic, and organizational features of reading texts, El Essawi recommends approaches that will have a positive effect on learners' written performance.

Part 5: Assessment

Part 5 addresses the issue of assessment in Arabic language. There is no commonly trusted set of criteria of measurement of Arabic language use in social contexts. Although the American Council on the Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Guidelines are a highly respected and widely used standard, there are aspects of language use that are omitted from those guidelines. This section addresses some of those omissions.

There are two significant issues that face Arabic language teachers in the 21st century in terms of assessment: one is the absence of a mutually agreed upon standard or model of what represents native speaker proficiency in authentic situations, so that testing becomes extremely difficult and invites a myriad challenges to the classroom teacher of Arabic. Therefore, Arabic language teachers need a frame of reference for measuring language use in social contexts, not only a narrowly defined proficiency.

In this regard, John Eisele, in Chapter 15, takes the step toward developing frames of reference for the assessment of a diglossic language like Arabic. He reexamines the notion of diglossia and the distance between the two codes from both objective and subjective points of view. Then he attempts to develop a model of native speaker

proficiency in Arabic that incorporates both the two views in a single model of language proficiency where task-based activities and the language skills are interrelated. Eisele indicates that there is more than one possible frame of reference for measuring diglossic language use by considering different types of curriculums for Arabic language instruction.

The second issue involves examining testing developments that have been applied to languages other than Arabic. Specifically, there are (in English language teaching, for example) many ways of assessing students' proficiency or second language acquisition: achievement tests, proficiency tests, placement tests, and other types of measurement such as self-assessment, peer feedback, and task-based activities. Of these various assessment tools, why is it that so few of the latter and so many of the former are found in Arabic language programs?

In Chapter 16, Paula Winke and Rajaa Aquil discuss the development of the available standardized tests designed to assess Arabic language proficiency, such as the O-APT and its rationale, objectives, and problems. This test, which is based on the ACTFL guidelines, was written with the purpose of using the Internet to deliver a proficiency test online.

Part 6: Technology Applications

Part 6 focuses on the use of the computer in teaching and learning Arabic. It is well known that the advent of widespread digital technology in the past 20 years has provided new tools for language teaching, language learning, and language teacher education and training. Technology can help us to provide teaching materials that are interesting and relevant to learners of all ages and interests. What specific technology applications are particularly useful to the learning and teaching of Arabic?

This question is dealt with in Chapter 17 by Everhard Ditters. He provides an overview of what has been accomplished by using technology in the field of teaching and learning Arabic. Ditters presents a brief history of the use of technology, and then examines the data, resources, and tools of primary impact in the teaching and learning process. He concludes by giving the reader an idea of what can be expected in the near future in terms of new developments in the domain of the use of technology in Arabic language teaching and learning, including a comprehensive list of references with annotated comments and recommendations.

The next question, which Vance Stevens addresses in Chapter 18, is what can learners do to adopt the strategies that good language learners use—strategies that are particularly accessible with the use of technology: self-pacing, self-correction, and interaction, to name three? Stevens focuses on the currently underdeveloped but potentially significant impact of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the teaching of Arabic as a second/foreign language. He traces the developments of instructional technology in parallel with concurrent developments in language teaching pedagogy, particularly in the contexts of language learning and resulting in the formation of communities in practice. These communities show how instructional technology supports current trends in language teaching methodology by allowing students to engage in authentic communicative activities that enhance their abilities to learn languages like Arabic.

In Chapter 19, Waheed Samy discusses the intrinsic value of using the technological media as the medium of instruction, such as video and audio clips on computers and their role in the process of learning languages. Samy points out that video and audio clips on computers are good examples of media that possess cognitively significant qualities that enhance the learning process.

How can technology provide opportunities for training teachers of Arabic, including online teacher training, Arabic-font word processing, and other tools? This is the

issue addressed in Chapters 20, 21, and 22. In Chapter 20, Adriana Bähler attempts to provide Arabic teachers with tools that can help them create interactive Web-based Arabic teaching materials. She begins by giving a brief overview of three approaches used to author CALL courseware and discusses criteria for choosing authoring systems to create Arabic instructional materials. Then she proposes two programs, Hot Potatoes and Interactive Language Learning, as authoring tools that can easily be used by Arabic teachers and provides sample activities.

In Chapter 21, al-Husein Madhany discusses how the use of basic technology, such as word processing, e-mail, and the Internet, by Arabic teachers can be helpful in the Arabic language classroom.

Mark Van Mol presents in Chapter 22, the Advanced Receptive Arabic Language Learning (ARALL) project, an attempt to develop computer software to accelerate vocabulary acquisition for intermediate and advanced learners of Arabic. The project is based on a large corpus of written and spoken Arabic. The ARALL project was developed at the Institute of Modern Languages of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. The basic question that motivated the start of this project was how much vocabulary does a learner have to know at different levels of proficiency in Arabic?

Part 7: Curriculum Development, Design, and Models

Part 7 deals with Arabic language programs and how they can develop specific language skills such as vocabulary acquisition, reading, and the attainment of pragmatic competency in an Arabic language curriculum.

In Chapter 23, Mahmoud Abdalla briefs the reader on Arabic immersion/intensive summer programs such as the Middlebury Arabic Language Program in terms of goals, organization, curriculum, and resources. He addresses problems that the programs encounter and suggests possible solutions. This chapter also discusses the roles of cognitive processes, learners' background knowledge, and cultural learning and teaching, as well as how curricular activities play a significant role in Arabic immersions programs.

In Chapter 24, Mahmoud Al-Batal addresses the teaching and learning of vocabulary, which is often a neglected area in the Arabic language curriculum. Al-Batal outlines some basic principles that can guide Arabic teachers in their efforts to make vocabulary an integral part the Arabic curriculum and classroom activities. In addition, he provides strategies for teaching vocabulary across the different proficiency levels.

In Chapter 25, Kristen Brustad argues that more research into language-specific reading process and skills must take precedence over general theoretical concerns, particularly for teachers of non-Western languages. She outlines the most critical issues in teaching reading in Arabic, such as reading aloud and reading for comprehension, and then presents a model for developing reading skills at the different proficiency language levels, followed by suggestions for designing reading materials and exercises for the Arabic classroom.

In Chapter 26, Zeinab A. Taha addresses cultural appropriateness in the Arabic curriculum and how Arabic teachers tackle this issue by building empathetic bridges between the target culture and the students. Taha points out that the Arabic language curriculum should consider the pragmatic aspects of language use along with the linguistic ones in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers.

In Chapter 27, James Dickins addresses the issue of teaching Arabic/English translation and interpreting in Britain. He explains how the study of Arabic/English translation and interpreting was developed in Britain at the university level and at the postgraduate MA level. Dickins discusses the background of students who are interested in this area of study and analyzes the methodological trends in teaching

Arabic/English translation in terms of the approach followed. Finally, he suggests different types of materials development for teaching Arabic /English translation and ends with a brief discussion on the future development in the Arabic/English translation area.

Part 8: Arabic Language Program Administration and Management

The issue of the administration and management of Arabic language programs is addressed in Part 8. In fact, the administration of Arabic language programs is subject to different pressures and challenges than those of other languages. This section deals with the joys and sorrows of Arabic language program administration and management: meeting learners' complex and increasingly urgent needs, hiring and retaining excellent classroom teachers, and working effectively with staff.

In the framework of these issues, Mohammed Sawaie addresses in Chapter 28 the challenges faced by the overseas Arabic language program established by the University of Virginia on the premises of Yarmouk University in Jordan, in terms of the linguistic, cultural, and administrative challenges. In addition, in discussing gender issues, Sawaie describes the mutual misconceptions and false perceptions prevalent in both the West and the Arab world with regard to the role of Western and Arab women. In this regard, an Arabic program can provide a substantial amount of useful information to participants in general, and to female participants in particular.

Part 9: Planning for the Future of Arabic Language Learning and Teaching

The issues of planning for the future of Arabic language teaching and learning are discussed in Part 9. The future of Arabic language teaching is bright. There are ongoing pressures for programs in defining and delivering high-quality programs, setting goals for different Arabic language programs, and developing qualified Arabic teachers professionally to meet the needs of different types of students. The role and the status of the Arabic language in the world continues to be a critical issue for the future of Arabic language teaching. Additionally, new strategies are needed for marketing Arabic language programs.

For these and other reasons, job prospects for qualified Arabic teachers are good as new programs open and established ones grow. Teachers will, more and more often, be called on to design curriculum, develop materials and testing tools, address complex Arabic language needs, and teach Arabic for specific purposes. Researchers in the teaching and learning of Arabic have new areas of study, including the role of corpus in the teaching and learning of Arabic, effective learner profiles, managing the diglossia issues in Arabic, and many others. With expanding enrollments, administrators face the task of hiring outstanding teachers and designing excellent curricula and materials that will lead to higher levels of achievement among students and more employment satisfaction for teachers.

In short, all Arabic language teaching professionals face new and exciting challenges in the new millennium. How we prepare for the future of Arabic language teaching worldwide is the main issue of Part 9. The first two chapters in this section contrast two different views toward the profession. One view is from inside the Arab world, and the other one is from the West.

In Chapter 29, Abdu al-Rajhi maintains that the planning of teaching Arabic should be based first on a realistic assessment of the position of teaching/learning Arabic in the Arab world to overcome the problems the field faces in planning for the future. The status of the teaching/learning of Arabic is usually characterized by little planning, especially for those who teach Arabic as a mother tongue. In other words, there is no national or international policymaking organization that plans or manages the

teaching of Arabic language as a mother tongue. Al-Rajhi suggests that planning for the teaching of Arabic requires establishing a central council, such as the British Council in England, to direct and manage the teaching of Arabic in the Arab world. Finally, the author warns of the new world order and its impacts on both the Arabic language and Arab culture.

In Chapter 30, Mahmoud Al-Batal and R. Kirk Belnap discuss the planning of the teaching and learning of Arabic in the United States. One of the areas that requires planning is improving the communication between the Arabic-speaking world and the United States, which in turn requires having proficient (advanced and superior) graduates to promote such understanding and to develop and maintain effective Arabic programs. Another point made by the authors is that although enrollment has risen in Arabic programs in recent years, there are not many programs that have experience in assisting students to acquire advanced-level proficiency in Arabic. Areas that need planning are teacher training and developing national and regional institutional leadership.

In Chapter 31, William M. Martin addresses the marketing of Arabic programs. He points out that the literature on the management and marketing of language programs other than English is practically non-existent. Thus, Martin reviews research from the field of general management and the management of English language programs and then discusses the implications of these management and marketing principles on curriculum and instruction in Arabic as a second/foreign language.

In Chapter 32, Mahdi Alesh, Hussein M. El Khafafi, and Salah-Dine Hammoud describe their efforts to develop professional standards for teachers of Arabic. These standards will serve as a set of criteria against which the expected and required competencies of Arabic teaching professionals can be measured in the future. These standards are intended for all who are interested in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers.

In Chapter 33, Liz England outlines some of the critical elements in the professional preparation for teachers of Arabic as a second or foreign language. The goal of methodology courses in Arabic language teacher education is to provide teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to design, implement, and evaluate instruction in the classroom. England also discusses the issue of the content of an Arabic language teaching methodology course in terms of syllabus design; learner needs; lesson planning; classroom management; learning; instructional materials; learning strategies; the teaching of grammar, vocabulary, and language skills; technology applications; testing and assessment tools; and the diglossia problem.

In Chapter 34, Zeinab Ibrahim and Jehan Allam discuss the issue of Arabic heritage learners, who represent a shift in the demographics of Arabic students in many Arabic programs. The authors examine this category in a study of 34 students at the Arabic Institute at the American University in Cairo in terms of needs, linguistic level, and their motivations, including their parents' and their own attitudes toward learning Arabic. The authors point out that Arabic programs should be aware of heritage Arabic learners' needs in terms of designing special classes and materials.

Thus, it can be seen that there has been a sea change in the role, use, and status of the Arabic language since the fall of 2001. Around the world, unprecedented numbers of new students have enrolled in Arabic language programs in universities and adult education programs. Arabic language programs all over the world continue to struggle to find qualified Arabic language teaching professionals to address the needs of the unexpected surge in students. What is the new role of the Arabic language?

The new reform in teaching Arabic has created a new population that wants to learn the language not only for religious purposes, but also for understanding others in order to resolve long-term misunderstandings and conflicts.

The profile of the use of Arabic has expanded as the role of Arabic has changed under the influence of new political events. The clash of civilizations has made it a requirement for the language to play another role.

In this handbook, we followed closely a transliteration system of the Library of Congress. Some modifications were necessary. For examples in *‘āmmiyya* and quotations from the works of the scholars, particularly in Chapter 3, various transliteration systems remain unchanged in this volume. Also, it was necessary to use the IPA transcription system in some sections of the book, especially Chapters 3 and 12 to fulfill the particular needs of the contributors. This transcription system, as well as the accompanying notes here, are provided in order to help the reader follow precisely the intended meanings and content of the chapters where contributors employed transcription and transliteration.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS AND FEATURES

This is arguably the first book ever written on the topic of teaching Arabic as a foreign/second language. Although the field has witnessed the publication of works such as *The Teaching of Arabic as a Foreign Language: Issues and Directions* (Al-Batal, 1995) and *Learner, Text, and Context in Foreign Language Acquisition: An Arabic Perspective* (Alosh, 1997) and the many articles and chapters that have indirectly addressed this topic, the most significant feature of this book is its pioneer role in dealing with the field of Arabic language teaching from many different perspectives. This book offers readers the opportunity to consider the role, status, and content of Arabic language teaching in the world today. It is a resource to build Arabic language programs and teacher education programs and to guide future academic research.

While we are fully aware that this volume may not address all of the various issues in Arabic language teaching today and in the future, we sincerely hope that this volume will offer a beginning for future study and future publications in helping teachers of Arabic around the world do their jobs effectively.

—Kassem Wahba, Washington, D. C.

—Zeinab Taha, Cairo

—Liz England, Hong Kong

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I

Background

History of Arabic Language Teaching

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LEARNING ARABIC IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

In the opening sentence of his *Kitāb al-ʿUsūl* (I, 35.2-4, ed. ʿA. al-Fatḥī, Beirut, 1985) the grammarian Ibn al-Sarrāj (d. 928) states that his aim in writing grammar (*naḥw*) is “that the speaker by learning it moves towards the Arabic language” (*ʿan yanḥuwu l-mutakallim ʿidhā taʿallamahu kalām al-ʿarab*); he adds that “it is a science which earlier scholars deduced from their observation of the Arabic language, so that they reached the ultimate aim of beginners in this language” (*huwa ʿilm istakhrajahu l-mutaqaddimūna fīhi min istiqrāʾ kalām al-ʿarab ḥatta waqafū ʿala l-gharaḍ alladhi qasadahu l-mubtadiʿūna bi-hādhihi l-lughah*). Clearly, Ibn al-Sarrāj regards grammar as a tool for learners of Arabic.

Elsewhere, grammar is sometimes defined without reference to the learners, but as a tool to correct mistakes. For instance, al-Rummānī (d. 994) defines grammar as “the distinction of correct from incorrect speech according to the manner of the Arabs by way of analogical reasoning” (*tabyīn ṣawāb al-kalām min Khataʾihi ʿala madhhab al-ʿarab bi-tariq al-qiyās*) (*Ḥudūd* 38, ed. M. Jawād & Y. Maskūnī, Baghdad 1969). Ibn Khaldūn (*Muqaddima* 546, ed. Beirut, n.d.) links the origin of the discipline of grammar with the corruption of speech in the newly conquered territories. This corruption inspired scholars to codify the grammatical rules as they observed them in the language of the native speakers, in order to stop the corruption and help people to speak Arabic correctly. These definitions emphasize the applied function of grammar and the grammarians’ role as language teachers, whose task it is to help learners acquire Arabic.

This is not the approach to linguistics taken by the majority of grammarians from the classical period. Their aim was not the description of Arabic, let alone the teaching of the rules and norms of Arabic, but the explanation of the linguistic phenomena they found in the speech of the idealized native speakers, the Bedouin. It is not as if they did not have any didactic considerations. In fact, from the beginning of the 10th century many grammarians engaged in writing elementary treatises for students, from Zajjājī’s *Jumal* to Ibn Jinnī’s *Lumāʿ*, a tradition that culminated in versified treatises like Ibn

Mālik's *ʿAlfiyya* (13th century). But these treatises addressed young students who were already native speakers of the language rather than new learners who had to learn the language from scratch.

If grammarians were generally not predisposed to assist learners of the language, how then were the supposed to learn the language? The answer is that there probably were not too many new learners anyway. By the time the Islamic empire started to institutionalize education, the process of Arabicization had already progressed to such an extent that it had become unnecessary to provide any program for second language acquisition because most children spoke a vernacular variety of the language. As the Arabic language spread over the Islamic empire, its standardized form became the language of the school system, in which all children learned to read and write, whether or not they spoke a vernacular variety of Arabic. The famous grammarian Sibawayhi (d. ca. 796) himself is a good example: Even though he came from Persia and presumably spoke Persian in his youth, when he came to Basra in the 770s he must have known enough Arabic to start studying hadith, before switching to grammar—according to the biographers—because of the grammatical mistakes he made.

After their primary education in a *kuttāb* where children were taught to read and write and recite the *Qurʾān*, most students attended lessons by various teachers in different branches of Islamic learning, simply by joining the circle (*ḥalqa*) of a scholar. At one time or another, they all joined the *ḥalqa* of a grammarian, because grammar was a normal component in an intellectual's education, a natural sequel to the learning of the script (Ahmed, 1968). This may be called the *majlis* type of education, in which instruction was given by a teacher to a varying group of students, without a set program.

Everywhere in the Islamic world, even in those regions where Arabic was not the colloquial language, whenever people came together to study Islamic science, the medium of instruction was Arabic, the language of the texts that were studied. This system of scholarship ensured that one could travel from West Africa to Southeast Asia and still be able to attend lessons of famous scholars because these were all given in Arabic (although they might be interspersed by comments or explanations in an indigenous language). Arabic therefore functioned as an international language of scholarship, in much the same way as Latin did in Europe.

A new type of learning institution came up in the 11th century, the *madrasa*, grown out of the combination of a mosque—the traditional place of learning—and the *khān*, a place of lodging for the students (Makdisi, 1981).

The *madrasa* functioned more like a university, with a fixed program and appointed professors. But neither in the *majlis* nor in the *madrasa* was there any curriculum for learning the Arabic language as such. Actually, the lack of tools for learners of Arabic as a second language was quite logical: There was no demand for such tools because in both the Arabic- and non-Arabic-speaking parts of the Islamic empire, the Classical language was acquired together with the principles of reading and writing at a very early age.

The lack of material for learning the language as opposed to studying grammar also tallies with the Arabs' almost complete disinterest in other languages. The Arabo-Islamic empire was basically a monolingual community, not in the sense that no other languages were spoken—there were indeed many speakers of Coptic, Syriac, Persian, Berber—but in the sense that the official language was Arabic. No other language had any status at all, at least not in the first four centuries before Persian became the language of the Islamic East. This monolingual character is also reflected in the attitude of the grammarians themselves. An anecdote told by the 10th-century grammarian Ibn Jinnī (*Khaṣāʾiṣ* I, 143.1-5, ed. M. A. al-Najjār, Cairo, 1952-1956) shows how far this sense of superiority for Arabic prevailed even among those who knew other languages: When he asked his teacher al-Fārisī about the Persian language,

this scholar of Persian origin answered that the Arabic language was far superior to Persian both aesthetically and rationally.

Geographers and travellers sometimes refer to the existence of other languages, and within linguistics there are a few half-hearted references to other languages, intended to demonstrate the superior structure of Arabic. The only grammarian showing any scholarly interest in other languages was the Andalusian 'Abū Hayyān (d. 1345). He wrote his Arabic grammar of Turkic, *Kitāb al-'Iḍrāk li-Lisān al-'Atrāk*, in order to facilitate the communication between the Arabic-speaking Egyptians and their Mamluk rulers (Ermers, 1999). Speakers of other languages—for instance, Syriac, Persian, Coptic, Berber—wrote grammars of their own language in an effort to preserve their own cultural and sometimes religious identity. But they borrowed the framework of Arabic grammar because the Arabic language and the grammatical tradition that had been developed to analyze it were regarded as the natural framework for linguistic analysis in general. Even the Hebrew grammarians used the vernacular language of the Jews in the Islamic empire, Arabic, for the analysis of the language of their holy scriptures, Hebrew. Most grammatical and lexicographical writings about Hebrew were first written in Arabic, and only then translated into Hebrew.

What applies to the Arabic-speaking parts of the Islamic empire to some extent also applies to those regions that did not take over the Arabic language. In many parts of the world, from Southeast Asia to West Africa, Arabic was introduced as the language of Islam by missionaries, who sometimes were not even native speakers of Arabic but had been trained in the Islamic sciences in Arabic. In the system of education they introduced, which is still current throughout the Islamic world, young children learn Arabic along with the principles of reading and writing by going to a traditional teacher and learning to recite religious texts, chiefly the *Qur'ān*. Later they go to the *majlis* of a teacher where they start studying texts. Most of the teachers have been educated in the same system and become experts in a language they can read and write, but do not speak.

Linguistically, this process is interesting because knowledge about Arabic was not transmitted through contact with native speakers, but transmitted in a written fashion. This led to the introduction of hundreds of Arabic loanwords in the languages involved, but not to the command of Arabic as a living language. In these Islamic countries, Arabic has remained the language of the *Qur'ān* and as such it is revered, but for most students speaking the language is not one of their aims. In some countries, such as Mali, along with the traditional system of teaching, a modernized system has been introduced, often called *madrassa*, where Arabic is taught in a classroom using modern didactic materials, with the explicit aim of teaching the students not only to read it but also to write and speak it. In other countries networks of schools of this type, for instance the Indonesian *pesantren*, are used to spread particular forms of Islam.

LEARNING ARABIC OUTSIDE THE ISLAMIC WORLD: ARABIC COMES TO EUROPE

Relations with Arabic outside the Islamic world were obviously quite different because of the religious gap between Christians and Muslims. In the early centuries of the Islamic empire, relations between it and Byzantium were rather one-sided: The Arabs were more interested in Byzantium for commercial, diplomatic, military, or scientific reasons than the other way round. For the Byzantines, the Arabs were an upstart people that needed to be checked and brought down as carriers of a "false" religion. The only conceivable reason why the Arabic language might be important for the Byzantines was to study the writings of this "false" religion in order to use them in polemics. Significantly, one of the earliest translations of the *Qur'ān*, the one used

by Nicetas of Byzantium in his polemics (9th century), was probably translated, by an Eastern Christian, whose mother tongue was Syriac and who had learned Arabic like all members of Christian minorities.

This pattern of reliance on Eastern Christians for information about Arabic and Islam was to remain intact for a long time. In the Islamic empire there were many Christians who could function as mediators and interpret and translate; on the European side there was a dearth of specialists in Arabic. The mediating function of the Eastern Christians was particularly important in the large translation movement of the 9th and 10th centuries. Syrian Christians translated Greek manuscripts on logic, medicine, and philosophy into Syriac, and then translated these from Syriac into Arabic. Of the Arab philosophers and logicians none most likely knew Greek directly, so they depended on these Christian mediators.

A mirror situation was happening in the West, where the Europeans were on the receiving end. From the 9th century onward, al-Andalus became a center of learning and knowledge, and any European scholar wishing to study medicine or philosophy was forced to travel to Cordoba or Granada, where the Greek sources were available in Arabic translation, sources that had almost completely disappeared from the European curriculum in the preceding centuries.

The majority of European scholars did not have the option of going to Spain and learning Arabic in order to read the Arabic texts. In Western Europe, Arabic knowledge was introduced through the translations of philosophical and medical writings, especially after the reconquest of Toledo in 1085, when the rich libraries of the Islamic culture became accessible to the West. It was here that one could find persons who were able to read those texts and translate them into Latin. Famous translators like Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187) produced a large number of translations of Arabic texts, among which the writings of Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) took pride of place. As in the translation movement in the East, a peripheral group served as mediators. Italian, French, and Spanish Jews who partook in both the Arabic and Latin tradition translated large amounts of texts from Arabic, first into Hebrew and then into Latin.

The study of the Arabic writings was accompanied by a re-evaluation of Arab science and philosophy. It was conveniently forgotten that wise men like Avicenna and Averroes were Muslims after all, so large was their impact in the development of knowledge, especially in the European monasteries. These scholars probably did not know Arabic themselves, just as the Arab philosophers never came to know Greek. The translations of the Arabic writings were regarded as the best introduction to the philosophy of Aristotle, and they became essential reading for scholars pursuing research in the physical sciences, medicine, and astronomy. Europe came to appreciate the wisdom from the East and to revere the Arab philosophers as their teachers through these translations.

There were, of course, a few people who went to Spain in order to learn Arabic and study the manuscripts firsthand (Daniel, 1979, pp. 268–281). Others gained some practical knowledge of Arabic through personal experience in the Middle East during the period of the Crusades, but the general knowledge of Arabic on the part of the “Franks” was rather low and limited to practical matters of communication. Additional sources of information were trade missions to North Africa and the Levant and the missionary activities by the Dominicans and the Franciscans among the non-Uniate Eastern Christians, who probably served as their main source of information.

What knowledge of Arabic there existed was largely lost during the period of early Renaissance humanism. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Western European scholars came in touch with the Greek originals and felt they no longer needed the Arabic translations. In their criticism of the “Arabists,” the “Grecists” painted an image of the Arab translators as defilers of the pure wisdom of the Greek philosophers.

suddenly the Arab philosophers were redefined as pagans, and their writings came to be seen as propaganda for the “false” religion of Islam.

Paradoxically, the falling out of favor of the Arab philosophers as a source of wisdom led to a renewed interest in the study of the Arabic language. Where in an earlier period the emphasis had been on the contents of the translations from Arabic, it now became fashionable to study the language itself. The connection with science was not completely lost however. In 1599, one of the first Chairs of Arabic was founded at the University of Leiden, soon to be occupied by Erpenius (d. 1624). In his inaugural lecture he deals with the usefulness of studying Arabic and the first argument he mentions is that of the Arabs’ *sapientia*, or “wisdom,” which he mentions as one of the prime motives to study Arabic (Brugman & Schröder, 1979). Bedwell (d. 1632), one of the first English Arabists, was deeply interested in mathematics and astronomy, and so was Golius (d. 1667), Erpenius’ successor to the Chair of Arabic at the University of Leiden.

But scientific interest was not the only motive. Many of these early scholars were theologians who learned Arabic in order to better understand the biblical texts. It was in this period that the closely related structure of the Semitic lexicon, which had already been discovered by Hebrew grammarians, was put to advantage in Europe as well. The Reformatory urge to study the biblical text in the Hebrew original, rather than in the Greek Septuagint or the Latin Vulgate, led to a revival of the study of Hebrew, and in its wake, of Arabic. Theologians and philologists alike turned to Arabic for new information about the closed corpus of biblical Hebrew, and as a result, the lexicographical study of Arabic received a boost.

Knowledge of Arabic was not completely devoid of practical use either. Especially in those countries that entertained commercial relations with the Middle East, the study of Arabic was also undertaken for practical purposes. The high point of Bedwell’s career was the conversation he had with a Moroccan delegation that visited England to talk about trade relations (Hamilton, 1985). Erpenius’ successor to the Chair of Arabic at University of Leiden, Golius, travelled to Aleppo before he accepted his nomination, both to establish trade relations and also to perfect his knowledge of the language. In the course of his stay in Aleppo, he collected large numbers of Arabic manuscripts that came to constitute the basis for the famous manuscript collection at the university. Sometimes, the assistance of Arabists such as Erpenius and Golius was enlisted by the authorities to translate official letters from the Ottoman or Moroccan sultan.

Yet most Arabists of this period never had any contact with the Arabic-speaking world, except perhaps for the Eastern Christians they used as tutors. Apart from the few people who had travelled to Morocco and the Middle East, their focus of interest was on Arabic as an ancillary to the study of Hebrew as the language of the Bible. They were solely interested in the Classical language, and in most cases, did not even know about the existence of a colloquial language.

How then did these scholars learn Arabic? A major obstacle to the study of Arabic was the almost complete lack of didactic materials: There were hardly any printed books, and Arabic manuscripts were only available in the libraries of the Escorial in Madrid and in the Vatican. The only printed grammars were those by Pedro de Alcalá from 1538 and that of Guillaume Postel from the next year. One of the problems was procuring Arabic types for the printing of books. Much the same as present-day scholars try to obtain fonts for the electronic representation of Arabic, scholars travelled all over Europe to obtain the best printing types, and the printing shop of Plantijn in Antwerpen and Leiden, which provided the best samples, was in high demand. What scholars also lacked was a dictionary of Arabic. The Oriental dictionaries were unavailable to them, so they had to make do with word lists compiled while reading texts, and there was fierce competition among scholars as to who would be the first to

print a reliable dictionary. (Bedwell, for instance, worked his entire life on a dictionary, only to be beaten in the race by Golius.)

Most of the information about Arabic and Islam that was available to Arabists in the 17th and 18th centuries came from Eastern Christians. From the 16th century onwards, Syrian Christians came to Europe and their advice about Islamic culture and religion was eagerly sought, first by the Church, but also by scholars (Haddad, 1970). The unification of the Eastern Christian churches had always had a high priority for the Vatican, and already in 1584, the Maronite College was established in Rome as a center of knowledge about Eastern Christianity. With the growing influence of the French in the Middle East in the 18th century, even the non-Uniate Christians came to see the advantage of having a European supporter. In return, they served as interpreters and commercial agents for the Western powers. Linguistically and culturally, they served as mediators and were instrumental, not only in bringing Western knowledge to the Middle East, but also in providing the West with information about Islam.

Not surprisingly, therefore, many of the texts used by the early Arabists were Christian texts, psalters, gospels, or Arabic translations of the texts of the Church Fathers. When Erpenius went to Paris, he studied Arabic with a Coptic tutor, whose name has been preserved, Yūsuf ibn ('Abī) Daqan (in Latin *Barbatus*). In his letters to Bedwell, Erpenius complains that this man knew less about Classical Arabic than about the vernacular. However the connection with Eastern Christians, from Egypt or, more often, from Syria, was established and when Erpenius demonstrates any missionary zeal in his publications, this is often addressed, not to Muslims, but to the non-Uniate Eastern Christians.

The separation between Arabic studies in Europe and the Islamic world came to an end in the beginning of the 19th century, when the European powers—chiefly France and England—became involved in the Middle East and North Africa through their colonial aspirations. Until then, none of these European countries had had any Arabic-speaking Muslim subjects, unlike the Russian empire (Kratschkowski, 1957). But the annexation of Arab countries brought them in direct contact with large numbers of Muslims in their own sphere of influence. Although French and English colonial policies differed considerably, both in purpose and in execution, they had one thing in common: their attitude toward the religion and language of the colonies. Both colonial powers regarded these as backward and an obstacle to what they regarded as their *mission civilisatrice*, the idea that they had a responsibility to introduce European language and culture to the regions under their administration. Although some of the colonial officers had a real admiration for Arabic culture, Europe's superiority was taken for granted by most of them.

The official aim of educating "the natives" was never actually realized, partly because of opposition from the colonists, who did not want to have them as competitors, and partly because no money was invested in this officially proclaimed educational policy. In fact, the European powers succeeded only in destroying the existing educational system, and when they left, the state of education was worse than when they arrived. The colonial period saw the rise of a new generation of Western-educated intellectuals who became bitterly disappointed when they realized that the promised emancipation would never come.

There is another aspect of the linguistic policy of the French and the English that had a deleterious effect: their interest in the vernacular language, which they sometimes saw as a means to divide the Arab world. At one point, the teaching of Classical Arabic in Algeria was forbidden entirely for some time, and only the Algerian dialect was permitted as the language of instruction. In Egypt, some of the colonial officers developed a sincere interest in the vernacular language of the people, but there can be no doubt that others had a hidden agenda. By emphasizing the Egyptian dialect, the British hoped to sever the ties between Egypt and other Arab countries. The

unfortunate result of this misguided policy was that when these countries gained their independence, they often saw the study of Arabic dialects as an instrument of neo-imperialism, only serving to keep the Arabs poor and underdeveloped. Something similar happened to the Berber language in North Africa, which had been officially promoted by the French and as a result came to be regarded as a divisive element in independent Morocco and Algeria.

TEACHING OF ARABIC IN THE MODERN PERIOD

In the second half of the 20th century, the Arab world regained its independence. Western countries increasingly needed specialists with a good command of the modern Arabic language because of the Arab world's political and economic importance. It took the European universities some time to adapt to this new situation and change their curriculum. In most countries this process did not take place until the last two decades of the 20th century. The shift toward modernizing the teaching of Arabic occurred in two stages. First, the study of Classical Arabic was replaced with that of Modern Standard Arabic, then the colloquial language was introduced in the classroom. In some countries, opposition to a shift of attention toward modern varieties of Arabic was fierce: Departments of Arabic that had been devoted to the philological study of Arabic as a Classical language did not want to give up their traditional interest. Nonetheless, even in the traditional departments the demands of modern times forced the teachers to turn to Modern Standard Arabic.

The new focus on Modern Standard Arabic called for the development of new language teaching tools. In the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, where political considerations determined the changes in teaching Arabic, large numbers of translators were needed for translating documents and interpreting at international meetings. A special brand of Arabic arose in this context, which is best exemplified by the *Lehrbuch des Arabischen*, developed in the DDR by Günther Krahl and Wolfgang Reuschel (1980–1981) and soon very popular throughout Eastern Europe. Generations of interpreters and translators were raised with the help of this book, which was distinguished by its thorough and methodical approach to the teaching of Arabic, but also by its typically socialist jargon. In the first volume, one looks in vain for any terms connected with religion: Words like *allāh*, *nabī*, (prophet) and *qur'ān* are completely absent, while terms like *shaghghīla* (working class), *jamāhīr* (masses), and *'ilāqāt ṣadiqa* (friendly relations) abound.

In Western European universities, a number of courses for modern Standard Arabic were developed in German (Ambros, 1975; Fischer & Jastrow, 1977, 1986), but these had the disadvantage of being accessible only to those who knew German. Otherwise, American course books like Ziadeh and Winder (1957) or the Michigan series (Aboud & McCarus, 1983) were used. Some universities tried new methods for teaching modern Standard Arabic, for instance by introducing the total immersion approach of the *Min al-Khalīj 'ila l-Muhīt* language course; by adapting the audiovisual materials from the popular *Iftah yā Simsīm* television program in an effort to introduce an informal register of modern Standard Arabic (Abu-Absi, 1990); or by developing programs for computer-assisted learning. For a long time, the lack of a reliable reference grammar was sorely felt. Most students had to make do with the old-fashioned grammar of Classical Arabic by Wright (1859–1862), or with the shorter grammar in German by Fischer (1972). The new reference grammar by Badawi, Carter, and Gully (2004) and the new reference syntax (in German) by El-Ayoubi, Fischer, and Langer (2001-) have finally filled this gap. Lexicographical tools are still a problem; the dictionaries that are published in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, tend to focus on the Classical language and are less practical for beginning students. As a result, those who

need a dictionary with Arabic as source language still use Wehr's Arabic/English dictionary (1979), whereas dictionaries with Arabic as a target language, from German (Schregle, 1974), French (Reigi 1987), or Dutch (Hoogland et al., 2003), have only gradually started to appear.

The second change in the curriculum was the introduction of the vernacular language in the curriculum. This was at least partly connected with the presence of large Arabophone minorities in many European countries, who had arrived since the 1960s as a workforce, in particular from Morocco and Algeria. Once it was realized that these migrants were there to stay, some of these countries developed a policy of teaching immigrant children in their home language. The explicit aim of this policy was to facilitate their integration in society by teaching them about their own language and culture. It was believed by some scholars that this might facilitate their acquisition of the language of the host country.

In most European countries, the teaching of Arabic as a home language was instigated by government policy, Sweden being the first country in which home language teaching was provided for by law. In those countries in which home language teaching was strongly promoted by the government, for instance in the Netherlands (Versteegh, 2001) and Germany (Mehlem, 1994), it turned out to be impossible to stop the process of language attrition among young Moroccans (El Aissati, 1996). In contrast, home language teaching in the United Kingdom has always been the domain of private initiatives. These initiatives may have been brought about by governmental budget cuts, but the positive effect was that the Arabic-speaking communities took it upon themselves to preserve the language for new generations (Abu-Haidar, 1994). In the last few years, the deteriorating economic situation and the growing belief that the home language teaching program is not likely to improve the integration process have led to the gradual or sometimes even sudden dismantling of the programs, at least in some countries.

A new phenomenon was the increasing number of students from the minority groups who became interested in studying Arabic at the university. In the last two decades, this has changed the classroom situation in many universities in Europe. The presence of speakers of Arabic dialects has undoubtedly affected the focus and teaching methods of the departments, because their relationship with Arabic differed fundamentally from that of the traditional students, for whom this was 'just' a foreign language they wished to learn.

The 'new' students' familiarity with spoken Arabic brought home the fact that teaching of the standard language was only part of the story. The diglossia situation in the Arab world forced the universities to deal with the selection of the variety to be taught. The usual choice was to start with modern Standard Arabic and then introduce a dialect, usually Egyptian Arabic because of its wide distribution in the Arab world. Some universities experimented with a different order of teaching the varieties of Arabic, either by starting with both varieties at the same time, or by starting with the dialect. With regard to the option of starting with both varieties at the same time, Agius (1990, p. 4) mentions the Tucson/Monterey experiment, in which those students who were exposed to both varieties turned out to be much more motivated to learn the language than those who had followed the traditional order of teaching.

The solution of starting with the dialect and then shifting to the standard language is recommended by some because it supposedly reflects the order of acquisition by native speakers, who first learn the dialect, and only later at school, the standard language (Nicola, 1990). A good example of such a course is Woidich's (1990) textbook of Egyptian Arabic, in which the choice of examples and lexicon is such that the transition from Egyptian to modern Standard Arabic is made as smoothly as possible. The first version of this course appeared in German under the title *Ahlan wa-Sahlan*; more

recently, a Dutch version by Woidich and Heinen-Nasr (1995) has appeared under the title *Kullu Tamām*; this version was also published in English by the American University Press.

Perhaps even more promising are those programs that combine the positive aspects of both approaches by dividing the linguistic skills across the varieties: reading and writing are taught in modern Standard Arabic, and speaking and listening in dialect Arabic (Holes, 1990). Such programs aim to mirror the 'actual' linguistic situation in the Arab world and emphasize the communicative importance of being able to switch on the speech continuum (for the role of communication in language teaching, see Nielsen, 1996). Kouloughli (1979) already called for a *grammaire de transfert* in which the rules of switching are made the explicit object of teaching.

Modern English language courses for Arabic dialects now exist for the main dialects, replacing the old Georgetown University series, which has become outdated. Only a few dictionaries with an Arabic dialect as source language exist, none of them equaling Badawi and Hinds' (1986) dictionary of Egyptian Arabic, which has become very popular, both in Egypt and in European universities. There are almost no dictionaries with an Arabic dialect as target language (Stevens, 1996).

An interesting development in the modern period is that part of the second language teaching of Arabic has been relocated from Europe to the Middle East. All students of Arabic are encouraged to travel to the Middle East during their studies, and unlike the situation in earlier periods, most of them welcome the opportunity to learn Arabic firsthand in the region rather than staying at home and studying Arabic in a classroom. Some foreign institutes in the Arab countries, for instance the German Institute in Beirut, the French Institute in Damascus, and the Dutch Institute in Cairo, have developed language programs catering to the needs of students of Arabic who can stay there for a few months without interrupting their curriculum or losing credits.

The option of studying at a foreign institute is not available for students from all European countries. As a result, some Arab universities have taken up the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL), and started to train their own teachers. At the vanguard of these initiatives is the American University in Cairo, which has long-standing experience in teaching second language learners. Its Department of Arabic has developed a wealth of didactic materials and competency tests for this purpose. Audiovisual materials and, in recent times, Internet-based solutions for teaching Arabic are part of the impressive array of materials they have developed.

One of the problems most Arab universities have to overcome is their natural reluctance to include vernacular varieties of the language in their curriculum. Among foreign students there is a growing interest in becoming fluent in an Arabic dialect, because that is the only way to achieve communication with the ordinary speakers. But in many Arab countries teaching dialect is still regarded negatively. In Egypt, however, courses in the Egyptian dialect have always been part of the curriculum, and in some other countries, initiatives have been taken to fill this gap. The main problem with the teaching of vernacular Arabic is the lack of teaching materials; again, the American University of Cairo is an exception with its very popular *Spoken Arabic of Cairo* course (Salib, 1981).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the challenge for all teachers of Arabic outside the Arab world is to find a way to rekindle interest in learning Arabic against the current of negative propaganda. Countries with an Islamic majority outside the Arab world, such as Indonesia, Turkey, and Nigeria, face an even more difficult problem. They have left the teaching of the Arabic language in the hands of religious groups, which are very diligent in setting up chains of schools in which the students are trained not only in language, but also in the ideology of the founders.

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Teaching Arabic in the United States

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As I write this chapter on teaching Arabic in the United States, enrollments are at an all-time high. The Modern Language Association statistics register a 92.3% increase in Arabic enrollments across the board since 1960 (from 541 to 10,584) and a 40.2% increase just since 1998.¹ Traditional questions asked of Arabic students have now shifted from “Why study Arabic?” to “How long does it take to become fluent?” As usual, Americans’ motivations for foreign language study are pragmatic and functional. As long as the Arabic language was considered of marginal importance to the lives of most Americans, it remained a marginal field of study and interest to the American public; now that it is perceived by that public as a strategically useful and even critical language to know, the reasons for study are no longer unclear.²

But how prepared is the Arabic teaching profession for handling the increased number of students? More importantly, how prepared are universities and government training facilities to fund expanded classes, teacher training, and the hiring of qualified faculty? The fact is that there is a very small cadre of Arabic language teaching professionals (the active membership of the American Association of Teachers of Arabic [AATA] currently numbers about 130). The range of learners now extends from elementary schools through universities and into adult education, and the sharply increased demand for more teaching of Arabic has resulted in hiring many newcomers to the field who have little professional preparation or classroom experience. Now more than ever, it is crucial to focus attention on the state of the Arabic discipline in general, its history, its current architecture, and on steps toward developing a roadmap for the future.

HISTORY OF ARABIC TEACHING IN THE UNITED STATES

The history of Arabic language teaching in America in some ways parallels that of other foreign languages and, in other ways, it has a unique trajectory. Arabic was taught early in our nation’s history, added to the offerings of Harvard University’s

courses in Semitic languages (Hebrew, Chaldaic, and Syriac) between 1654 and 1672. As Ernest McCarus notes in his article, "History of Arabic Study in the United States," (1992, p. 207), "This became the typical pattern—instituting first Hebrew and cognate languages and then Arabic soon after. Arabic was introduced at Yale in 1700, at Dartmouth and Andover in 1807, and at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1822."³

As with many other languages, Arabic was taught in the grammar-translation tradition for centuries, and focused on building a reading knowledge of the classical language for access to Arabic literature, both sacred and secular. Among the concepts that underpinned this approach was that the study of grammar, especially the grammar of classical (usually dead and highly inflected) languages, was considered a particularly rigorous pedagogical tool for developing disciplined thinking. The grammar-translation method centered on reading, overt grammatical analysis in the L1, and extensive written translation exercises from the L1 to the L2 (from first language to second, or target language).

Whereas the knowledge of classical languages may have been the traditional European mark of a gentleman and a scholar, as Elizabeth Bernhardt points out, in postcolonial America, a much more "utilitarian" viewpoint arose that would "prefigure a 20th-century view of functionalism in language use" (1998, p. 42). Bernhardt goes on to discuss the tensions that arose in young America regarding issues of teaching foreign languages as opposed to vigorously fostering the spread of English—issues of cultural and linguistic assimilation, elitism, and functionality. For example, she quotes the influential Coleman report of 1929 that recommended a strict focus on reading skills for foreign languages (p. 48). With American involvement in World War II, it became clear that in terms of foreign language capacity, there was a "critical deficit that had to be remedied essentially overnight" (p. 49).

The Army Specialized Training Program emerged, administered and designed by specialists in the relatively new science of structural linguistics.⁴ This in turn shifted the attention and goals of the field of foreign language teaching in general into the audiolingual mode, which aimed at proficiency in speaking and listening as well as reading, writing, and translation.⁵ For Arabic this posed a particular problem because of the issue of diglossia.

Diglossia

Diglossia refers to the fact that Arabs read and write one form of language (the so-called "high" form or, in Arabic, *Fuṣḥā*), but for everyday spoken communication with each other, Arabs speak language variants that are substantially different. Moreover, the spoken vernacular (referred to as "colloquial" or "dialect") varies from region to region in the Arab world, and although some geographically close vernaculars are mutually intelligible, those separated by vast distances (for example, Moroccan and Kuwaiti) are normally not. These spoken forms have evolved over more than a millennium to accommodate the needs of everyday existence and are vital, sophisticated, complex, living languages. However, within the Arab world, they are not considered suitable for written communication and, therefore, not written down. Nor are they taught in educational institutions.

This means that the spoken variants are free to evolve and adapt in their vocabulary, grammar, and style, whereas the grammatical rules for the written language remain similar to what they were centuries ago. It also means that the gap between the written and spoken forms is considerable and increases as time goes on.

Native Arabic speakers function within a continuum of linguistic competence that encompasses an extensive range of performance, calibrating their interactions according to a number of sociolinguistic factors, including the formality of a situation, the

location of a situation, and the people involved in it. This range of competence is, of course, acquired over a long period of time that includes both formal and informal learning experiences. To aim for communicative competence equivalent to that of an “educated native speaker” (the term generally used to refer to the highest functional skill in proficiency testing) in Arabic, means that the goals are complex in ways unparalleled in other languages. This is one reason that Arabic is classified by the Department of State as being in the Category III of “superhard languages,” ones “that are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers.”⁶ Arabic is the only Semitic language in this category; the other members of the small but superhard category are Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Arabic is in this category because, essentially, of diglossia.⁷

AUDIOLINGUAL AND COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES

As mainstream Arabic teaching faced adapting to the audiolingual approach, a number of key questions arose. How were materials to be developed that focused on oral skills when the spoken variants of Arabic were not written down, were substantially different from country to country, and were not considered appropriate objects of study, description, or teaching? The solution that emerged was twofold. For the academic teaching of Arabic in general, most materials were based on the literary or written form of the language, which came to be referred to in English as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). This meant that oral skills were rooted in the literary language and literary topics. Team efforts of leading Arabic professionals in the 1960s and 1970s yielded the publication of high-quality breakthrough materials, originally published by the University of Michigan: *Elementary Modern Standard Arabic* by Ab-boud and McCarus (first published in 1968), and *Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic* (first published in 1971).

At approximately the same time, projects were undertaken by scholars to study, document, and describe the major Arabic vernaculars: North African, Egyptian, Levantine, and Iraqi. A series of reference grammars, dictionaries, and basic courses were developed that represented linguistic fieldwork, lexicography, and descriptive analysis at their very best.⁸

The resulting situation did not lend itself to the effective marriage of spoken and written Arabic in the classroom, however. Academic programs leaned toward teaching only Modern Standard Arabic; dialect materials were seen as useful in the field and for special purposes, but rarely afforded legitimacy as courses in university curricula. Over the years, this situation has resulted in curricula where the focus is on formal topics, even at the lowest levels of proficiency, whereas authentic topics and functions of everyday life (normally dealt with in colloquial Arabic) have been given substantially less attention. A kind of conceptual gap developed in the materials and approaches to teaching Arabic in America, and a very real pragmatic gap developed as more students prepared to study abroad, and as they began to participate widely in proficiency testing. Full “communicative competence” became the ostensible aim of many Arabic teaching programs, but materials and methods remained centered primarily on MSA.

Primary versus Secondary Discourse

Leaving aside the issue of MSA or colloquial Arabic for the moment, there is a useful framework for classifying discourse types, raised and discussed by Heidi Byrnes in her 2002 essay, “Toward Academic-level Foreign Language Abilities: Reconsidering

Foundational Assumptions, Expanding Pedagogical Options" in *Developing Professional-Level Language Proficiency*. In this article, Byrnes refers to the work of J. P. Gee (1998), who, in the context of differentiating different types of literacies, distinguishes between the "primary discourses of familiarity among family and friends, generally within settings that are presumed to be known or at least highly predictable," (p. 38) and "secondary discourses of public life in a vast range of settings" (p. 38) "that involve social institutions beyond the family" (p. 49).

In her analysis of current language teaching practice, Byrnes refers to "the extraordinary privileging of discourses of familiarity" (p. 49) in classrooms using communicative approaches, while the discourses of "the professions, the academy, and civil society are largely disregarded." And it struck me as I read these astute observations about the teaching of most European languages that in the field of Arabic teaching and curriculum development, we have traditionally done the opposite. We have privileged the secondary discourses of literature and the academy over the primary discourses of familiarity. I refer to this as "reverse privileging," and I posit that it is the key issue facing teaching Arabic as a foreign language in America today.

Reverse Privileging

This reverse privileging is a central reason why the Arabic field faces complex issues in defining proficiency skill levels and how to assess them, and why Arabic students still may get discouraged early on in their coursework because they lack the tools of primary discourse that would allow them to begin to interact with Arab peers and friends on an informal level. It also constitutes one reason for the extraordinary low number of Arabic speakers at the superior and distinguished levels in America today, because the gap in communicative competence at the lower levels undermines the ultimate achievement of communicative competence and confidence at the higher levels. What other foreign language educators take for granted as foundational skills of interactional facility in the target language, academic Arabic programs often postpone or minimize. This is analogous to building a major edifice without a deep and fortified foundation. The more advanced a student becomes in literary or theoretical Arabic studies, the more acutely he or she experiences a disjuncture between his or her classroom achievement and the lack of ability to deal with the most basic quotidian matters.

Reverse privileging has impacted curriculum and materials development, teaching methods and teacher training, and the articulation of instructional goals. An important and even crucial point is that the differences between primary and secondary discourses in the Arabic language are substantially greater than those in European languages. The forms of language used are not only different, they bear sharply distinct values in Arab society, with the most formal levels of Arabic (written Arabic) being deeply respected, and the less formal or everyday colloquial variants of Arabic often being discredited as "corrupt" or "ungrammatical," and certainly inappropriate as topics of formal language learning. To add to this complexity, there is no neat dividing line between spoken and written Arabic. Rather, there is a continuum of subtly differentiated and articulated levels of language.⁹

One of the effects of the privileging of MSA and secondary discourse has been a skewed concept of grammatical accuracy and its role in instruction. "Grammar" rules are often considered by the Arabic-speaking public as applying only to the written language and not to the spoken variants. Grammar has traditionally provided a base on which to build courses, syllabi, and materials, and therefore MSA materials were largely grammar-based until the 1980s.

SUCCESSFUL MODELS

A first step toward expanding and fortifying curricula is to clearly define the successes in the field. Success in this instance can be identified as advanced proficiency in speaking and listening, as well as in reading and writing. For the most part, university-based, academic-year programs have been the least successful in helping learners acquire fluency in both primary and secondary discourses. Some successful programs include the following:

The Middlebury Model: Immersion

The Middlebury Summer Arabic Program has been a keystone of developing Arabic proficiency since its launching in 1982. This is due to the famous “pledge” students make to not use English at all during the 9 weeks of their summer course. They are forced to rely on their innate ability to manage communication situations, no matter what their language resources are, with the help of their teachers. This immersion experience, new for Arabic in the 1980s, resulted in the development of new materials, new ideas, and new expectations of both teachers and students.¹⁰ Extensive discussions about which level of Arabic to use for primary discourse in the Middlebury program resulted originally in the selection of MSA as the only vehicle of communication. In recent years, colloquial dialects have been introduced for primary discourse purposes.

FSI Model: Mixing and Long-term Intensive

One effective “mixed” model of teaching has been that of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), where MSA is taught concurrently with “Formal Spoken Arabic” (also referred to in the literature as “Educated Spoken Arabic”), an elevated form of spoken Arabic closer to MSA than to a regional dialect, but incorporating the most common lexical and morphological features of Arabic colloquial speech.¹¹ Out of a 6-hour day, 4 are devoted to spoken Arabic and 2 to written Arabic. The two tracks complement each other rather than compete with each other. There are specific reading and speaking goals for each track, and students progress through 44 weeks of full-time training in this manner. The goals are usually S-2 or 2+ /R-2 or 2+ on the Interagency Language Roundtable proficiency rating scale and they are usually achieved. Gifted students occasionally obtain an S-3/R-3. In addition to the 44-week Washington-based Arabic intensive program, another year is devoted to Arabic study abroad at the FSI Field School in Tunis for those officers whose goals lie in the higher ranges of proficiency. This 2-year, 2-track form of study results in officers who are able to negotiate both primary and secondary discourses effectively.

CASA: The Center for Arabic Study Abroad

The CASA program is a competitive, grant-based, study-abroad experience in Cairo that is funded primarily by the U.S. Department of Education but also by the Ford Foundation and other sources. It has been supremely successful in accelerating academically trained American learners of Arabic into proficient speakers of Arabic who are comfortable interacting at all levels and who are able to build their skills to the highest levels of performance. This carefully constructed program has had excellent leadership both in the United States and in Cairo, and is considered a model of best practice in Arabic study-abroad programs. It is Arabic only; CASA fellows study Arabic 100% of the time and at the higher levels, content courses in Arabic.¹²