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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: MULTILINGUAL APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE LEARNING: PERSPECTIVES FROM ARABIC AS A MULTIDIALECTAL LANGUAGE**

### **What is this Special Issue About?**

Arabic is best known as a di/multiglossic language in which speakers draw from at least two named varieties (the Standard and the dialects) based on contextual factors (Ferguson, 1959; Badawi, 1973). Standard Arabic is the written variety that represents continuation of Classical Arabic, the language of Islamic and literary heritage. By virtue of this continuation, it has status, prestige and power (Bassiouney, 2009; Albirini, 2016). For some time, the field of Arabic learning and teaching has been shaped by language ideologies stipulating that the standard variety should not only be the target but also the medium of instruction from beginning to advanced levels. Ryding (2009) describes this situation as “reverse privileging,” in which Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the secondary discourse, is taught first, and the primary discourse, which is the dialect, is taught inadequately second, if it is taught at all. Over the past decade or so, the field has made great strides from teaching only MSA to embracing an integrated approach (Younes, 2014; Al-Batal, 2018) in which MSA and at least one dialect are taught side by side. However, these developments have continued to be shaped by monolingual language ideologies, in the sense that they define socially named varieties such as “Egyptian”, “Levantine”, or “North African” as codes separate from and in addition to Standard Arabic.

The multilingual turn in applied linguistics has challenged this conceptual approach and encouraged a focus on how individuals draw from their linguistic repertoires in specific social situations, regardless of socially named linguistic boundaries (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Diao & Trentman, 2021; Otheguy et al, 2015). In the context of Arabic teaching, this can mean advocating for a multidialectal approach that recognizes how speakers' linguistic repertoires shift through time and with experience (Trentman & Shiri, 2020). These shifts are shaped by mobility patterns such as study abroad and the movement of people from the Middle Eastern and North African region to other parts of the globe. Recent scholarship taking a translanguaging approach to Arabic learning has advocated for recognizing the legitimacy of all the language resources that learners bring to contexts of learning, including both the classroom and less formal situations, such as community centers or study abroad. These studies demonstrate the ways learners and teachers strategically draw from their full linguistic repertoires to further expand them (Abourehab & Azaz, 2020; Al Masaeed, 2020; Azaz & Abourehab &, 2021; Oraby & Azaz, 2023; Trentman, 2021a, 2021b). These practices include transdialecting, or drawing from resources associated with multiple Arabic dialects (Oraby and Azaz, 2022).

Issue 11, Volume 1 of 2024 is a special issue dedicated to providing further definitions and directions forward for embracing multilingual perspectives to Arabic language learning in a myriad of contexts including Arabic as a second language, Arabic as a heritage language, and virtual exchange. It includes twelve articles from researchers in Europe, the U.S., and the MENA region. Three of these articles are position papers that offer an overview of current issues in the field. The remaining nine articles present original research examining multilingual and multidialectal approaches. These articles include student, teacher, and parent perspectives on translanguaging pedagogies, research on multidialectal vocabulary acquisition, and detailed analyses of how speakers draw from their multilingual and multidialectal repertoires to engage in learning. As many of the authors are also Arabic teachers, the articles include practical recommendations for the classroom.

## **Summaries of the Articles**

### *Literature review and position articles*

The article by Farah Ali offers a comprehensive and critical review of research on multilingual/-dialectal approaches to Arabic instruction in L2 and heritage contexts. The author shows how this scholarship provide a lens for reevaluating ideas about diglossia, monolingual ideologies,

and exclusive MSA instruction. In particular, studies that adopted a translanguaging approach merited further attention. The author recommends going beyond the traditional dichotomy of low versus high varieties and the standard ideologies that go with it. Adopting a flexible approach to Arabic instruction has the potential to open up new horizons for more socially just pedagogies and curricula in Arabic.

The article by Katrien Vanpee continues the conversation about how to develop more socially just pedagogies and curricula in Arabic. First, the author reviews the principles of social justice pedagogy and calls for the adopting of a social justice pedagogy that includes underrepresented and marginalized groups and dialects in Arabic. Secondly, she argues that the interrogation of power dynamics is helpful to curriculum designers looking to destabilize instructional models focused on centers of power. Pairing multidialectal approaches to the teaching of Arabic with the principles of social justice pedagogy can support Arabic curriculum designers in their efforts to diversify their curricula both linguistically and culturally. The author concludes with specific examples of curriculum design and classroom activities and identifies the challenges involved in this process.

The article by Reham Abuemira surveys current research on telecollaboration and intercultural communication development. The author argues that a multidialectal approach to Arabic instruction is crucial to the development of intercultural competence and supports moving away from static representations of culture. The author also provides an in depth description of how telecollaboration can enhance cultural and dialect learning. Throughout the article, the author provides practical examples from the classroom.

*Perceptions of multilingual and multidialectal practices: Teacher, learners, and parents*

The article by Youma Deiri explores the beliefs and pedagogical practices of seven bilingual Arabic teachers in the American Midwest, focusing on their use of translanguaging and transdialecting in the classroom. Using semi-structured bilingual (English-Arabic) interviews with Arabic teachers in K-12 schools and various community-based settings, the author describes a variety of opinions about the efficacy of translanguaging and transdialecting in their contexts. Importantly, the study advances the position that transdialecting provides a distinct theoretical anchor to adequately describe teachers' pedagogical decisions as they move fluidly between dialects in ways culturally relevant to their students.

The article by Ebtisam Oraby and Mahmoud Azaz discusses students' perceptions of translanguaging in content-based instruction in a literature course. In focused interviews with the students (heritage and nonheritage), the authors discuss how translanguaging pedagogies

created an inclusive space that allow students of vastly different proficiency levels and backgrounds to fully participate in class and develop their understanding of Arabic literature. The authors argue that student voices give legitimacy to pedagogical translanguaging. This legitimacy does not threaten the status of standard varieties, but rather provide a wider space for Arabic dialects, particularly with the growing number of heritage speakers and study abroad returnees in content-based courses in Arabic programs.

The article by Amr Rabie-Ahmed and Ayman Mohamed discuss how Arabic heritage learners perceive translanguaging practices and how these perceptions shapes their classroom experience. Following a mixed-method design using questionnaires and interviews, the learners were found to hold positive perceptions of translanguaging practices in the classroom and their home communities, while desiring to avoid these practices in their heritage communities in the Arab world. Translanguaging practices in the classroom enhanced their goal of learning MSA. The authors recommend translanguaging pedagogies as way to give space to heritage learners to use their full linguistic repertoires, provide motivation, affirm their identity, and enhance their acquisition of MSA.

The article by Fatma Said explores the perceptions of parents and educators on the the diglossic nature of Arabic, as well as how they view its role in the effective transmission of Arabic as a heritage language. Acknowledging the complexity of Arabic multiglossia, the author distinguishes between multilingual socialization and multidialectal socialization and argues that when children are socialized into and through more than one dialect this can make space made creative expression. Multidialectal socialization expands their linguistic repertoire and their knowledge of semantic fields in Arabic across the varieties. The author concludes that embracing the multiglossic characteristics of Arabic will enhance parental and education institutions' efforts to teach and transmit Arabic as a heritage language more effectively.

#### *Multidialectal approaches in vocabulary learning*

The article by *Elizabeth Huntley* presents the results of a lab-operationalized comparison of Arabic L2 vocabulary acquisition in two learning conditions (MSA-only and MSA-Egyptian integrated). Using accuracy of form and meaning recognition, results indicated no significant differences between any of the groups for either accuracy or reaction time. This finding suggests that the learning outcomes were potentially equal, regardless of whether participants studied in one register or two. This finding contradicts the argument that integrated approaches require an additional learning burden. It supports an integrated approach, where through the same learning

process, students acquire multiple varieties. These findings have further implications for the theoretical debates on teaching more than one variety of Arabic.

The article by *Rasha Soliman and Laila Familiar* continues this conversation on teaching sociolinguistic variation in Arabic vocabulary. The authors address a clear gap in Arabic, which is vocabulary profiles for Arabic learners in different proficiency levels. They describe the creation of vocabulary lists for the first two levels (A1 and A2) of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The authors used multi-dialectal commonality, frequency of use, linguistic complexity and relevance to the CEFR descriptors to create these lists. It is expected that these lists will help teachers, curriculum designers, material writers and assessors to determine the language content for these levels. They also enable learners of Arabic to communicate across multiple varieties in a more inclusive approach to L2 Arabic vocabulary acquisition.

#### *Multilingual and multidialectal perspectives in interaction*

The article by *Elizabeth Saylor, F. Zach Jenio, and Youssef El Berrichi* analyzes an online language exchange program that offers multilingual and multidialectal learning environments for Arabic and English learners. Viewed through the lens of translanguaging, the program was designed to allow the learners to bring their full linguistic repertoires to use in a dynamic, equitable, and collaborative environment. The authors analyzed learners' pre-program expectations and post-program reflections. Participant data showed significant enhancement of speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Students also stated that they have gained real-world exposure and learned about new topics through the program. The authors recommend further discussions of translanguaging within technology-mediated learning environments.

The article by *Khaled Al Masaeed* examines the relationship between repair practices and topical talk in a case study of L2 Arabic conversation-for-learning. The author shows how repair strategies in conversation create learning opportunities through participants' orientations to their roles as a language learner and a language expert and contribute towards elaborating and extending topical talk. The results of the study offer insights into how to structure tutoring sessions in language learning. They also have implications for the emerging area of conversation analysis-informed research to further understanding of the relationship between repair work and topic management in L2 talk.

The article by *Hanna Lämsä-Schmidt* uses translanguaging and Vygotskian sociocultural theories to examine the trajectories of two Arabic heritage students learning English in Germany across a three year period. To complete an English learning task, learners drew from

their heritage (Arabic) and second (German) languages. Analyzing the collective scaffolding, language-related episodes and private speech, the results indicates that translanguaging practices facilitate foreign language learning, enable learners to co-construct a collaborative pattern of interaction, which has been found to be conducive to learning. Given the absence of the heritage language in the second time frame, the author emphasizes the need to resist monolingual language ideologies in the classroom, and make space for translanguaging across the full linguistic repertoire.

Collectively, these articles demonstrate the value of multilingual and multidialectal approaches across a variety of learning contexts, including those with a strong monolingual orientation. They also provide practical examples that can be used in the classroom. Finally, these articles pave the way for future research in this area, particularly in the areas of addressing language ideologies and providing practical resources for a variety of learning contexts.

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