

**Pushing the Limits:
Achieving Superior Arabic Fluency in America**

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**To my beautiful wife, Nicole,
who continues to be my guiding light,
my encouraging and tenacious muse,
and my best friend.**

I love you, forever and always.

**To my fantastic sons, Noah and Bryce,
who are truly my angels sent from heaven.**

**To my chosen parents, John and Christy,
who have accepted me as a member of their family
and who I consciously call Dad and Mom.**

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Pushing the Limits: Achieving Superior Arabic Fluency in America

Introduction

This study investigates the current situation of Arabic education in the United States with an overarching question of, “What is the best way for a student of Arabic in the United States to achieve Superior proficiency?” For information on Arabic in America, this study focuses on two elite institutions of Arabic education, the University of Texas at Austin (UT) and the Exclusive Language School (ELS).¹ Five aspects of the Second Language Acquisition process are evaluated and analyzed to assess their role in helping students achieve Superior proficiency in the Arabic language.² These five aspects include the role of the student, the role of the teacher, the role of technology, the role of the environment, and the role of language and ideology.

¹ “Exclusive Language School” is the fictional name I will use to describe an actual academic institution, which exclusively teaches foreign languages in the U.S. The pseudonym being used in this research is due to security concerns of the institution, its faculty and students. This institution agreed to participate in this research given this factor of maintained privacy.

² Superior-level proficiency in this research refers to the guidelines set forth by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

This study is based on 3 sources of information from the two elite Arabic programs: curriculum review, teacher interviews, and student conversations and interviews. The findings of this research show that there are certain elements that contribute to a student achieving the higher levels of Arabic proficiency. In addition, there are certain factors that will hinder a student from achieving Superior level and beyond. This study includes a previously unidentified aspect of the SLA process that will help both the Arabic teacher and student on the foreign language journey to Superior proficiency and beyond. The study concludes by suggesting some new directions for Arabic language instruction that may help increase the number of students who reach Superior proficiency.

Chapter I

Role of the Student

This section will analyze the importance of both student motivation and aptitude in reaching the Superior level of proficiency in a foreign language, specifically Arabic. I will discuss both how these two aspects relate to the second language acquisition (SLA) process and how they pertain to Arabic students. In particular, I will show that while motivation and aptitude are essential to learning and succeeding in the SLA process, they do not completely explain why certain students reach Superior-level proficiency and others do not.

A. Motivation

Throughout the process of learning a second language, the student plays the most crucial role of any of the contributing factors discussed in this research. The student begins the process by choosing what language he or she wishes to study. This choice is an example of student motivation which Rubin (1975, p.42) claims is one of the three factors of good language learning; the other two being aptitude and opportunity. Gardner (1960) illustrates the hierarchy of these factors by stating that a student will not learn more than the student's aptitude allows but may learn less if no motivation is present. However, the student's motivation plays a more central role than this statement demonstrates. Motivation is the primary factor in foreign language acquisition because through determination, as a professor at ELS stated in an interview, a student with

motivation will be able to succeed in the goal of learning Arabic despite any deficiencies in the curriculum or the teacher's ability. This motivation determines to what extent the student will be actively involved in learning the new language, and unmotivated students seriously lack this involvement and are unable to recognize their potential in the second language (Oxford and Shearin 1994, p. 12). I will use the term "motivation" to refer to the extent to which the individual strives to learn the second language because of a desire to achieve a goal and/or the satisfaction experienced through the second language acquisition (SLA) process (Dornyei 1994, p 516).³

Students' initial motives for studying Arabic result from a myriad of possible stimuli. Interviews conducted with UT and ELS students reveal the following as the most common reasons for formally studying Arabic:

- Previous or current personal relationships with native Arabs
- Need to learn Arabic for employment purposes
- To better understand the Arab culture
- Religious purposes
- To challenge oneself due to the difficulty of the language
- Result of September 11, 2001

These results are similar to those produced by the research data gathered by the National Middle East Language Resource Center's (NMELRC) investigation of the current conditions of Middle East language education in the United States (Belnap 2006, p. 173).

³ According to interviews with students and faculty from UT and ELS, goal orientation and linguistic satisfaction are not both necessary for Superior-level achievement, however the presence of both elements increase the likelihood of success in the language.

That study shows that most students surveyed began studying Arabic as a result of a desire to better understand Arab culture or to more competently interact with Arabs, and as well as perhaps for reasons of employment. There are even those students who begin studying Arabic to facilitate finding a suitable spouse (Ibrahim and Allam 2006, p. 441). This evidence illustrates that motivation of a student in Arabic will be affected by cultural awareness, interpersonal relationships, and exposure to the language (Kenny 1992, p.120). Students' experiences with the culture and language prior to formal Arabic studies will affect the students' desire to achieve higher levels of proficiency. If one is studying Arabic just to read the Qur'an and not to be able to function in an Egyptian *suuq*, then his or her level of proficiency will differ from a student who seeks employment in the Middle East.

Geo-political events within the last decade have spurred an increase in the number of students enrolled in Arabic programs in the United States and abroad. Following the events of September 11, 2001, many people in America became cognizant of the importance of understanding the Arabic language and culture. There has also been an increase in the number of heritage language learners (Belnap 2006, p.174). Therefore, global political developments and the proliferation of the Internet have increased non-Arab awareness and interest, and also the desire of native Arabs to maintain their cultural identity. Students' responses to the question about why they began studying Arabic correlate very well with the types of motivation put forth by the earlier research of Gardner, which classifies motivation as either *integrative* or *informative*. The former refers to motivation stemming from a personal desire to relate with the culture and people

of the foreign language or to travel to or migrate to the countries in which the language is spoken. The latter is more pragmatic for the students because this type refers to motivation stimulated by employment opportunities and practical benefits. Gardner claims that integrative motivation has more of a long-term influence on the student than does informative motivation. These motives must be understood by teachers in order to better facilitate the students' successful acquisition of the Arabic language. The source of motivation is very important in a practical sense to teachers who want to stimulate students' motivation. As Oxford and Shearin claim, "Without knowing where the roots of motivation lie, how can teachers water those roots?" (1994, p.15)

At both ELS and UT, student motivation plays a central role in the beginning of the SLA process and determines the extent to which the student will pursue further study of the language (Gardner 1991, p.51). This is especially the case at ELS since all of the students have a primary goal of attaining employment in which the students will use the L2. This is the purpose of the ELS, to train linguists for employment involving foreign languages. Each of the graduates from ELS will use the language in varying degrees in their post-graduation careers because this is part of the prerequisites of admission to ELS.

However, at UT motives vary more than those of the ELS student body. Interviews conducted with UT students for this research reveal that their motives are more integrative and relate more to a personal desire to live or interact with the Arabic language and culture. UT students relate that they wish to continue with the language in future career and academic endeavors. Every student I interviewed from UT stated that they wished to travel and study in an Arabic-speaking country in the near future.

Thus, despite the fact that post-graduation career prospects for graduates from UT differ from that of ELS in that UT students are not guaranteed jobs that will require using Arabic, UT students exhibit more of an integrative motivation than that of ELS students. Part of this motivational difference may be the result of the monetary investment that UT students have in their Arabic studies. ELS students do not have an initial monetary investment related to their studies of the Arabic language. However, they do have an obligation to serve in a career position using the language for two to four years following graduation. This is not to say that no ELS students have integrative motivation or that there are no students at UT whose motivation is solely or primarily informative. Officials within the State Department as well as ELS and UT recognize this perception of a clear difference in motivation of students, who pay for their education and those who do not⁴.

Thus, while two types of motivation are evident at both UT and ELS, the integrative motivation appears to be a more contributing factor to Superior fluency. All students interviewed who had achieved at least Superior-level scores from speaking listening, or reading tests, possessed this type of motivation. Several of these students also exhibited, at least in some manner, informative motivation, which would serve them financially following graduation. However, these two types of motivation do not answer the following questions:

- Why does any student achieve higher levels of fluency?
- Why do students continue to study Arabic when they do not live in an Arabic-speaking country nor have a job in which they utilize the Arabic language?

⁴ Information assessed from interviews with faculty at UT and ELS and with Dubai Hub Director Michael Pelletier and Charge d'Affaires Alberto M. Fernandez.

B. *Aptitude*

In addition to motivation and other intellectual and additional factors thought to contribute to success in foreign language learning, a student's foreign language aptitude is of great significance. The difficulty in precisely quantifying this element of the SLA process is that a multitude of variables are inevitably involved in each student's endeavors in studying a foreign language. The even more problematic factor is the lack of consensus among the various language schools concerning which test best suits the students of that particular institution. ELS uses a private language aptitude test in order to determine the language that will be most suitable for each student. This test resembles the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) created by John Carroll, along with Stanley Sapon and published in 1959 (Carroll & Sapon, 1959; Petersen & Al-Haik, 1976). The MLAT measures foreign language aptitude using a simulated format (a hypothetical foreign language) and English grammar to provide an indication of one's probable degree of success in learning a foreign language.

Since the 1990s, studies on high school and college foreign language learners have consistently shown that the MLAT is an important predictor of achievement in a foreign language after one to two years of study (Sparks, et al., 1995, 1997). Ganschow and various colleagues have shown through multiple studies that good foreign language students possess a dramatically higher aptitude for foreign language study than poor FL learners as predicted by the MLAT (Ganschow, et al., 1991, 1992, 1994, 1996). Additionally, students who score higher on the MLAT have been shown to achieve higher

levels of foreign language proficiency after two years of study than students who obtain lower *MLAT* scores (Sparks, Ganschow, Artzer, Siebenhar & Plageman, 1998). Similar findings from ELS show the same results; students who achieve higher on the ELS aptitude test are more likely to achieve Superior-level scores in listening and/or reading. Exact statistics comparing this relationship however, are not available⁵. This data if made available to the public could increase the number of Arabic programs that would use the ELS aptitude test. However, the lack of disclosure prevents inter-program cooperation and coordination.

Research has also been conducted on foreign language students concerning the correlation of personality types and SLA success. Ehrman and Oxford (1989) tested the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to determine its applicability. However, findings of this research indicate that personality type elements provide useful information about the compatibility of the individual student and the style and methodology of the teacher, but are not good predictors of FL learning success (Sparks and Ganschow, 2001, p. 93).

ELS uses a Diagnostic Assessment to analyze students' aptitude, personality types, and learning styles in order to provide a detailed study plan as well as to inform the teachers about the students they will be teaching. This type of student assessment, however, is not fully accepted by the teaching staff or the administration. Not every teaching team has a qualified diagnostic assessor, nor does every teaching team utilize the results of the diagnostic assessment in tailoring the curriculum to suit the students'

⁵ The information was collected through interviews with former ELS students who had achieved Superior-level scores in at least the skills of listening and reading.

learning styles. An ELS teacher in the intermediate and advanced program, when asked about his thoughts concerning the diagnostic assessment, replied that it was a waste of time and did not affect what he thought was appropriate for his students. This teacher was one of the few at the ELS who possessed a Ph.D. in Arabic and Linguistics.⁶ The person in charge of training the diagnostic assessors relayed the same sentiment to me. She told me that the results produced from the assessments were not given to the students but rather to the teaching team, and this poses a problem when the teachers already have a disdain for the assessment process and recommendations. The low number of diagnostic assessors as well as the less-than-favorable view held by some of the teachers and lack of administrative support creates a situation in which this potentially significant tool is not being utilized to the full potential. The fact that these assessment tools are not being fully utilized is a problem that appears to be the fault of the administration by not instituting a more complete system in which every Arabic teacher would be trained with these assessment tools.

UT, on the other hand, does not utilize any aptitude battery or examination before students enroll in Arabic classes. Instead, each student is interviewed by his or her professor and discusses the student's goals, ambitions, personal history, and educational history. This provides the teacher with a more in depth understanding of each of the students in the classroom than would be possible given the absence of an aptitude test. Since there is no aptitude test administered to the UT students in Arabic there is no sufficient method of analyzing and comparing those students' aptitude and proficiency.

⁶ The lack of teachers specialized in Arabic or Linguistics is another issue that I will not discuss in this section.

As Belnap observed, “Even if a teacher has a thorough knowledge of Arabic and a Ph.D. in a relevant field, this is no guarantee that this individual will be effective as a teacher” (2006, p.177). Every tool available to the Arabic teacher must be used to promote the student’s achievement and satisfaction in Arabic that will lead to higher proficiency and a deeper love for the language.

C. Conclusion

As I have shown, aptitude tests and batteries are not utilized at UT and ELS in the same manner. ELS uses a variation of the MLAT which shows to be successful in predicting the likelihood of a student in Arabic to achieve Superior levels in any of the four main linguistic skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. However, the lack of coordination and cooperation between ELS and other schools means that other institutions are not aware of the success of this test. Moreover, can these aptitude tests help us make average learners into Superior-level linguists?

Research has shown us that motivation and aptitude play considerable roles in the success of the student learning a foreign language. However, they are not always accurate predictors of success in reaching Superior proficiency. Why do students with high levels of foreign language aptitude fail to achieve the highest levels of proficiency? Are students with low aptitude scores destined to remain in the lower levels of proficiency? If so, why do these students continue studying the language? Are there other elements in the SLA process that provides the foundation for student motivation and aptitude? These are

important questions for the SLA field, and through the course of this study, I will attempt to provide answers to these previously unanswered questions.

Chapter II

Role of the Teacher

In this chapter, I will evaluate the influence and responsibility of the teacher in the SLA process by analyzing the relevant literature and the realities of ELS and UT. First, I will examine the importance of teaching philosophies and goals. Secondly, I will analyze the aspect of teachers' understanding of their students and serving as a gateway to the Arabic language and culture. The role of the teacher is an area that demands attention in this research, and I will show that there is a missing element in the understanding of what the role of the teacher is in the foreign language classroom.

A. *Philosophy and Goals*

An important responsibility of every Arabic teacher is to have a philosophy and teaching goals vis-à-vis the classroom. Without a plan or classroom goals, the teacher will be unfocused on tasks and will not be able to design a lesson plan to fit the needs of the students or achieve the teacher's own goals for the students. Therefore, if one is not properly trained in how to design lesson plans or conduct student assessment it will be difficult for that teacher to function at his or her fullest teaching potential. This problem within the Arabic teaching profession stems from the lack of "professionalization" described by Al-Batal and Belnap, who note that nearly half of all Arabic teachers have a small amount of training in foreign language pedagogy or none at all (Al-Batal and Belnap, 2006 p. 397). A lack of training in pedagogy is evident at ELS, where most

teachers do not hold degrees beyond baccalaureate level and many ELS Arabic teachers are not trained in Linguistics or Arabic. These teachers are given a six-week training course designed to provide each teacher with knowledge on teaching methodologies and grammar instruction. However, this type of training, while seemingly more beneficial than detrimental has not been shown to enhance student fluency or proficiency test results.

In addition to teacher training, the minimum proficiency required of the ELS Arabic teacher is Superior, or Level 3 in speaking as defined by the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Skill-Level descriptions and the minimum English proficiency required for an Arabic teacher is Advanced or Level 2. While nearly every Arabic teacher at ELS is a native speaker of the language, the lack of teaching standards and the low levels of required proficiency are a source of criticism from other Arabic teachers at ELS. One ELS Arabic teacher described his feelings about the teaching situation and said, “Just because someone has teeth doesn’t make them a dentist”. In other words, just because one speaks Arabic does not mean that one has the ability to effectively teach Arabic.

UT on the other hand, has no set standard of proficiency as a requirement to teach Arabic. However, one must possess at least a Master’s degree and be approved by the current Arabic faculty as a valid candidate for employment. The most recent faculty addition to the Arabic department of UT was selected from three Ph.D.’s, and each of whom presented two lectures, one in English and one in Arabic. Arabic students with high levels of proficiency were asked to attend all lectures and provide feedback

concerning the candidate they believed to be best to teach Arabic at UT. This incorporation of students' opinions into the hiring process led to an increase of self-confidence and a personal connection to the established faculty as well as the new member.

Teaching philosophies at ELS were researched through interviews conducted with 10 Arabic teachers, each of whom possessed a different philosophy about what was best for their students. One established teacher with over twenty years experience in the field of teaching Arabic as a foreign language described his philosophy as “grammar-focused”. He explained this idea by drawing a map on the back of a piece of paper with a starting point and a final destination but without a path to reach the end point. He said, “This is the beginning point of all Arabic students”, while pointing to the “X” that marked the starting point “and this is the goal of high fluency”, indicating the other mark on the page. He explained, “Grammar is the roadmap that will allow the student to go from beginning to the final destination of fluency and will allow the student the ability to compensate for any lack of ability in listening, reading, writing, or speaking by having a firm grasp on the Arabic grammar.” In other words, what this teacher was stating was that without a firm foundation of Arabic grammar one would not be able to achieve the highest levels of fluency. Thomas Kempis, a Christian monk in the 14th and 15th centuries, put it another way by stating, “The loftier the building, the deeper the foundation must be.”

A professor of Arabic at UT attributed the same importance to grammar but used the term “applied grammar”, meaning that being exposed to Arabic grammar is not enough but rather the student's application of the grammar rules through speaking and

writing exercises. These exercises involve students producing with the language and not just receiving input as in listening and reading drills.

Another teacher at ELS subscribes to the school of thought that says the teacher is the facilitator of the language. In his classroom, he presented the students with an authentic reading passage and recited the line that is etched into every Arabic student's memory, "*la tastakhdim al-qaamuus*" (don't use the dictionary). The students were allowed to discuss the passage amongst themselves in Arabic while the teacher walked around the desks observing the discussions. When they finished, he asked them to summarize the passage and answer questions verbally in Arabic. When a student would make a mistake, he or she would be allowed to finish their thought and then the teacher informed them of the mistake and used the opportunity to discuss the grammar rules that the student had violated. In this classroom, students were allowed to make mistakes but not left to be ignorant of the grammatical rules they had broken. This teaching approach is important for two reasons. One is so that the student builds and maintains the confidence to speak and use the language, rather than shying away from engaging the language and building fluency. The other is so that the student is not left to continually make the same mistakes based on ignorance. The teacher would be doing a disservice to the student if correction were not provided.

Another ELS Arabic teacher believes in the idea that the student must be able to apply the Arabic learned inside the classroom to his or her life outside the classroom. For instance, this teacher brought in two articles about a somewhat sensitive topic concerning birth control and the male reproductive system. Similar topics are not discussed in the

classroom due to instructor fear of offending a student or having a complaint filed against the teacher. But this particular instructor, true to her philosophy, had the students read the two articles about the same topics, one obtained from BBC and the other from al-Jazeera. This technique not only served to promote high level vocabulary, but also there was a more subtle and strategic goal the teacher had in mind, not only the ability to read what the two authors had written but to examine the different ways in which the authors stated the information and their opinions. This teacher clearly comprehends that the ability to understand nuance, connotative intentions, and subtlety is one of the characteristics of the higher levels of Arabic proficiency.

One of the recognized responsibilities of an Arabic teacher is to get the students to use the language as much as possible. In this, the teacher must be the example of which the students are to follow. Therefore, Arabic should be the language of communication inside the classroom as much as possible. The presence of English in the classroom by default creates less opportunity for the students to put into action that which they have been studying. Middlebury College creates a contractual environment in which the students pledge to only use Arabic inside the classroom and out. The Language Pledge is reportedly “the foundation of all [Middlebury’s] intensive immersion programs”⁷. UT and ELS do not have a contract that the students sign as a physical pledge to focus on using Arabic as much as possible.

⁷ Information about the Middlebury College Language Pledge is available at the following website: <http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/ls/pledge/>

B. Understanding Prior Language Exposure and Motivation

The importance and the responsibility of the teacher in the process of SLA cannot be overestimated and must never be underappreciated. For some students, myself included, the Arabic teacher is the first Arabic-speaking person the student meets. The student's first impressions of the language are important just as they are in other personal relationships the student may have. These first experiences will contribute to the student's perceptions of the language, culture, and people, in turn; this will help determine the height to which the student will journey to find his or her own Superior level of proficiency.

This is the point in which a teacher's experience and knowledge with motivational factors discussed in the first chapter play an important role. Given the diversity of students who are enrolling into the Arabic programs, the teacher will need to be cognizant of whether the student has informative or integrative motivations for language study. For a student with integrative motivation, the teacher can serve as a gateway to the Arabic language and culture, and a portal to the Middle East. Also, the knowledgeable teacher can positively encourage the student motivated by informative factors. This teacher can add a personal element to the pragmatic aspects of informative motivation.

For other students, such as heritage learners, these first impressions are not made in a formal classroom but rather in childhood. This type of student possesses some previous connection and a degree of understanding of the history, culture, and practices. The teacher does not have the need to introduce common cultural knowledge to this type of student as opposed to the truly "foreign" learner. Heritage learners of Arabic usually

account for less than twenty percent of all students studying in American universities (Belnap, 2006, p. 175). That means that approximately 80% of students studying Arabic in the United States are non-heritage learners. Therefore, the responsibility falls on the teacher to understand which types of learners are in the classroom.

Less than two percent of all ELS students in the basic course have *any* prior experience with the Arabic language. This experience with Arabic stems from mostly small amounts of time in a Middle Eastern country, ranging from two to six months. Rarely, this prior knowledge is due to a student being of Middle Eastern descent. But for the other ninety-eight percent, the first day inside the Arabic classroom is their first tangible experience and exposure to Arabs, Arab culture, and the Arabic language. Most have only become acquainted with Arabic through depictions from the media or literature.

Similarly, teachers at UT report that 85% of students who begin studying Arabic at UT do not have any prior knowledge of the language. Therefore, approximately 15% of UT students beginning to study Arabic do have limited experience due to religious practices such as Quranic recitation, or through other means. These students have heard and recited Arabic from the Qur'an. However, almost all of these students do not understand the language in it without a translation into their native tongue. This is the point in which a teacher's experience and knowledge with motivational factors discussed in the first chapter play an important role. Given the diversity of students who are enrolling into the Arabic programs, the teacher will need to be cognizant of whether the student has informative or integrative motivations for language study. This demands that

the teachers be properly trained in a variety of techniques and methodologies in order to properly stimulate a variety of students to achieve Superior levels of proficiency.

C. Conclusion

As I have shown, the teacher has many different roles and responsibilities. He or she must be able to analyze the students' needs and goals while maintaining a teaching philosophy and instructional goals. Teachers also serve as a conduit for the non-native students to contact the Arab world and culture. While there is no doubt as to the influence and importance of the Arabic teacher in the SLA process, teachers are not necessarily a determining factor for success, and there are still questions that have not been answered. Why are teachers with Ph.D.s unable to produce more Superior-level students? If highly trained teachers are unable to produce more Superior-level students, then what is the hope for the teacher who does not have formal linguistic or educational training? Assuming teacher success in all aspects, why don't all students of great teachers achieve Superior-level proficiency? Can students achieve Superior-level proficiency in spite of what type of teacher is teaching the class? The truth is that teachers play a crucial role that previous literature has been unable to identify and this new aspect for teachers will be discussed in the last chapter of this study.

Chapter III

Role of Technology

In this new century, technology has expanded the reach of the Arabic teacher to students around the world in the same way that technology has allowed students to engage the Arabic language, culture, and media with a click of a computer mouse. The Internet has now become the main provider of authentic Arabic materials for students around the globe (Ditters, 2006, p. 243). Warschauer and Meskill explain that this is particularly critical for those students studying a foreign language because accessing and using these websites helps immerse students in discourses that extend well beyond the classroom, their immediate communities, and their language textbook (2000, p. 307). However, in the field of Arabic language education, technology is still an underestimated tool for the students as well as the teachers (Ditters, 2006, p. 239). In this section I will discuss the present state of new technology at UT and ELS, and the subsequent problems. I will assess the future possibilities for instruction inside and outside the Arabic classroom that will potentially help students reach Superior proficiency.

A. *Technological Reality*

According to the latest statistics regarding Internet usage there are approximately 1.5 billion people worldwide with regular access to the Internet. In North America there

are over 248 million people or 73.6% of the population with Internet access⁸. This amount has increased 129% in the last eight years. In other words, North America is the continent closest to Internet saturation. However, the figures concerning the Middle East differ in every category. The latest Internet usage data shows that nearly 42 million people or 21.3% of the population of the Middle East use the Internet, a low number compared with Asia or North America. Nonetheless, the increase of Internet usage in the Middle East from 2000 to 2008 is the highest in the world. The growth in the Middle East has been registered at an increase of 1,176.8%, almost 10 times that of North America (see fig. 1).

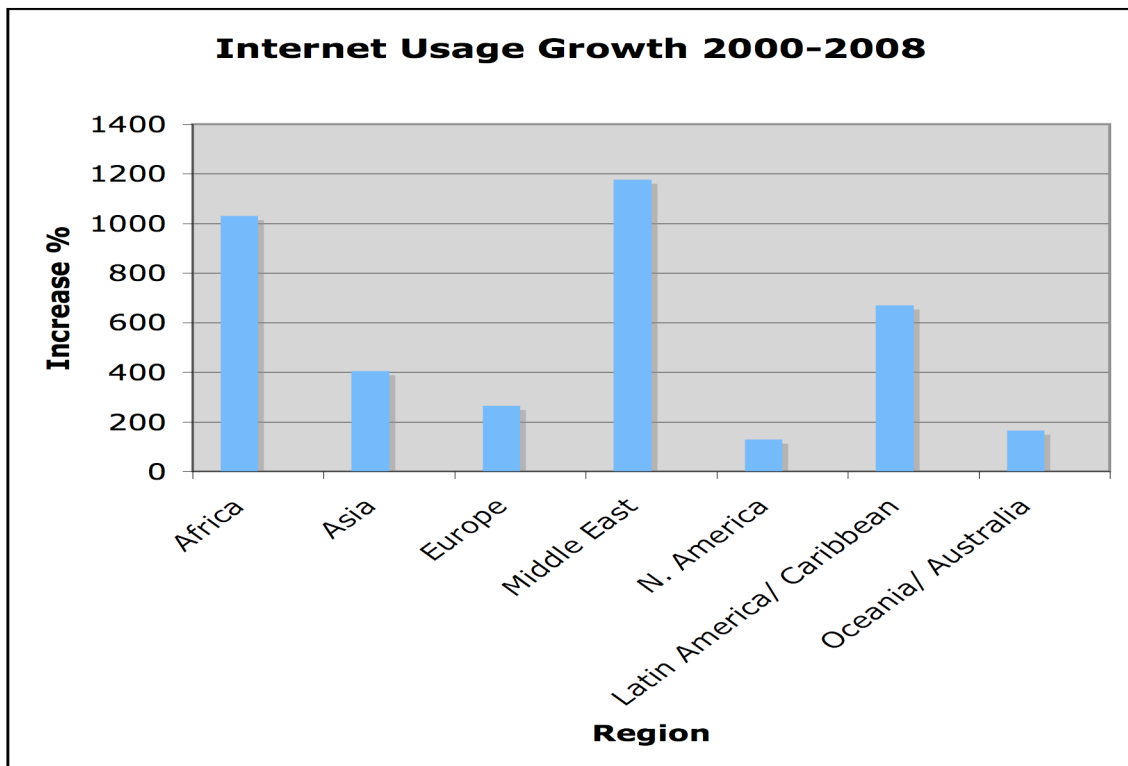


Figure 1. Regional Internet Usage Growth from 2000 to 2008

⁸ Statistics are derived from information available at the following website:
<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

What does this information illustrate about the recent trend in Internet usage of the world? The citizens of the world and especially the Middle East are increasingly becoming members of the global community of the World Wide Web. With more Arabs participating online, more opportunities exist for Arabic students to engage the native speakers of the language instantly and efficiently. What this means for an American student of Arabic like myself who has not traveled to the Middle East to use Arabic in “real-life” situations is that he or she is now able to interact with the Arabic language, people, and culture directly in modes never before available.

There are two main categories into which this interaction may be divided: reception and production. I will discuss the category of “reception” initially due to the fact that most communication is conducted in this category (Lee and Hatesohl, 1993). A study of the time college students spent in communication indicates that they spent almost 77% of each day (18.42 hours) in some form of communication (Barker, et al. 1980). Of that time, 12.86 hours or nearly 70% was spent in a form of communication that would be categorized as “reception”. 52.5% (9.67 hours) of the time was spent listening and 17.3% (3.19 hours) was spent in reading. The rest of the “communication day” was spent in language “production”. Speaking comprised 16.3% (3 hours) of the day while writing consisted of 13.9% (2.46 hours). See figure 2 and 3.

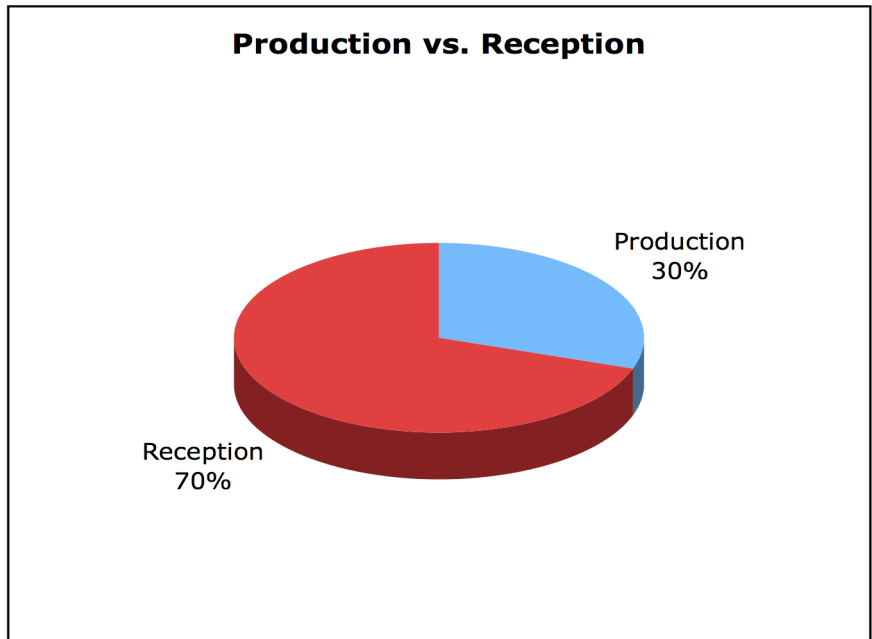


Figure 2. Comparison of time spent in language reception and production

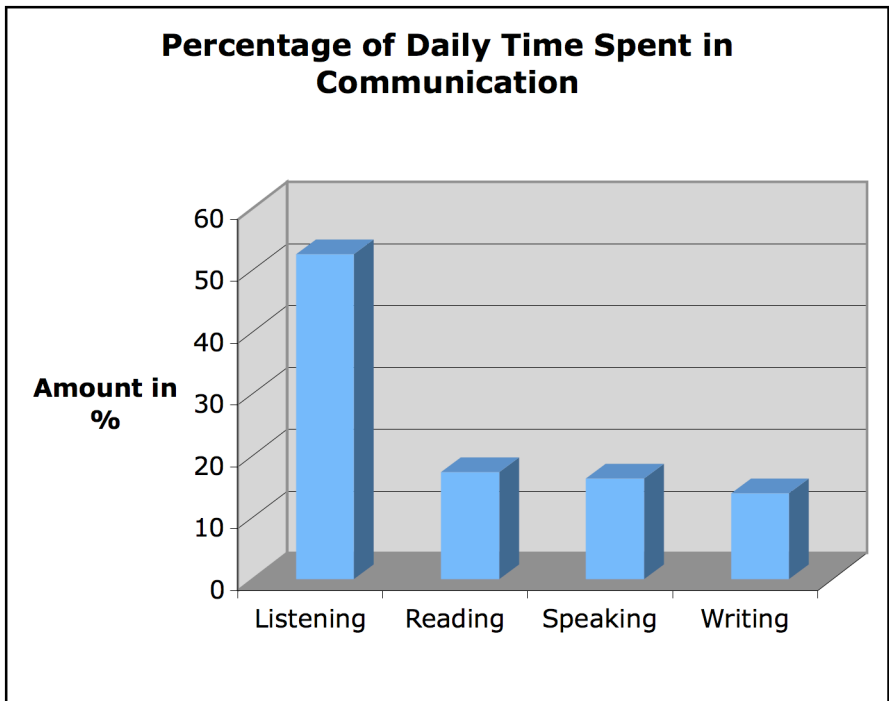


Figure 3. Comparison of time spent in various communication forms.

1. Current State of Technology at UT and ELS

In this section I will assess the present state of technology in use at UT and ELS. Since most students in America study Arabic as a foreign language, those students are left without an environment in which to interact with the Arabic culture and people as those studying the language in a Middle Eastern country. The ability to adapt new technology to the goals of teaching Arabic in America has now become incredibly important, because new technologies allow students to become virtually immersed in the language regardless of time or location.

Most UT teachers of Arabic utilize a variety of technologies in the classroom and throughout the three levels of curriculum. Every classroom is furnished with a computer with a digital projector. This allows the teacher to function in much the same way as a teacher at ELS. The only difference is that comments about articles, vocabulary lists written during the lesson, and student transcriptions cannot be recorded and viewed later on. However, teachers are able to illustrate key points with conventional chalkboards and dry erase boards. The curriculum itself is composed of MP3 format vocabulary lists, passages, and DVD format dramatizations. This provides the students with visual references to the vocabulary in each lesson, again allowing the students more flexibility to review outside the classroom.

UT does not provide any type of equipment, electronic or otherwise, to the students of Arabic. However, while many students already possess computers and MP3 players, the students are encouraged to utilize their own resources to surround themselves with the language as much as possible. UT does not have a fully electronic version of the

curriculum but does use the Al-Kitab series of books, which include vocabulary in MP3 format and various dramatizations and authentic materials in DVD format. While UT does not provide personal computers specifically for Arabic students, there are seven desktop computers in a lab designated for use by hundreds of students in Middle Eastern languages of Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, and Turkish⁹.

In contrast, as an example of an administration bearing the cost of technology in language training, ELS equips every student with a video iPod to use in the course of language study. The iPod contains all curricular lessons and allows for the student to input various other audio and video sources in Arabic for additional exposure and study. Such programs include politically charged programming such as Al-Jazeera's *al-Ittijaah al-Mu'aakis* (The Opposite Direction) and *Akthar Min Ra'y* (More than One Opinion) or Arabic broadcasts of various news outlets such as the BBC or NHK World. ELS also equips each student of Arabic with a notebook PC with which to complete curricular tasks and auxiliary language study. However, accessing these and other authentic materials with those laptop computers is impossible at ELS because they are missing the wireless hardware needed to access the wireless network presently in place. Thus, no student can utilize this technology to its potential. One student even joked that the PC he was given, while not being able to get on the Internet, did hold his papers down well. This shows that funding alone does not allow students to reach Superior-level proficiency. However, with the right equipment, relevant expertise, and adequate funding

⁹ Other communal computers for all students at UT are located in libraries and various buildings on campus free of charge and dependent upon student demand.

the language programs at both UT and ELS, students might have a clearer path in which to reach the Superior level of Arabic proficiency.

As I have previously shown, average students spend most of their day “communication day” in the category of “reception”. Understanding this allows the teacher and the student the flexibility to tailor the language learning process to fit normal communication patterns. There are a number of ways in which technology can assist in this reception process and provide useful information to the students as well as the teacher. Here are a few technological examples used in “reception” situations at UT and ELS.

- *Movies and Film*

This type of media can be beneficial for a number of reasons such as requiring students to deal with hypothetical, interpretive, evaluative, and cultural situations (Lee, 2007, p.39). Since film often deals with social norms, beliefs, and traditions, Arabic movies can serve an important role in the SLA process. Movies, while being entertaining, also serve as a rich medium to convey styles of language, colloquialisms, and dialect, which is vital in a diglossic language such as Arabic. One important way in which this medium can be beneficial for Arabic students is by watching a film in class and having the students write down phrases or words that are unclear to them and review it with the teacher later. Also, the teacher needs to be familiar with the movie to be shown so that he or she can stop the movie at specific times to explain certain cultural or linguistic details.

Here is an example from an Egyptian dialect class at UT. The students were watching an Egyptian film where an Arab man and woman were speaking, the man asked

about her father and she replied that her father gave him his years. To all of the students this exchange seemed confusing, but the teacher seized this opportunity to explain how death is dealt with verbal conversations in the Middle East. For the most part, movies are sparingly used, if at all in the curriculum of ELS or UT. Mainly, the students outside the classroom or in specific dialect classes explore this technology.

- Current events websites and T.V. programming (news, sports, cultural, etc...)

This type of medium is invaluable for any student of another language but especially significant for students of foreign languages such as American students of Arabic. Due to the rise of pan-Arab stations such as Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiyya, and the Arabic site of the BBC, students can not only access current up-to-date news documents but also listen to authentic news articles and political programming just as one could who lives in the Middle East.

An Arabic teacher at UT illustrated the importance of Arabic students accessing this type of information. He said that the Arab people are incredibly politicized, and it is absolutely necessary that students wishing to reach the higher levels of proficiency continually engage with current events and political debates. Since reaching the higher levels of Arabic depends on the student's ability to hypothesize, argue, and comprehend abstract ideas and topics, one must be dedicated to utilizing this type of medium to assist in increasing proficiency.

ELS depends very heavily on this type of technology in the third semester of the basic course and more in the intermediate and advanced courses. This technique continually exposes the students to current events and debates in the Middle East. UT, as

well, uses current events and media Arabic in many classes and specifically has a graduate course dedicated solely to Arabic used in the media. The important issue when dealing with current event and news websites is to maintain variety. Students are easily bored when the topics continually deal with “*al-‘alaaqaat al-thunaa’iyya bayn al-baladayn*” (bilateral relations between the two countries) or death counts from explosions. Introduction to various scientific, technological, and pop culture topics will help keep the interest of the students. This will stimulate both students both with integrative and informative motivation by giving them freedom to learn about topics of interest. However, current technology cannot choose appropriate materials for Superior-level proficiency. This responsibility falls on the teacher, and necessitates proper technology training as well as a high level of education and cultural as well as general knowledge. Without the proper training, education, and knowledge the teacher will not be able to fully utilize the new technologies in aiding the students to reach Superior proficiency.

B. Problems with Technology

Any discussion concerning technology and foreign language education must identify the problems of utilizing various technologies in the foreign language classroom. One of the most significant problems is what Stevens has identified as the “firewall in the mind” (2006, p. 254). This term describes the misconceptions and apprehensions that teachers may have when it comes to using technology in the classroom or allowing the students to utilize technology when completing assignments. Despite the benefits that new technologies bring to the classroom, not every teacher is able or willing to exploit

this application. Teachers who have a fair level of computer literacy compared with those teachers who are not technologically savvy present a stark difference in classroom inclusion of technology. This difference is most clearly displayed when new technologies such as podcasts, SMART Boards, and YouTube appear on the market.¹⁰

For example, I was studying Arabic at ELS in 2003, when the SMART Boards were purchased and installed in each Arabic classroom. In a teaching team that consisted of seven teachers, only one was able to use the SMART Board with any level of proficiency. Other teachers, specifically those teachers who had basic knowledge of how to use a computer, refused to use the board altogether in exchange for a regular dry erase board. One teacher with over fifty years experience in teaching Arabic stated, “People for over a thousand years had been efficiently learning Arabic without the assistance of an electronic board and we could too”. This is not an example of a teacher being “technophobic” but rather viewing the use of the technology as disadvantageous in Arabic education (Lam, 2000, p. 390). To solve this problem, the Exclusive Language School trains each teacher how to use the new technology in order to prepare the teacher so that he or she can incorporate the board into the lessons. ELS currently utilizes

¹⁰ SMART Boards are electronic, interactive white boards that allow teachers and students to control computer applications directly from the display. The touch-sensitive display connects to the computer and digital projector to show the computer image. The teacher can then control computer applications directly from the display, write notes in digital ink and save the work to share or review later. The board can also function as a screen to view movies, video clips, or any other media available on the Internet. Description from the SMART Board website: <http://www2.smarttech.com/st/en-US/Products/SMART+Boards/default.htm>

“SMART Boards” in many Arabic lessons, especially in the third semester that focuses on analyzing current authentic articles in Arabic from various media outlets.

However, UT does not mandate technology training for the Arabic faculty. The university offers optional group and online technology training to faculty on a regular basis, but does not require “technologic literacy” from any of the Arabic teachers. In addition to this laissez-faire policy, UT does not provide time for teachers to complete such training. The teacher, if so willing, has to complete all normal professional duties and then use personal time to complete the training tutorials. This presents a problem for both new teachers and more experienced ones. The new teachers usually have a large workload and are attempting to establish their own teaching styles and methodologies. Free time is in short supply for these teachers to spend in additional training. More experienced teachers have already established their teaching patterns and are less likely to alter the modes of instruction that have served them well for several years. To fix this, mandatory technology training should be provided for all new teachers before they begin teaching in the classroom, and for all teachers to be permitted regular training as a part of their work schedule.

This issue brings up another problem, which is the attitude of the language school’s administration concerning the benefit of the technologies in foreign language education vis-à-vis the cost of the technologies (Warschauer and Meskill, 2000, p. 307). Lam suggests that the use of technology is largely a personal decision, irrespective of administrative support, although for some teachers the level of support may be a factor (2000, p. 408). This problem is compounded by the fact that most academic institutions,

such as UT, do not have specific classrooms designated for language education and more specifically, Arabic education. Every semester, the locations of Arabic classrooms change, and in most instances, the building where the class will be held is changed as well. This lack of location continuity from semester to semester increases the difficulty and cost of supplying the language classrooms with technology such as SMART Boards. However, most rooms in which Arabic classes are held have been furnished with a computer and a digital projector to perform most tasks of which one would use a “SMART Board”.

C. Possibilities of Technology

Given the “firewall” and “roadblocks” discussed in the previous section, what else can be done to incorporate technology in teaching and studying Arabic? I will discuss how technology can be used to overcome this dearth and provide the student with a kind of virtual immersion regardless of their physical location. These new technologies are not currently in use at ELS or UT, and may be used to help assist a student in his or her journey to Superior-level and beyond.

- *“Blogs and Vlogs”*

This mode of technology is one of recent evolution. The term is a derivation of the term “blog” which refers to a log of information that an individual maintains and updates on the web. The word “blog” stems from a combination of the words “web” and “log”. “Blogging” is the action of updating or posting information to a blog). “Vlog” is a term that refers to a video web log or a blog that includes video. This style of blogging

has become increasingly popular through the proliferation of user-dependant sites such as YouTube and filfil.net, which allow people the ability to post videos to the web. A variety of Arabic blogging and blog aggregate sites exist such as Dwwen.com, Itoot.net, and Tadwen.com. Controversies surrounding Arabic blogs and government suppression techniques have led to increased attention being paid to this type of communication. Wael Abbas, an Egyptian blogger, has been at the forefront of this movement and has garnered international accolades for his blog “al-wa’y al-miSri (The Egyptian Awareness) such as the Knight International Journalism Award, BBC’s Most Influential Person Award, and CNN’s Middle East Person of the Year¹¹.

These sites, if utilized by teachers and students of Arabic, would promote exposure to the language, people, and culture of the region in a way that traditional media cannot provide. For many students who already maintain a blog in English, this would serve as a point in which the students could acquire a personal link to their Arabic-blogging counterparts. As with movies, blogs expose the students to cultural idioms and slang that might not be witnessed through conventional media forms. In addition to the benefits of blogs, vlogs allow the students to be exposed to a variety of nonverbal forms of communication such as body language and facial expressions. This is an area that demands attention, since as Mehrabian observed, nonverbal communication consisting of tonality and body language provide the receiver with most of the trusted or “liked” information (1981). In other words, verbal communication consists of many factors other than merely the words being spoken. There are other elements of verbal communication

¹¹ A more detailed list of awards are available at <http://misrdigital.blogspot.com/>

that help the receiver to decode the message and understand what the speaker is attempting to convey. Since nonverbal communication is an important part to any culture, Arabic students must learn to understand nonverbal elements of Arab communication in order to become more proficient to supplement possible deficiencies “reception” skills.

Blogging and Vlogging not only allow the students to view what Arabs are putting up on the Internet, they also provide the student the ability to produce their own blogs and vlogs in Arabic. This type of production is imperative for a student who seeks not only to learn the language but also to live the language. A student can maintain a blog in Arabic while also visually recording him or herself discussing daily happenings in Arabic. These blogs could be used in a class project to encourage the students to bring the language to life in their personal realms. Websites such as Araspace.com exist to encourage social interaction between people who speak Arabic. This website is free of charge and relatively new to the Internet but has already gained exposure in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf region. Incorporating this type of technology into a curriculum would allow for student experimentation and authentic interaction with the language and people much more than merely observing the region through conventional media, unfortunately, neither UT nor ELS utilize this technology in the Arabic programs.

- *MP3 Music/ Online Radio/ Podcasts*

Music and radio have been instrumental in establishing cultural identities as well as political catalysts not only in the Middle East but also around the globe. In Egypt, Nasser used the radio as a medium to reach the listening audience inside the borders but also to extend his scope of influence internationally. Singers such as Umm Kalthoum and

Fairouz have helped solidify and personify an image of Arab national pride and culture. For instance, Umm Kalthoum played a significant role in Egyptian politics when she sang songs, which celebrated the failure of an assassination attempt on Nasser, the nationalization of the Suez Canal and was on hand to celebrate the building of the Aswan High Dam. After the Arab defeat of 1967, she led an international campaign to help raise money to rebuild Egypt (Tresilian, 2008). As well, Fairouz sang what many people believe should be the Lebanese national anthem, “I love you, Lebanon” (BaHibbak ya Libnaan)¹². As Dr. Racy describes Fairouz, “More than just a singer's name, [Fairouz] is a concept whose connotations are ethnic and nationalistic as well as musical and poetic”. With the important role that music has played in the development of the Middle East, any Arabic classroom or curriculum would be deficient if this important element was not included.

Technology plays a significant role in providing an avenue for students and teachers to utilize this musical heritage in an informative and instructional format. Several websites exist that provide for free or inexpensive downloading of Arabic music such as Mazika.com, Rotana.net, and iTunes.com. ListenArabic.com is another website which provides online Arabic music with information about the singers and their lyrics which can be used in an Arabic classroom for translation and re-enactment purposes. Other sites provide free online Arabic radio programming such as RadioSawa.com, RadioramaOnline.com, and RadioTunis.com. Utilizing this technology for classroom

¹² Personal opinions on this topic were gathered from the following website devoted to Fairouz: <http://fairuzonline.com/cgi-bin/board/YaBB.pl?board=General;action=display;num=1210807006>

exercises or for extracurricular work will allow the students the ability to internalize the language through music and replay or sing the song anytime outside the classroom.

Podcasts also supply the Arabic teacher and student with the ability to cover several topics interactively ranging from issues of Islam to tattoos in Lebanon. A podcast is a free video or audio series, much like a TV or radio show, that one downloads and plays on a computer or MP3 player. These programs are available for free and accessed through software applications such as iTunes and may be stored on a computer's hard drive for future use in the classroom.

Major media companies with Arabic programming, such as Al-Jazeera, Radio Monte Carlo, and the BBC, utilize this technology to reach a wider audience base. The beauty of podcasts, besides the fact that they are free, is that they allow for student interactivity and control. In other words, a student may download the Al-Jazeera podcast of "al-Itijah al-Mu'akis" (Opposite Direction) and replay Faisal al-Qasem's introduction a few times to become acquainted with the vocabulary. Then the teacher may ask questions concerning the topics and vocabulary of al-Qasem followed by showing a transcript freely available from Aljazeera.net so the student can read along and listen to the introduction again to solidify his or her understanding. Performing this type of exercise in the Arabic classroom does not cost anything and provide the students with confidence that they can listen with understanding to high-level native speaker of Arabic. As the students progress with their proficiency the programs may be viewed, analyzed, discussed, and/or translated for higher levels of difficulty.

Other podcasts are available such as Radio Monte Carlo's "Sibaaq Al-Aghaani" which is an hour-long podcast counting down the most popular Arabic songs or Japanese news programs in Arabic. These programs may also be used by the students to "virtually immerse" themselves in Arabic whether they are in class, riding the bus, or exercising. Continual exposure to the language is important but just as important is variety and entertainment. If a myriad of free Arabic programs are available to the student, the more likely it is that the student will choose what best suits that student's taste and maintain a personal connection with the language.

Podcasting also allows the students the ability to produce with the language. Students may record themselves presenting local news and events in Arabic and upload the podcast to the Internet for other students to listen to or watch. Incorporating podcasting into a curriculum consist of a semester research project or even establishing a perennial online podcast show on which Arabic students could interview teachers or other students while recording the audio and video for the podcast. Podcasting used in this manner in conjunction with Arabic education is not currently being exploited at either UT or ELS.

D. Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, technology has allowed students and teachers around the world to engage the Arabic language, culture, and media with a click of a computer mouse. The Internet is helping students to become immersed in discourses that extend well beyond the classroom, their immediate communities, and their language textbook.

The technologies I have discussed in this section have an incredible potential to benefit students and teachers of Arabic; however, interviews conducted at UT and ELS reveal that the most common reason for not using these technologies is because the teacher or student is unaware that they exist at all, especially in the case of podcasts and vlogs. To alleviate this lack of teacher knowledge, the following steps need to be taken to ensure continual adaptation of the Arabic classroom to suit the needs of the students as well as the teachers.

- School administrations, professional teacher organizations, and teacher mentoring teams *must provide* initial and recurring technological training for teachers (al-Batal and Belnap, 2006, p. 393-395).
- Programs must grant academic and administrative release time for teachers to make the necessary time investments to experiment with new technologies and test them inside the classroom.
- Successful technological endeavors used by institutions, such as ELS and UT, must be publicized and spread to other institutions to allow for the greatest success to be achieved by the greatest number of students. Open lines of communication between private, public, domestic, and international Arabic programs are vital for this step to be successful.
- Technological literacy must be seen as a prerequisite for new and experienced Arabic teachers.
- More cooperation with various IT departments and companies to ensure newer and less publicized technologies are being utilized for teaching Arabic.

- Competitions and challenges for teachers and students to invent newer technologies that would benefit the Arabic education process.

There must be incentives and motivation from various institutions and teaching organizations to recognize all the benefits that technology can bring to the Arabic teacher and student. The sky is the limit when it comes what technology can bring to the language classroom, but the challenge requires that there be individuals and institutions willing to lead us into that uncharted territory. Nonetheless, we must remember that current technology cannot chose “level-appropriate” materials but it can allow students and teachers greater freedom in adapting and personalizing the curriculum. Technology has the potential to be a positive factor in the classroom to motivate students as well as provide the teachers with the tools necessary to help tailor the lessons in order for more students to reach the higher levels of proficiency.

Chapter IV

Role of the Environment

“The classroom should be an entrance into the world, not an escape from it”

-John Ciardi

As this quotation from the poet John Ciardi illustrates, the classroom cannot and must not be a replacement for the reality outside the school. Most scholars and students would agree with this statement however, the differences in opinion revolve around what I will define as the external and internal elements that encompass that “entrance into the world”. Some view study abroad as a key component in achieving Superior proficiency (Al-Batal and Sypher, forthcoming), while others argue that the necessity of study abroad in achieving this level of fluency is overrated and that intensive immersion programs are the best method (Freed, Segalowitz, Dewey, 2004).

In this section I will discuss how internal and external environmental factors affect the Arabic classroom. Also, I will compare and contrast the programs at UT and ELS to analyze the strengths and weakness of these programs vis-à-vis the environmental factors in order to illustrate to what extent the environment plays a role in reaching Superior proficiency. There are no statistics and few studies of any kind with regards to this topic; therefore I will include information collected from interviews with Superior-level students to supplement this dearth of statistical data.

A. *Internal Factors*

First, internal factors are those elements of the learning experience inside the classroom that influence the SLA process. These factors also play a crucial role in affecting the atmosphere of learning in the classroom. Interviews and classroom observations conducted at both ELS and UT show several internal factors have become apparent as being important to the success of the students in achieving higher levels of Arabic proficiency and providing for an enjoyable foreign language experience for the teachers and students. I will identify these factors and analyze the ways in which they are dealt with differently at UT and ELS. The following factors came up repeatedly in student and teacher interviews as three important internal factors:

- Classroom alternation
- Teacher and student rotation
- Variety of program

This is not a complete list of all possible internal factors that may affect the process of Arabic education; however, these were the factors that students and teachers from ELS and UT said either contributed to or could be more effectively integrated into the respective programs¹³.

1. *Classroom Alternation*

The lack of classroom alternation was one of the factors to which students and faculty at ELS had the strongest aversion. ELS consists of three different schools for the students enrolled in the 64-week basic course in Arabic. The students are placed into

¹³ Internal factors, such as the technological equipment of the classroom, not included in this section are discussed in other sections of this paper.

specific classes consisting of approximately 18 students separated into 3 classrooms. Therefore each classroom usually consists of 6 students. These Arabic students remain in the same classroom with the same classmates for the entirety of the 64-week program. It is not difficult to imagine why this would become very monotonous and may eventually lead to lessened achievement of the students. There are different reasons as to why the students remain in the same building and room. One is that for a school that has approximately 1,000 students in the basic Arabic course, it is logistically easier to have the students stay in the same classrooms. Another reason is because the teachers' offices are next to the classrooms in which the teachers teach and to move their offices would be difficult and time consuming given the fact that each school houses approximately 120 teachers.

The students and some of the teachers have valid complaints against this manner of reasoning. One problem that was repeatedly described was the fact that the best students in each classroom are never challenged nor have the ability to gauge their level of fluency and proficiency against talented students from other classes. Another complaint was that even though moving the teachers' offices would be time and money-reliant, having the students rotate classrooms would not be as intense or time-consuming. This would also allow for the students to be exposed to different teaching team styles, accents, and personalities. One ELS language instructor even proposed that since there are three Arabic schools and three semesters in the basic course, then the students could begin at Arabic school "1" and after the first semester, would "graduate" to the next school, Arabic school "2". The same process could be repeated for the third semester as

well. This would allow students and teachers a variety within the program and connect all three schools in a way that they are not currently involved. Also, students would gain a sense of accomplishment and gratification knowing that they are “graduating” to the next level of Arabic, in theory and in practice. Every student asked about this proposal acknowledged support and enthusiasm for the possibility of its implementation.

This issue of classroom alternation is not an issue at UT given the fewer amount of students enrolled in the Arabic program, the student population in each class, and the continual adjustment of classroom location following each semester. There are approximately 200 students enrolled each semester in the Arabic program at UT and with 14 teachers with fixed offices, it is much easier for the students to adjust to room change. Due to the constant alternation of rooms, students and teachers are continually presented with various environments, which help to decrease the sense of monotony inside the classroom.

2. *Teacher Rotation*

Both ELS and UT address the issue of exposing the students to a variety of teachers with differing pronunciation, accents, and personalities. The students at UT are taught by a different teacher and teaching assistant each semester and usually practice speaking throughout each semester with another teacher altogether. In addition to the exposure of the students to different teachers regardless of their level, UT also has made a deliberate effort to employ non-native speakers of Arabic into the classes in order to illustrate to those students that being proficient in Arabic is not limited to native speakers.

ELS deals with this internal factor in a different way. Each section of 18 students has a team of 6 teachers who alternate every hour of instruction. This teaching team most often will be the only team the students in the section will come in contact with apart from any involvement in extracurricular language activities. This method allows for the students to become aware of differences of speech, handwriting, teaching abilities and style. Also, this method allows for the teaching team to monitor personal progress of the students throughout the length of the curriculum and adjust teaching techniques to reinforce any skills in which the students may be lacking. This also allows for a deeper interpersonal understanding and relationship to form between the teachers and the students.

Students and teachers from UT and ELS are in agreement concerning the importance of exposing students to different teachers throughout the respective programs. Though each institution has different methods for going about this, both methods serve to assist the students in their ability to interact with a variety of different individuals. The two programs appear to best suit the styles of Arabic education at their own institutions. For ELS, the fact that the program is very intense with over 30 contact hours a week demands a team of teachers for each section to share the workload. UT has less time devoted to in-class instruction and therefore does not need to rotate teachers except following each semester. Therefore, students need to be exposed to a variety of teachers but the manner of exposure is dependent upon the needs of the program itself.

3. *Variety of Program*

ELS and UT have different levels of curricular variability. UT uses the four-part system, “Al-Kitaab” as its core curriculum. Other universities such as Yale, Georgetown, Emory, and Harvard use this commercially available curriculum. UT uses this curriculum for all six, core semesters in Arabic instruction. The curriculum of other courses varies and is chosen by the instructor; such courses include dialect, courses in literature and culture, and the language of Arabic media. The textbooks are used as the primary mode of instruction for the first four semesters, but additional relevant materials are incorporated into the lesson plan. Writing is also a major portion of the Al-Kitaab textbook curriculum that, as Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey (2004) demonstrated, is essential for students to achieve the higher levels of proficiency in speaking.

For the most part, students at UT are in agreement as to the benefits of using the Al-Kitaab curriculum in learning Arabic. However, some students have raised the issue that the texts from the curriculum are not current enough and that the format does not leave flexibility to accommodate different student goals in the language. One student stated that he wished there were more “everyday” elements in the lessons such as sarcasm, humor, and pop culture as opposed to the debates about whether or not poetry is dead. This type of instruction is usually more salient in the semester of dialect, which the students take after the first four semesters, and also in media and culture and cinema courses. Students also were pleased with the technological aspect of the curriculum; that being the DVD-format videos and MP3 audio clips, which allow students the ability to load those lessons onto MP3 players and review at various times.

ELS uses a different system for teaching Arabic than does UT. The curriculum of ELS is privately produced and not available to students or teachers at any other institutions. The curriculum consists of 10 units; each unit is made up of 5 chapters, which are taught in the first and second semester. The third semester consists of a mixture of authentic texts and media intended to allow the student to transition from the Intermediate level of proficiency to the Advanced and Superior levels. Listening is the major focus of the ELS curriculum, and writing receives the least amount of detailed focus. While there are no semesters designated for dialect study, the ELS basic course incorporates portions of each lesson to expose the students to variances between different dialects, namely Iraqi, Egyptian, Levantine, and Gulf Arabic. The entire basic course curriculum is formatted both as a textbook and digitally for access on the issued iPods.

The curriculum currently in use at ELS has only been taught for the last two years. Due to this short period of time, detailed statistics concerning proficiency levels of students finishing the program are still too few to fully analyze. However, students and teachers at ELS were interviewed concerning their opinions and thoughts with regards to the new curriculum. Most agreed that the new program was sufficient in providing the students the necessary tools to become proficient in the language. However, a few teachers did express concern about the sheer amount of text that needed to be covered in the 43 weeks of the first two semesters and that there needed to be more emphasis on grammar and writing. Many of the students interviewed stated that they wished there was more dialect training in the curriculum instead of the few, short sections meant to make the students aware of regional differences in pronunciation and word choice.

Comparing the curriculum of the two institutions is very difficult because there is no shared uniformity of grading, teaching, or evaluating practices. Establishing criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of each curriculum would be incredibly problematic and is not the goal of this research. To compensate for this fact, four students were interviewed who have studied Arabic both at UT and ELS. Each student stated that both programs were beneficial but in different ways. According to these students, the ELS program served to provide a solid base for vocabulary, usage, and linguistic understanding. All students began their study of Arabic at ELS, and believed that they had been well served by beginning at ELS due to the focus of the course. At ELS, the students' sole academic responsibility was to learn the Arabic language. However, the students claimed that the instruction of Arab history, literature, and dialect at ELS was lacking.

According to the students, the UT curriculum served to fill those knowledge gaps. Each student believed, that through the courses at UT, they gained a better understanding of the social, cultural, and political landscape of the Middle East. This was the result of a combination of Middle Eastern Studies courses and the Arabic program. Also, all reported that the atmosphere of UT was one that allowed for more open and critical debates about US-Middle East relations, Arab culture, and the "Arab street". While the students acknowledged that these topics were covered in brief at ELS, the greater academic freedom of the UT program stimulated their informative and integrative motivations. Moreover, each student believed that a combination of the two programs would be ideal and possibly help more students to reach Superior levels of Arabic proficiency.

B. *External Factors*

External factors refer to the environment that lies outside the classroom, including:

- Is the classroom located in an Arabic-speaking country or community?
- Once the student leaves the classroom, will he or she come in contact with Arabic-speaking individuals who are not Arabic teachers, such as in an émigré community?
- Will the student be able to use any Arabic skills in a community to reinforce what is taught inside the classroom?

For most students in the United States studying Arabic as a foreign language, the answer to every question is no. The absence of these kinds of opportunities contributes to the belief of scholars and students that to reach the Superior level of proficiency in Arabic, one must spend time in an Arabic-speaking country. In a soon-to-be published study of CASA students from 2002 to 2006, Al-Batal and Sypher claim, “Experience living [in an Arabic-speaking country] is a critical ingredient for achieving Superior-level proficiency” (p. 14). This belief was found to be shared by all UT faculty and students that participated in the interviews conducted in the current research. Every Superior-level student of Arabic at UT had lived and/or studied Arabic in a Middle Eastern country.

Other scholars, among them Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey (2004), cast doubt on this claim of the necessity of living in country through study abroad language programs. Their research analyzed three different programs of French language instruction: regular classroom, study abroad, and intensive domestic immersion. Their research shows that

students who were enrolled in an intensive immersion summer program made significantly higher gains in oral fluency than those in a semester-long study abroad program and in the conventional classroom. These results illustrate the differences between the types of programs and the importance of focus placed on utilization of the target language inside and outside the classroom. The students who participated in this study reportedly used more of the L2 in out-of-class activities and wrote considerable more in the L2 than the study abroad and regular classes. The study abroad students reported that they used English, which was their L1, more outside the classroom than the students in the immersion program. Studies such as this raise questions about extracurricular L2 activities, contact hours, and how to design domestic programs that incorporate some immersion into the curriculum. How do the two institutions studied here fit into this discussion?

Complete comparative analysis of student achievement at UT and ELS on proficiency tests cannot be performed at the present time. The main reason for this is the fact that proficiency tests are not mandated for Arabic students at UT. In addition, ELS uses a private language proficiency test that measures the skills of listening and reading. Neither institution tests for proficiency in the skill of writing. In order to compensate for this lack of comparable test scores, I will analyze the factors that constitute the two programs to show similarities and differences, such as the amount of contact hours, homework per week, length of program, and amount of speaking practice.

The Arabic program at UT is a conventional university-language program. The first four semesters consist of 5 hours of Arabic instruction per week with one additional

hour of speaking practice for a total of 2 hours per class day of Arabic instruction either curriculum-based or focused specifically on the skill of speaking. The total contact hours in class for the first four semesters amount to 360. The fifth and sixth semesters of Arabic instruction have slightly less in-class time with 5 hours per week for a total of 150 hours of Arabic instruction. The contact hours of other Arabic classes are reduced to 3 hours a week with a total of 90 hours of Arabic instruction. 90 additional hours are required to complete the Arabic program, but these last hours usually amount to 45 hours of dialect (Egyptian or Levantine) and 45 hours of instruction in Arabic literature. A student without prior knowledge of the language enrolling in the Arabic program at UT will acquire approximately 780 contact hours in the course of the full program. The Arabic program at UT is designed so that the student is required to study roughly 2-3 hours outside class for every one contact hour inside the class. This is due to the limited number of hours available for classroom contact. In total this would amount to around 2,340 total hours of Arabic-related study in a course of the four-year program.

The ELS program differs in the basic design of the course as well as the length of the program. This program consists of three consecutive semesters, each consisting of approximately 21.3 weeks, with only a break for the winter holidays. The amount of contact hours does not vary from year to year as in the UT program, but rather is fixed. Each week consists of 6 hours per day of in-class instruction for a total amount of 30 classroom contact hours per week. Over the course of the ELS program, this amounts to roughly 1,920 hours of in-class instruction with 5 days set aside for intense Arabic immersion. The course of ELS is designed for the students to study outside the classroom

one hour for every three hours spent inside the classroom for an amount of 2,632 total hours of Arabic-related study in a course of the 64-week program. This design, being a 1:3 ratio of time spent outside the classroom in study as compared to the hours of instruction inside the classroom, is almost the mirror opposite of the UT program, which has a 3:1 ratio of external to internal time spent in Arabic study.

During the first semester each class has one day of immersion where the class resides in an isolated area of the campus that is specifically designed to facilitate complete use of Arabic without any English whatsoever. The second semester consists of two days of immersion and the final semester includes a three-day immersion. Some ELS students have reported that these periods of immersion are essential for the awareness that the students have the ability to function in a non-English environment by employing the skills and vocabulary learned inside the classroom. One student even stated that this was the event in which he began to think in Arabic instead of translating from English to Arabic in his head and vice versa. This fluency is one of the important factors in reaching the higher levels of fluency. Even the students at UT who reached Superior level agreed that they had all overcome that mental translation barrier to begin thinking in Arabic. Moreover, while the immersion experiences were short and artificial, every student interviewed stated that they benefited from the experience and would not have gained as much confidence without having been put in that environment.

To understand this factor and the role of the external environmental factors in reaching Superior fluency, interviews with those students at both UT and ELS were. One UT student described his experience in an Arabic-speaking country and the personal

study system that he used to increase his proficiency. He would attend conventional Arabic language classes during the day and then return to his apartment and review what he had learned that day. When he finished his review, he would head down to the closest corner store and “hang out, shooting the breeze” with the native Arab employees and customers. This exercise allowed him to put into action what he had learned earlier in the day and at the same time being able to gain “cultural literacy” and experience with typical Arabic nonverbal customs. This student also explained that he was a “what’s in it for me?” student. This meant that what was provided in the classroom by the instructor was filtered by the student, and, if it was deemed that the information would be useful outside the classroom, he was more motivated to commit the lesson to memory. For students such as this one, the ability to engage with individuals outside academia was a key factor in his desire to reach the higher levels of proficiency.

This type of self-motivated learning, according to all students interviewed, is one of the most essential keys to achieving higher levels of proficiency and comfort with Arabic. Students such as this, seeking external connection and cultural immersion, demonstrate a key element of integrative motivation. They all have a desire and motivation to engage with the “real-life” aspects of the language and culture instead of translating sentences on a chalkboard. Teachers must design curriculum and an environment that fosters this motivational mentality. Each student interviewed stated that they hoped for a program that would perform that role.

Since neither UT nor ELS have geographical proximity to Arabic émigré communities, let alone Arabic-speaking countries, students at both institutions are forced

to use English or Spanish as the mode of communication for almost every external social situation apart from those that are related to the Arabic curriculum or assigned homework. Those students have described the difficulties they have had in dealing with this dearth of Arabic outside the classroom. One student at ELS described her method for dealing with this linguistic obstacle. Since she had been the only member of her household and neighborhood who spoke Arabic, she began having conversations with herself in Arabic. Most of these conversations were conducted verbally, and to avoid unwanted staring, when she was driving in her car. She laughed and said, “It would have seemed odd to see an American woman walking down the street babbling to herself in Arabic.” This technique is a variation from what scholars have defined as self-talk (Chamot and O’Malley, 1987). They define self-talk as an “affective strategy in which students allay their anxiety by reassuring themselves about their own abilities” (1987, p. 244). This definition is referring to that which the student does mentally but verbal self-talk encompasses this definition and more. For the student of Arabic in the United States this technique allows the student to continually practice the speaking skill in a number of ways.

- Improve pronunciation of difficult letters or letter combinations – this is useful for the American student of Arabic given certain difficult letters such as the *qaaf*, the *‘ain*, and the *khaa*.
- Review vocabulary in communicative context – being able to verbalize the vocabulary from the curriculum complements various grammar rules such as number rules and noun-adjective agreement.

- Fill gaps in vocabulary – for instance, a student could be walking on the sidewalk and verbally practicing the skill of description when he or she tries to say that there are weeds growing in the cracks along the sidewalk. The student doesn't know the words for weeds or cracks so the student writes those two words on paper and looks them up when the student has a dictionary available. The next time the student is on that portion of sidewalk the words will be available from the earlier practice of verbal self-talk.
- Increase self-confidence and decrease apprehension of speaking skills – the more comfortable the student is with his or her own voice and ability to speak without breaks the more confidence and motivation the student will have to engage in conversations with unfamiliar individuals.
- Incorporate and become comfortable with a variety idioms and expressions – this is important not only to give the students the ability to fill gaps in speech but also to help the student incorporate the expressions into speech in the same way that a native speaker uses the language.

Both ELS and UT students believe that the most beneficial method is a combination of verbal self-talk in Arabic and extracurricular speaking situations that help the student to maintain a personal sphere of Arabic despite the student's physical environment.

ELS and UT both seek to circumvent this problem of studying Arabic in America as a foreign language by providing groups that the students can join that allow the students the ability to meet with other Arabic students and converse in the language outside the classroom. Students from ELS who have participated in the voluntary

speaking club have regularly outperformed the students who do not attend. The ELS Arabic teacher who volunteers to lead the speaking club informed me that this was due not only to the motivational factor of the students but also the personal enjoyment that the students receive from engaging the language in a non-structured environment with unfamiliar individuals and topics. The topics are chosen by the teacher and may include jokes, popular Arabic movies, literature, or current political events. All students interviewed, who attended the session I observed, informed me that they would most definitely continue to attend further speaking opportunities because they enjoyed the ability to put their new language into use. Other students described how they found a sense of accomplishment by being able to hold conversations about diverse topics and hear people other than their usual classmates speak. Neither institution mandates participation in the extracurricular speaking clubs, due to diverse student schedules and familial obligations. Therefore, the students with more motivation will be able to participate in the extra speaking programs.

In addition to extracurricular student-led speaking clubs, UT conducts an Arabic speaker series in which various lectures are given in Arabic encompassing a variety of topics such as Arabic movie culture, literature, politics, and history. This type of activity permits the students to engage the various speakers in Arabic through the actual presentation portion as well as the question-and-answer section at the end of each presentation. ELS does not provide an equivalent to this “Arabic speaker series,” but this method of Arabic presentations by native Arabs is incorporated in the three different periods of immersion. This allows the students the ability to ask the speaker questions

and discuss the topics while continually maintaining an atmosphere of Arabic without English as a default.

C. Conclusion

As I have shown, both internal and external environmental factors affect the process of teaching and learning Arabic as a foreign language. ELS and UT have different methods of overcoming these obstacles, and both have shown to be successful in achieving their respective objectives. However, given the differences in programs and in the opinions of the teachers and students within both institutions, a move towards an academic “middle ground” may prove to be more beneficial. Taking the strengths of both programs and giving attention to the thoughts of those interviewed, improvements are possible. This program could consist of 15 contact hours per week of in-class instruction and at least 15 hours of homework and review per week. Also the program could consist of a variety of classroom environments as well as an alternation of teaching staff. This program should have an essential base of grammar, vocabulary, and exercises that exist in both the Al-Kitaab series and the ELS curriculum. In addition, there should be flexibility in the latter semesters for the students to engage the language in ways that are relevant to their future goals and interests. The program should include the ELS “immersion” experience, as described earlier. This would not have to be 5 days of total immersion, but one day of immersion at the end of every semester would be possible at most universities. By including this aspect into the curriculum, the students would have

the opportunity to solidify the knowledge gained during the semester while stimulating their integrative motivation.

Given the fact that both ELS and UT have the same goal of producing the best Arabic linguists possible, the fact that there is such little cooperation between the two institutions is disheartening. The current global situations demand more cooperation and coordination between all Arabic institutions. A program that would build upon the strong foundations of UT and ELS and at the same time give heed to other environmental factors would become an example for other institutions to follow.

Chapter V

Role of Language and Ideology

Discussing the role of the language in the process of second language acquisition may seem redundant, however in Arabic this topic is continually a point of debate. In Arabic, there is a continual debate over not only how to teach the language but also what type of language to be taught. This debate stems from the existence of different “registers” of Arabic. One register of Arabic is spoken in casual and informal conversation while another form of “high” Arabic exists which is defined by extensive grammatical rules and is used in more formal speeches and rhetoric. In this section, I will analyze how the realities and ideologies of Arabic inside and outside the classroom walls affect a student of Arabic aiming to reach the Superior level of proficiency. Also, I will discuss the ways in which students view this diglossic dilemma and the importance of studying Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and colloquial Arabic (*'aammiyya*).

A. Linguistic Reality outside the Classroom

Most students in the United States do not live in a community in which they have the ability to easily interact with native speakers outside the academic realm. Thus, the authenticity of language in conversations and curriculum has only recently become an issue, as more students travel abroad and are exposed to *authentic* language use. Since 87.4% of 614 students from a recent NMELRC study of Middle East language learning and teaching in the United States agreed that they were studying Arabic in order to

interact with the people who speak it, teachers and students must first understand what the reality of Arabic in a native context would look like (Belnap 2006, p. 174).

The idea is that Arabic is a diglossic language (Wahba 2006, p.139). There is what has been described as “high” or “classical” Arabic, which is the mode of communication for educational settings and skills such as reading and writing as well as speaking in formal situations such as political or professional occasions. The other is “low” or dialect. This is the medium of oral communication in Arab society, which most people learn and acquire in the home. The educated native Arab speaker has the ability to successfully navigate a myriad of linguistic situations. In a mix of registers, Wahba illustrated this variety of situations in which an educated user would use one of four “levels” of Arabic and the skills involved in those situations. He describes the uppermost level as Classical Arabic or “High” (Ferguson, 1959), then, in descending order but not importance, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Educational Regional Arabic (ERA), and Regional Arabic or “Low” (see Table 1). This ideology pervades decisions about what to teach, and many Arabic teachers focus on the “high” Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, while avoiding the “low” partially or altogether. This leads to a student having a proficiency with obvious gaps, who will be able to conduct political discourse with well-educated Arabs but unable to speak to a young Arab child.

Table 1
The functions of the Arabic Varieties¹⁴

<i>Variety</i>	<i>Functions</i>
Classical Arabic (High):	-Religious and nationalistic purposes (reading and speaking skills) -Medium of medieval heritage (Islamic and Arabic literature: reading skill)
Modern Standard (MSA):	-Written communication (writing skill) -Reading aloud and recitation (reading skill) -Spoken communication in limited formal situations -Not a native variety, but learned through formal education -Medium of media (print and broadcast), modern literature, and any serious writing (Parkinson, 1991, p.32)
Educated Regional (ERA):	-Medium of oral communication among the educated; It is used in written communication, especially in personal letters (see Meiseles, 1977, pp. 173-195)
Regional (RA) (Low):	-Medium of oral communication among the less educated; it is a native variety

The reality outside the classroom is that the Arabic student has to possess the ability to adapt the linguistic skill to fit the situation. As Wilmsen describes it, “In an Arabic context, the salient feature of all of these functions save one is that in normal conversational settings, none of them is carried out in the formal declamatory code (2006, p.127). Speaking to a taxi driver, haggling in the *suuq* (market), and conversing over a game of chess or backgammon are conducted in the local vernacular. Parkinson (1985) and Campbell (1986) also describe the uselessness of Modern Standard Arabic in most normal non-academic situations. One Arabic professor even stated that native Arab professors and scholars, on most occasions, refrain from speaking in MSA or “high” Arabic when amongst themselves.

¹⁴ This table is a modified version of the table proposed by Wahba on page 143 of *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals in the 21st century*.

The realization of the linguistic reality of Arabic has been witnessed around the world. Korean students who began studying Arabic in the Middle East found that MSA wouldn't meet the daily demands of life in an Arabic country (Hee-Man and El-Khazindar 2006, p.100). Students from UT and ELS have even stated that a lack of colloquial proficiency has been detrimental to self-confidence and motivation. For instance, one student related his disappointment when after a short period of study in an Arabic-speaking country he realized that what he had been studying in the classroom was irrelevant. He said that when he walked through the Middle Eastern streets and was unable to understand most conversations, he became dispirited. Therefore, he lost interest in studying MSA and focused primarily on the study of *'aammiyya*.

The views of teachers and students at UT and ELS are not as disparate. The students at UT are shown the importance of understanding *'aammiyya* from nearly the beginning of the program. This is led by the efforts of the teachers in designing a curriculum, which focuses on exposure of the entire range of Arabic. ELS teachers realize the importance of *'aammiyya*, however are restricted by the administration's requirement of adherence to the prescribed curriculum. New Arabic students at ELS many times do not realize the different registers of Arabic, but later in the program become aware of the necessity of *'aammiyya*. The periods of immersion discussed in the previous chapter help highlight the need for colloquial speaking skills. As a former student of ELS, this was the point when I realized that to hold a casual conversation in MSA took so much longer than in *'aammiyya*. I learned that by using *'aammiyya*, I was able to focus more on the speaker and his or her meaning, rather than on the conjugation

of each verb or vowel ending. This led to increased confidence with the language and a feeling that I was actually using Arabic, as would a native speaker. In turn, this led to a stimulation of my integrative motivation and personal study of ‘*aammiyya*. In both programs, the students and teachers understand the importance of the full range of Arabic registers and seek to provide as many opportunities as possible. UT, however, provides considerably more ‘*aammiyya* exposure for the students.

B. Linguistic Reality inside the Classroom

The fundamental ways in which native and non-native Arabic speakers learn Arabic differ from one another. The native speaker learns ‘*aammiyya* first and then MSA in school to be used for special occasions. The non-native speaker usually learns MSA first and then ‘*aammiyya* for special occasions (Badawi, 2006 p. x). This pattern of “MSA before ‘*aammiyya*” has been the modus operandi for several institutions for many decades, in the United States and elsewhere. One of the main reasons is the ideology of colloquial Arabic as a “low” register of the language. In addition, there are a variety of reasons for this style of unnatural focus on MSA, such as the following:

- Dearth of materials in colloquial Arabic – Most readily accessible texts such as newspapers, literature, magazines, transcripts, and religious writings are in MSA or a high form of Arabic. Since most colloquial Arabic is, for the most part, spoken and not written, there is a discernible dearth of texts, written or audio-visual, to support instruction of ‘*aammiyya*, especially for the Intermediate level.

- Ideology that the student could “pick up” colloquial Arabic – Interviews of various Arabic teachers has shown that there is a philosophy shared by some that if a student has a good understanding of MSA then the student will be able to absorb ‘*aammiyya* by exposure. However, interviews with students show that students are more likely to reach Superior proficiency when there is a foundation of MSA as well as training in colloquial Arabic.¹⁵
- Desire to present the most esteemed version of Arabic to foreigners – This specifically relates to teachers who shy away from presenting the reality of the language and culture to foreigners. At ELS, taboo topics such as religious discrimination, profanity, and sexual issues as relating to Arabic are often times removed from discussion and curriculum. ELS students interviewed described a desire to learn the “good, bad, and ugly” parts of the language and culture. To discourage controversial discourse is to limit the scope and possibilities of each student.
- Lack of administrative and financial support for teaching dialects – There are severe constraints on the ability of most Arabic programs to institute and maintain ‘*aammiyya* training. This is common in institutions with a small teaching staff or an administrative goal of teaching towards academic and literary agendas that exclude communicative skills.

¹⁵ Information is derived from personal interviews conducted in the course of this research with students who have scored at the Superior level of proficiency on listening and reading tests.

- A focus on reading and writing rather than interactive skills – The teaching and learning of Arabic in the United States has long followed the Arab model that consisted of what some might consider excessive reverence for the written language (MSA) and outward contempt for spoken varieties of Arabic. The linguistic reality is one that requires the individual to function in multiple situations on with a wide range of linguistic abilities. Colloquial Arabic is necessary for any student to be able to function effectively in an authentic environment. By concentrating on reading and writing to the exclusion of communicative practice, the teacher is falsely defining the linguistic reality in which the majority of a normal communicative day is spent in listening and speaking. However, this does not negate the importance of reading and writing with regards to the student’s ability to “interact” with the language.

Given the linguistic reality outside the classroom, I will discuss the ways in which ELS and UT deal with this pronounced situation. The ELS basic Arabic program is overwhelmingly focused on Modern Standard Arabic. Approximately 96% of the 1,920 contact hours are devoted to listening, reading, writing, and speaking in MSA. This leaves 4% or 80 contact hours of the curriculum designed to incorporate exposure to Levantine, Egyptian, Iraqi *‘aammiyya*. These exercises are designed acquaint the student with the different ways that these three dialects say various phrases in comparison with MSA. In the last half of the program the exercises are more focused on the student being able to understand the important elements of each colloquial passage. No other exercises

in the basic course are designed to incorporate ‘*aammiyya* into the student’s repertoire of linguist abilities.

In contrast, interviews with teachers and students of ELS offer a more realistic view of the diglossic situation than the curriculum supports. One Arabic teacher, with over twenty years experience teaching Arabic to foreigners, stated that the beauty of the language is the treasures that exist in every region and dialect. He further explained that the gravest sin students of Arabic commit, is refraining from feasting on the bounty of language outside the banner of “*fusha*”. Current and former students of ELS relay this same problem with regards to the incomprehensibility of ‘*aammiyya*. One student, who achieved Superior-level proficiency upon completion of the basic Arabic course, described his discontent at being unable to watch an Egyptian movie without subtitles. Another student stated that she had difficulty communicating with Arab children due to her lack of colloquial knowledge.

This diglossic situation is treated differently at UT. The proficiency-based curriculum is based on the methodology of the *Al-Kitaab fi Ta'allum al-'Arabiyya* textbook series, which introduces students to both formal and spoken Arabic from the beginning, and focuses on developing learning and comprehension strategies in addition to the active acquisition of vocabulary and structure.¹⁶ The view that this book series takes is that to be truly proficient in Arabic, one must also attain functional proficiency in the more natural, less formal colloquial spoken Arabic (of any variety), the kind of Arabic that native Arabic speakers use in natural, real-time conversations (Awad). In

¹⁶ Information gathered from University of Texas website
http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/mes/arabic/lang_training/

addition to the basic curriculum, each student participates in one hour per week of ‘*aammiyya* conversation. According to the Coordinator of the Arabic Core Curriculum, this is a recent development in the UT Arabic program, and the future direction is towards further inclusion of ‘*aammiyya* into the basic curriculum.

The UT program also incorporates colloquial training in the two one-semester courses devoted ‘*aammiyya*. One of the courses focuses on Egyptian dialect and includes popular Egyptian songs (such as ‘Amr Diab, Muhammad Muneer, and Haifa Wahby) and viewings of various famous Egyptian movies (*Yacoubian Building*, and *Deer’s Blood*). The Levantine colloquial Arabic course is conducted in much the same way. Popular Arabic television shows (such as *Baab al-Haara*) and music from artists such as Fairouz are included in this course. Both dialect courses emphasize the speaking and listening skills of each dialect each day through various exercises. Interviews of students in both courses indicate that students desire more exposure and training in ‘*aammiyya* to gain a better understanding of the Middle East. However, given the linguistic realities of the language and the desires of the students the ‘*aammiyya* component at UT is still small and haphazard.

C. Room for Improvement

Students enrolling in foreign language courses believe mastering the necessary elements for everyday conversation is the basis of the SLA process; they expect to attain this minimum in the university (Angelescu 2006, p.117). As this statement illustrates, students enroll in Arabic courses with preconceived notions about what they expect to

gain in the courses. In addition to the amount of colloquial, another area in need of improvement at both ELS and UT is the variety of dialects available for the students to choose from. ELS does not offer a single dialect for the students to select for further study, while UT only offers two. With twenty-two Arabic-speaking countries around the world, the fact that only two dialects are taught is incredibly disheartening.

Understandably, the ELS and UT programs require increased funding to hire teachers trained in teaching different dialects than the two currently offered; this is the second area in need of improvement. Funding for *'aammiyya* programs must be increased to allow for ELS and UT to meet the global language demands of Arabic and the expectations of the students. The third area that is in need of improvement is increased leeway given to Arabic faculty to develop techniques and materials to deal with the linguistic reality of the language. Teachers at ELS have very little room for adaptation within the curriculum. This led one motivated teacher to devote his own time outside of the class for students wishing to learn and use more “real-world” Arabic than the curriculum allowed. The students who participated in this extracurricular activity have been able to reach higher levels of proficiency on average than those that did not participate.¹⁷

D. Conclusion

A site of controversy continues to be the divergence between the Arabic linguistic reality of an educated Arab and that which the average American student of the language experiences. For several years, there has been a standard of teaching Arabic, which

¹⁷ Information gathered attained through personal interviews with this ELS teacher and the students attending this speaking practice.

focused on the traditional skills of reading and writing of “high” Arabic and/or MSA.

There is a modern current in the field of Arabic education that aligns more closely to the linguistic reality that the students will experience in an Arabic speaking country or with Arab expatriates. Also, Arabic students at both ELS and UT desire to learn more

‘aammiyya in order to interact in everyday Arabic society. This demand for more realistic Arabic education requires more resources to be devoted to the design of colloquial texts.

All forms of the Arabic language must be embraced and celebrated by the teachers and students in order to promote a productive and effective process of Arabic education.

Currently, Arabic is being transformed by the proliferation of the Internet and the rise of blogs and chat rooms. These are the realities of Arabic in this new era and the demand for new research in this area with development of colloquial texts will be vital for advancing the field of Arabic education. The only question is if the field will keep pace with the advances in technology and the evolution of the Arabic language.

Chapter VI

Student-Language Relationship

What is missing?

Many studies have been conducted concerning the second language acquisition process. Research has investigated the importance of elements such as motivation (Rubin, 1975; Gardner, 1960, 1991; Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Dornyei, 1994) and aptitude (Carroll & Sapon, 1959; Petersen & Al-Haik, 1976; Pimsleur, 1966; Sparks et al., 1995, 1997, 1998, 2001). The influence of technology has also been analyzed (Ditters, 2006; Rosenthal, 2000; Stevens, 2006; Lam, 2000; Lee, 2007). Differences in the value of receptive and productive language skills have also been addressed (Lee and Hatesohl, 1993). In addition to this immense array of literature, much discussion has centered on the role of the teacher (al-Batal and Belnap, 2006) and the student teacher relationship or “STR” (McCargar 1993; Moskowitz 1976; Lee 1998). However, all these factors still do not add up to a guaranteed Superior-level student. I believe there is a crucial portion of foreign language learning that has been continually overlooked, unnoticed, and unnamed throughout all this relevant research. This missing constituent will fill a gap in the research on foreign language education and allow for a more productive understanding of the roles of the student as well as the teacher. In this section I will identify and name this missing element and assess the ways in which it may be applied to students, teachers, and the field of foreign language study as a whole.

A. What is the “Student-Language Relationship”?

When I love

I feel that I am the king of time

I possess the earth and everything on it

and ride into the sun upon my horse.

These words of the great Arab poet, Nizar Qabbani, illustrate that Arabic poetry, music, and literature venerate the aspect of love and its importance in life. Just as the great ballads of love illustrate, the importance of love is undeniably essential to life. I am arguing that the same formula of love found in these literary treasures is applicable and essential for foreign language students. By this I mean that there is an essential, and unnoticed aspect of foreign language learning that I will name “student-language relationship”. This relationship is inherent between any foreign language student and that language. In other words, the “student-language relationship” is simply the very personal bond that is formed between a foreign language student and the language itself. Every person studying a foreign language has a “student-language relationship”, though most are not cognizant of the significance or even the existence of this relationship. In this chapter, I will describe the five aspects of this relationship in further detail, which illustrate how the “student-language relationship” or *SLR* is similar to any other personal relationship.

- ***The more quality time spent together the better.***

Quality over quantity matters in any relationship and is indispensable in the “student-language relationship”. A student may spend over one thousand hours in an Arabic class and not be any better off than the student who spent half that amount. The difference is quality time spent with the beloved (Arabic). Time effectively spent in building a better “relationship” and becoming closer to the language will allow for a deeper love to blossom. In a soon to be published article, Al-Batal and Sypher argue that students in the Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) needed an average of 1,238 contact hours to achieve Superior proficiency in speaking in Arabic, as opposed to the premise of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), under which a student requires 2,200 contact hours to reach Superior proficiency. This example demonstrates that quality time of the student spent with the “beloved” language will produce better results than just a large quantity of contact time. Subsequently, there is a need for further research into the differences of the “contact hour” and the end product. The relational correlative is also illustrative. Two people in a relationship can spend three hours together, however whether the time was spent watching a movie together or in deep, personal conversations with each other alters the end results of the three “contact hours”. The same is valid for the “student-language relationship” in the quality of time spent together.

- ***Satisfaction and a sense of purpose in “relationship” are essential.***

A healthy relationship depends on the amount of satisfaction and purpose present. A Superior-level student from ELS described his satisfaction with the language as it relates to a treasure hunt. He stated that his love of Arabic led him on a continual search

for Arabic literature not available in English (his native language). When he was able to find texts that he couldn't read in translation the satisfaction he felt was drastically increased. This student poetically related this feeling to finding his wife in the airport after he returned from a long journey away from home. This example clearly shows that feelings similar to those of his marriage were present in his "student-language relationship".

Conversely, when a student suffers from a lack of satisfaction and a loss of purpose in the "student-language relationship", the possibility of a linguistic "break-up" or "divorce" is increased. Several students interviewed who had not reached the Superior level of proficiency stated that they did not feel a sense of fulfillment or satisfaction with Arabic after hundreds of classroom hours. Therefore, they did not feel the desire to continue studying the language. One Superior-level Arabic student from UT described how he had studied another foreign language for one year but had not developed a personal relationship with the language and never used that language again after the year of study. He did however find the relationship when he began studying Arabic, and he has continued to the Superior level. Continuing in a relationship without reward or satisfaction is difficult for anyone but especially with regards to foreign language students. Since most linguistic "break-ups" happen early in the relationship, enjoyment and a clear set of goals will help the student to overcome this obstacle.

- ***Periodic reassessment is vital for continual improvement of the “relationship” and to avoid stagnation.***

The tendency in any relationship is to become comfortable and stagnate at a certain level of engagement. For lovers, this usually happens when they become more like “roommates” than intimates. The same stagnation can occur in the “student-language relationship”. When the student becomes complacent with his or her ability, stagnation occurs and the “relationship” suffers. Six Superior-level students from ELS reported that each one of them had felt this stagnation set in after approximately 300-500 hours of classroom time. One of the six claimed that once she reached the point that she could “get by” in a conversation there was an urge to “slack off” in her studies. This was overcome by her assessment of her skills and her desire to reach higher levels of proficiency than which the curriculum required. She had “fallen in love” with the language and wanted to see what else Arabic could offer. This student perfectly illustrates the need for reassessment in the “student-language relationship”, and the importance of not being complacent with a mediocre relationship in order to reach Superior-level proficiency.

The student must also be aware of the negative effects of linguistic complacency and not periodically reassessing the relationship. This ensures the continual growth of the “student-language relationship” in addition to maintaining the elements of love and enjoyment. This is especially critical for the student after graduation, because then is when the student who is complacent with his or her “relationship” will most likely not continue to higher levels of proficiency. Three students who had graduated from ELS related this fact. Each had felt comfortable with their abilities and had no need or desire

to pursue the language. They demonstrated a poor “student-language relationship”.

Hence, none of them reached Superior proficiency.

- ***Hard work and patience are necessary to build a healthy “relationship”.***

A relationship does not make itself; it takes input and a patient heart to create a bond that is able to last indefinitely. In the same manner, the foreign language student must contribute countless hours with his or her “beloved” (that being the language). Just as in any relationship, patience is a virtue. A healthy and lifelong relationship will not come to fruition overnight, but rather through the ups and downs that are inevitable in any relationship.

A Superior-level student who had graduated from ELS described the ways in which his relationship with the language took patience and hard work. At the beginning of the program, ELS students are given Arabic nicknames to help them assume the role of native speaker. This specific student was given the name “Qasim” in the first week of his program. However, the problem for this student was that he could not pronounce the letter “*qaaf*”. One can imagine the disappointment of beginning to study Arabic and not be able to correctly pronounce one’s own name. Distraught, he went to the head teacher and relayed his feelings. The teacher calmed his worries and told him an Arabic proverb, *al-Sabr jamiil*, patience is beautiful, and to continue working to pronounce the letter. Following his teacher’s advice, he persisted in his studies and upon completion of the program, achieved Superior-level proficiency in reading and listening. Due to a healthy “student-language relationship”, he would continue to practice speaking and achieve Superior-level in speaking as well. In this example, hard work and patience are clearly

critical ingredients in a healthy “student-language relationship” and in achieving the Superior levels of proficiency in Arabic.

- *A strong “relationship” is able to withstand time apart.*

Undoubtedly, the foreign language student will not be able to remain in the language classroom forever. There comes a time when the student departs for one reason or another from the “beloved”. During these times, the strength of the “student-language relationship” (SLR) is tested. Does the student think about or desperately seek to reunite with his or her “beloved”? A strong SLR can withstand periods of absence just as a strong marriage can prevail over obstacles of separation. In these periods, it is essential that the student surround himself with his “beloved” as much as possible. Just as a deployed soldier carries pictures and recorded messages from his wife, the student must utilize the Internet, podcasts, and available texts to maintain the “relationship”.

One of the Superior-level students at UT described his “relationship” with Arabic and the ways in which he was able to maintain that bond through time away from the language classroom. He stated that due to his career there were several intermittent long periods of time when he would not use Arabic at all in a professional manner. During these times he would seek out Arabic newspapers and music at every opportunity. This would give him the ability to at least maintain the relationship he had with the language. Due to this strong “student-language relationship” he continually pursued every available possibility to study Arabic in a classroom setting. This student’s experience highlights the fact that the “student-language relationship” is crucial for the individual to be not just a

former student of the language but a lifelong partner. This is essence of the fifth truth of the “student-language relationship”

B. *Implications*

Now that I have illustrated the existence of the “student-language relationship”, I will now discuss how the relationship affects the SLA process with implications for the student, teacher, and the field of second language acquisition.

1. *For Students*

The “student-language relationship” is a vital element in the achievement of Superior-level fluency and higher, and allowing the student a rewarding and fulfilling journey with his or her “beloved”. The “student-language relationship” is initially formed in the first class in which the language is studied. This is the point when the student should be made aware of this “student-language relationship”. By acknowledging that there is a deep relationship to be formed, the student will be much more cognizant of his or her contributions to the relationship.

From interviews with students from UT and ELS, I have learned that there is a definite connection between healthy “student-language relationships”, higher proficiency levels, and continuation of Arabic study. Over 90% of Superior-level UT and ELS students interviewed have stated that a main reason for continuing Arabic study is because of a love for the language and a desire to achieve higher fluency. The same feelings are found when speaking to current and former students of ELS. The students who possess stronger and deeper “student-language relationships” are also the students

who achieve the higher levels in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. They are also the students who will most often continue studying the language on their own after graduation from formal language classes because these are the students who enjoy immersing themselves in the ocean that is the Arabic language. A high-level Arabic-speaking official in the U.S. State Department even went as far as to say the most important factor in achieving the highest levels of proficiency is a deep intellectual and emotional commitment to Arabic.

The opposite is also true with students who do not have deep “student-language relationships”. ELS students who do not have a connection with Arabic, whether through an effective teacher or through a personal affinity for the language or culture, achieve less on proficiency exams and most often, do not continue studying Arabic after graduation. I interviewed several current and former ELS students and found that they did not have a definite “student-language relationship”; they studied Arabic enough to be competent at their jobs and that was the extent of their motivation with the language. None of these students were aware of the existence of the “student-language relationship”, or the important role that each student played in the building of such a relationship.

In addition to the achievement of higher fluency, the “student-language relationship” is part and parcel of the motivational factor for the student and as I have already shown will allow for a rewarding and encouraging foreign language journey for the student. The students who maintained and/or even improved in proficiency levels are the ones who have a healthy relationship with Arabic and have fallen in love with all the language has to offer. Also, the SLR is invaluable for students learning Arabic as a

foreign language. For instance, due to the limited availability of native Arabic speakers in most areas of the United States, the students with stronger “student-language relationships” are more likely to seek out opportunities to study and use the language. Conversely, students without healthy “student-language relationships” are more likely to discontinue studying Arabic as a personal choice and less likely to maintain levels of proficiency outside of the classroom. The importance of understanding the SLR and being able to nurture the growth of the SLR becomes a responsibility of the teacher as well.

2. For Teachers

First and foremost, teachers must realize that they are students as well and have a need to focus on their own “student-language relationship”. The demands of professorship are intense and require many hours spent in writing, research, and grading. However, as students themselves, teachers must set aside to spend with their “beloved” in order to reach deeper levels of linguistic intimacy and be able to lead their students on the path as well. When the teacher has a healthy “student-language relationship” then the students will be able to witness what a loving relationship is supposed to look like. Moreover, parents in bad marriages exemplify bad relationships and corrupt the children’s images of what to expect when they become involved in their own relationships. The same is true for teachers in unhealthy “student-language relationships”. Students take note of the examples of their “linguistic parents” and can have ideas concerning the language distorted. This reality must be acknowledged by teachers in order to avoid being a detriment to their students’ own “relationship” with the language.

The important role that teachers play in the genesis and development of the SLR cannot be overestimated. Upon a teacher's acknowledgement of the SLR, the teacher's responsibility shifts from one solely of instruction to that of facilitating a healthy and strong "student-language relationship" for each student. Each teacher must be absolutely aware of this important responsibility he or she and be willing to encourage the full development of this "student-language relationship". Teachers must be aware of the needs and goals of their students; every student will not wish to become an Arabic professor but others may study Arabic with the goal of emigrating to a Middle Eastern country. Well-trained teachers who understand their students and their needs are vital to the success of each student in achieving his or her goals in Arabic (Belnap, 2006, p. 177). As Doughty observes, "instruction is potentially effective, providing it is relevant to learners' needs" (2003, p. 256). Teachers must legitimately care about their students and be able to flex and adapt their styles and methods to suit the learners' needs in order for the instruction to be relevant. Teachers who are able to do this will help build a "student-language relationship" as well as inspire their students to fulfill their linguistic potential and possibly become agents of change in a world in desperate need of change (Brown, 2001).

3. *For the Field of Second Language Acquisition*

With the realization of the existence of the "student-language relationship", the field of Second Language Acquisition must adapt and focus efforts on teacher training, curriculum development, and further research into this newly identified element. The ability of each student, whether listening to or being the instructor, to actively participate

in their own love affair with the language will strengthen the field, while at the same time inspiring others to embark on their own journey of amour and adventure with the “lover language”. For too many years the focus has been on the scientific aspects of the process and now the field must return to what is at the heart of matter, the relationship that the students has with the “beloved language”, then the picture will finally come into focus. Second Language Acquisition must now turn to investigation of the characteristics and results of the newly identified “student-language relationship”. Studies are needed to explore the possibilities that this relationship may have in the field of Arabic as it relates to producing higher-level students of the language. Further investigations are needed to analyze the implications of the “student-language relationship” with regards for other foreign languages as well.

Conclusion

This study has examined two elite Arabic programs in the United States in an attempt to understand the most effective methods to assist students in reaching Superior proficiency. In addition, this study has discussed a variety of ways in which the programs need to improve, given that both programs are in a period of change and redesign.

The Arabic program at the University of Texas at Austin effectively stimulates the integrative motivation of the students by incorporating more colloquial Arabic into the curriculum and encouraging the mastery of both colloquial as well as *fuSHa*. In addition, the program encourages the teachers to discuss and share successful teaching strategies and philosophies with one another. This leads to an overall improvement of shared teaching skills for the benefit of the students. Also, there is an environment of academic freedom in the Arabic classroom that allows the students and teachers to discuss and debate the issues relevant to native speakers, such as political corruption and criticism, cultural assimilation, and religion. Moreover, the UT Arabic program encourages continual study and engagement with the language and the culture as well as participation in study abroad programs to the Middle East.

The Arabic program at UT needs to include the use and experimentation with more new technologies such as blogs, vlogs, and language-related social networking sites to encourage the students to take the SLA process into their own hands. To achieve this, the UT administration must provide better technology training as well as the time necessary to accomplish the training. The program must include a better variety of

colloquial Arabic for the students to study. While Egyptian and Levantine are important, they are not the only Arabic dialects spoken around the world. Another way in which the program might help students achieve higher levels of Arabic proficiency is to require that students first complete the non-Arabic credits necessary for graduation and then enroll in Arabic full-time. This would remove the strain on the students' mental energy that currently is divided among Arabic and several different courses each semester. By removing the academic distractions posed by a diverse schedule of non-related courses, a student might have a better chance of harnessing all of his or her mental capacity in order to achieve the higher levels of Arabic proficiency.

The Arabic program at ELS has several strengths, which have allowed many students to achieve Superior proficiency. The main strength of the program is that students do not have to focus on any other academic requirements other than learning the language to their fullest potential. Every day for approximately 64 weeks, the student in the classroom will focus on Arabic. ELS also has a more structured method of measuring the aptitude of the students enrolled in the Arabic program than does UT. The Arabic program also furnishes every student with the dictionaries, texts, and technologies needed to complete the course; no expense is left for the student to pay out-of-pocket. Another strength of the Arabic program is the inclusion of the immersions throughout the length of the course. For several Superior-level students this was viewed as critical in establishing comfort and confidence with the language by removing the "translation block" posed by having to continually mentally translate from Arabic to English and back to Arabic.

However, the ELS Arabic program has several areas in need of improvement. First, ELS must include more colloquial exposure and training for the students in order to avoid having Superior-level students who can't converse with a native child or understand an Arabic song. As Heath claims,

Teaching students only MSA severely hampers their ability to communicate in the language they have striven so hard to learn. Given that Arabs will understand what students are saying, the students themselves will not understand anything said to them outside the limited MSA linguistic register they have mastered (1990, p. 43)

ELS also needs improved teacher coordination and cooperation concerning successful and unsuccessful teaching strategies. Also, the Arabic teachers must have training in pedagogy, linguistics, or be experienced in teaching Arabic as a foreign language. This would help strengthen the mutual understanding among the teaching staff of ELS. In addition, there must be drastically increased communication between the three ELS Arabic schools. Each school has the mission of training highly qualified linguists and would be better served with open avenues of information exchange. ELS also needs to recruit more non-native professors with high levels of proficiency to teach Arabic. This would allow the students to better relate with the instructor, and for the instructor to more deeply connect with the students based on the instructor's own experience of learning the language as a foreigner. Classroom alternation of each class would also serve to break up the monotony of studying in one classroom for over a year of intense language study. One basic change would be to have the three schools serve one semester. For instance, Arabic school I would be for semester one while school II would be for semester II. A

change such as this would benefit the mental state of the students and might help lead to higher motivation and decreased boredom.

Both ELS and UT serve the purpose of teaching Arabic to mostly non-native students in the United States. These institutions have several strengths as well as areas that are in need of improvement. In addition, both of these programs are in a transitional period and are seeking to improve the efficacy of each program. The deficiency of both of these institutions is the lack of mutual cooperation and coordination. Interviews from UT and ELS show that both institutions desire to find a solution to this conundrum and hopefully this study will serve to encourage the future interschool communication for the betterment of the students and increased numbers of Superior-level students from both institutions.

The key to increasing the number of these Superior-level students has been the objective of much previous research and relevant literature. These works have opened many doors of the second language acquisition “house”, but there was still the need to turn the lights on. The “student-language relationship” serves as the light switch. This missing constituent fills the gap in the vast amount of research on foreign language education and allows for a more productive understanding of the roles of the student as well as the teacher. I have identified and named this missing element and assessed the ways in which students, teachers, and the field of foreign language study as a whole may apply it. One must never forget that on the basic level, every individual is a student, professors included. Therefore, every foreign language student has a “relationship” with the language whether they realize this or not. By understanding the aspects and

implications of the “student-language relationship” each foreign language student and teacher will benefit immensely, as will the field as a whole. Now that the “light switch” has been turned on, there can be no longer be any excuses for closed eyes.

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