

*Critical Language Awareness in Arabic Language Teaching: Five Modules for Professional Development* © 2024 by Saurav Goswami, Esha Mukherjee, Rima Elabdali, Hina Ashraf, & Lourdes Ortega, at Georgetown University's Initiative for Multilingual Studies with funding from Qatar Foundation International, is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International](#).

*Note on how to use this module:* We have designed this teacher development module for an audience of teachers of Arabic working with k-12 students (any context, any level). The module can be completed in 1.5 hours. You will find 5 modules like this one. Each can be used alone. If you want to use them all, we have numbered them 1 through 5 to suggest a beneficial sequence. We'd love your feedback! Just email us at [lourdes.ortega@georgetown.edu](mailto:lourdes.ortega@georgetown.edu).

## Module 4

### Language Ideologies

Goal: Teachers will reflect on and discuss circulating beliefs about what counts as a “good” or “bad” dialect of Arabic and how such hierarchies may shape the Arabic language classroom.

#### Introduction for Workshop Leader

The spoken varieties of Arabic are each unique, and can be vastly different from one another. For example, speakers from Morocco and Syria may not understand each other when speaking in *Darija* and *Shaami*, respectively. Or, a speaker from rural Palestine may speak differently than someone from Nablus or Ramallah. The way teachers of Arabic think about these different regional varieties or dialects can impact their teaching in the classroom. Some teachers might choose to teach *Shaami*, because they think it is closest to MSA or easier to learn. Others might choose to teach *Masri*, because of the prevalence of Egyptian media. Others may choose not to teach certain regional varieties, because they believe it is not as widespread, or contains too much influence from other languages like French. Some teachers may choose to teach a regional variety they are comfortable with, whether they speak it at home or learned it themselves in a classroom or through study abroad. In this module, teachers will explore different attitudes about spoken Arabic dialects, and think about how they may impact their teaching.

Please note that the module ends with an *Exit Ticket*, which is a reflective activity that teachers will individually fill out and submit to the workshop leader. The exit ticket should be handed out to participants as the last workshop activity.

## For Participants

### Warm-up in Small Groups

Take a look at the statements given here and tick the column that best expresses how much you agree or disagree with each:

	Disagree	Partly disagree	Neutral	Partly agree	Agree
1. Teachers should only teach MSA, because it is the standard variety.					
2. Teachers should only teach dialects they are familiar with.					
3. Teachers should teach dialects based on students' needs.					
4. Levantine Arabic is easier than other dialects to learn because it is the closest to MSA.					
5. Egyptian Arabic is easy to learn and understand.					
6. Gulf Arabic is not valuable to learn, because most people in the Gulf speak English.					
7. North African Arabic is too difficult to learn.					
8. We should teach North African dialects more because they are marginalized in the U.S.					

## Part 1: Read and Reflect

Read the three poems below about the experiences of teachers and students. After you read them, write down your thoughts in response to the discussion questions.

### Time to learn Al-Arabiyy

By: Saurav Goswami

'It is a truth universally acknowledged that—'  
The most bang for your buck is in *Shaami*.  
But there's the other well-known fact that  
*Al-Masriyy* lets you branch out like a tree.

What's the easiest to learn then?  
You hear more of it, so it must be *Al-Masriyy*?  
You travel more to the Levant, so is it *Shaami*?  
It's time to make up your mind, time to learn *Arabiyy*!

Wherever you look, you'll see Egypt:  
Surf the net, or turn on your TV,  
Brush up on al-masriyy and you're all set  
Turn up the music, put on a movie.

Pack your bags for the Levant, where all the beauty is  
Where the sounds are sweet like milk and honey.  
Listen to Fairuz, read Mahmoud Darweesh  
And remember to slide in your *Shaami*.

Why learn the Arabic of the Gulf?  
They all speak English in Qatar and the UAE.  
The Arabic of the Maghreb is difficult you're told  
Too French, too African, too Amazighi.

So which should it be, which shouldn't it be?  
You sigh, you click your tongue, you groan in agony  
Everyone says theirs is الحقيقي العربي  
It's time to make up your mind, time to learn *Arabiyy*!

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## A Learner's Conundrum

By: Esha Mukherjee

After years of Arabic, I thought I knew  
I mastered MSA, my skills ready to display  
But “*Ureedu qahwa*” is hardly the way  
So to Morocco I went, to learn *Darija* anew

Several months later, I found my voice  
Chattering to anyone, anywhere I went  
And everything they said, I knew what it meant  
With my new abilities, I'm glad I made this choice

In Jordan for vacation, I hail a taxi ride  
Confident with the Arabic I'd learned to speak  
But the driver frowns, and my voice becomes weak  
“English, please” he says, as doubt grows inside

I try once again, but the words go astray  
He laughs at me this time, dealing another blow  
“What is wrong?” I ask, my confidence sunk low  
Still chucking he says, “No one understands *Maghribiye*”

“Then why have I learned Arabic?” I think with despair  
Classroom, Morocco, Jordan, I did what I could  
Yet despite my investment, I'm still misunderstood  
Contending with these varieties, it's hardly fair

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## My Arabic

By: Rima Elabdali

تقول كيفاش

I do not speak Arabic?

تقول وعلاش

my words are barbaric?

Algerian, Libyan, Tunisian, Moroccan

I hear you say

They are difficult, different, distant.

I hear you say

They are not even Arabic.

So I wonder

Who gets to say

Which Arabic is pure?

Who gets to be the language police?

Who gets to be the language قاضي

Imprisoned for speaking هاي شو هاي شو

Straying away from the Classic: جريمتي

Speak but on parole: عقابي

Use Levantine or Egyptian Arabic.

So I yield

I search for your words and bury my own.

I adopt your sounds and crush my own.

I lose my thoughts to chase your tongue.

I find myself الهامش على

في ظل عربية مستعارة

My voice fades but yearns to say

انا مهوش

This is not my Arabic.

So I dream.  
Of a day when I can speak my Arabic  
Unchained, undaunted, unapologetic  
I dream and dream until one day  
You might listen and let me be  
My heritage, my identity

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### **Discussion Questions:**

After reading the poems, write down your answers or thoughts for the following questions. Refer back to the poems and underline relevant lines.

1. What does the first author think about *Shaami*? What about *Al-Masriy*, Gulf Arabic, and North African Arabic?
2. Why did the second author struggle to communicate when arriving in Jordan? What was the taxi driver's reaction, and how did it make the author feel?
3. How does the third author feel when communicating in Levantine Arabic? Why does she feel that way?
4. Is it really "a truth universally acknowledged" that you get the most advantage by learning Shaami?
5. Do the authors express different attitudes about North African Arabic? If so, what are they? In your opinion, which authors would agree or disagree with each other.

### **Part 2: In small groups**

1. What are the opinions the authors express about certain varieties when they say the following:
  - "They are not even Arabic"
  - "The Arabic of the Maghreb is difficult"
2. What do you think the third author would tell the narrator of the first poem about which Arabic is valuable to learn?

### **Part 3: Whole group discussion**

1. Revisit your answers for the statements you read at the beginning of this activity. Would you change any of your answers? Why or why not?

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**Exit ticket**

1. What have you learned about different dialects of Arabic and the attitudes toward them?
  2. What is one change you can make in your classroom, based on what you thought about today?
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