

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.

Module 1

How do teachers explain Arabic as one language with many varieties to students?

Goal: Teachers will discuss and reflect on different ways to explain Arabic as one language with many varieties to their students.

Introduction for Workshop Leader

Arabic is a diglossic language; its standardized and regional varieties are markedly different from each other, and are often used in separate domains or for different purposes. *FusHa*, or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is often used on television and in public domains like politics, the news, and education, while the regional varieties, or *'Ammiyyas*, are used in other domains like day-to-day interactions and informal spaces. As teachers of Arabic, it can be tricky to explain and acknowledge this situation in the classroom. Oftentimes, students coming from an Arab background may bring prior knowledge to the classroom. Other times, students who are entirely new to Arabic may be completely unaware and unfamiliar with this type of linguistic reality. The multitude of *'Ammiyyas* further nuances Arabic's diglossic situation, since they are not only different from *FusHa*, but also from each other. Although students may have different goals in learning Arabic, or schools may have an MSA-centered approach, it can be helpful to explain Arabic's diglossic situation to students to equip them with knowledge of Arabic's linguistic realities.

We have presented a few ways in which the workshop leader can facilitate this module. Teachers can read one or two anecdotes alone, before sharing with a partner who read different anecdotes. Or, teachers can read anecdotes in pairs, before sharing with a larger group. Currently, this module is

designed for individual, pair, and group work, but can be modified according to the needs of the workshop.

This module has anecdotes from 4 different teachers of Arabic. Consider the big picture and how you can help teachers arrive at three principles by the end of the Module:

- Introducing Arabic varieties (Teachers 1, 2, &3) vs. not introducing (Teacher 4) them to introductory Arabic students
 - How important is it to introduce varieties to introductory Arabic students?
- Doing it explicitly (Teacher 1) vs. implicitly (Teachers 2 & 3)
 - Which do you think is more effective, explicit or implicit instruction?
- The power of analogies, that is, making comparisons to the familiar (Teachers 3 & 4)
 - What kinds of comparisons can you make to familiarize students with the concept of Arabic variation?

The workshop leader can choose from various options for facilitating this module: splitting the cohort into groups, introducing pair work, etc.

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

How do you explain Arabic as one language with many varieties to your students? Taking turns, discuss your experiences and strategies with the group.

Part 1: Read and reflect

In the scenarios below, you will read about the experiences of real teachers of Arabic, and how they explain Arabic varieties to their students in their classrooms. Choose 2 teachers to read. As you read each scenario, think about the following questions:

- How does each teacher explain varieties to their students? Underline the relevant parts in the text.
- What types of analogies, tools, materials, or strategies are they using to explain Arabic varieties? Circle the relevant parts in the text.

Teacher 1: Hannah

Hannah is a teacher in a public school in New England. She teaches 7th and 8th grade students. While most of the students are learning Arabic for the first time, she also has a few students who have knowledge of some regional varieties because they are spoken in their family. Hannah herself started learning Arabic in her college years. In her classroom, she teaches both *Shaami* and *FusHa*. This is how she introduces the idea that Arabic is one language with many varieties to her students in their Arabic language-learning journey:

“When it comes to introducing Arabic varieties, I think it's important to be intentional about it. Because when you're working with kids who have been exposed to Arabic, and then tell them that there are 8 different ways to say a word, that can be overwhelming. But I think it's also really important to understand. Because that's how Arabic works. So I teach *Shaami* alongside *FusHa*, because I think it's important for them to speak the language that people speak. And very few people walk around speaking pure modern standard Arabic. In the beginning, I tell them: “Okay, I will be speaking in *Shaami*, and that it's going to be a little different, but don't worry, it's not something you can't handle.” If we address it right away, if I give them a cheat sheet that says this word in *FusHa* means this word in *Shaami*, they can get used to it. When I teach question words or basic vocabulary, I give it to them in both varieties. I make sure to tell my students which words are *Shaami* and which words are *FusHa*. And so I teach a combination of the two with the understanding that my more comfortable language is *FusHa*. But that it is also important to become comfortable with different ways of speaking Arabic as well. In the end, the thing that guides most of my teaching is: How can I make this authentic? How can I bring the real world into the classroom?”

Teacher 2: Sami

Sami is a public school teacher. He teaches middle-school and high-school students. Mostly, he teaches students who are learning Arabic for the first time, but sometimes he will also teach a few students with knowledge of a regional variety. Sami is originally from Lebanon, and he speaks *Shaami* as his native regional variety. Although his school has an MSA-only policy, Sami still teaches *Shaami* here and there. This is how he introduces the idea that Arabic is one language with many varieties to his students in their Arabic language-learning journey:

“I want to teach a dialect. I think it's important to teach a dialect from the beginning because you're not acknowledging the presence of the other form early on, and the shock is bigger later. I explain Arabic varieties in terms students will understand. I make comparisons between *FusHa*

and Shakespearean English, or I compare the dialects to the different dialects in US cities. In class, I speak to them in my native *Shaami* dialect, but I am not telling them that I am speaking specifically in *Shaami*. In the end, what's more important for me is the culture. So we want students to love the culture. We say, 'Always lead with culture, language will follow.' If the student doesn't love the culture, they don't love the language, and they will not continue with Arabic. So, I try to introduce dialects, like *Shaami* and other dialects, through cultural materials. I try to create that excitement. In my classroom, there are camel teddy bears. There is a tea set, very cultural. There is a library of books as well as drums, there is art from the Middle East. I tried to make it as culturally immersive as possible, so when the students enter, it's as if they have traveled somewhere else. That sense of familiarity with a regular classroom is disrupted. And now they have traveled somewhere else, and we make tea. I also love introducing dialects through music. Many times when I bring something that's dialect-related, it is through music, whether it's teaching colors, through a song that talks about girls with different hair colors, Middle Eastern songs, Syrian songs, Lebanese songs. Through the culture, I believe students learn the language, including the dialects.”

Teacher 3: Heba

Heba teaches at a middle school that has an MSA-only policy. Her classrooms are very diverse, including many students with prior knowledge of a regional variety and students who are learning Arabic for the first time. Heba believes that knowledge of *FusHa* is important for a foundation and for reading and writing in Arabic. This is why she mostly teaches *FusHa*. But she also welcomes dialects in the classroom to enrich discussions; and to compare and contrast them with *FusHa*. This is how Heba introduces the idea that Arabic is one language with many varieties to her students in their Arabic language-learning journey::

“Well, in the classroom we're supposed to teach the standard, *Al-FusHa*. However, because I have students from different backgrounds and from different parts of the Arab world, I try to implement a little bit of Egyptian, a little bit Khaleeji, the Gulf area, a little bit of *Shaami*, etc. I will admit I'm not great at the Moroccan dialect. But I always ask my students to teach me their dialect. It is just about this connection, and to connect socially with my students. But, however, during teaching content, it's always the modern standard Arabic. I do believe [letting children speak to one another in dialects] enriches their thinking skills. So when one student answers in dialect, or comes up with an example in dialect, I do not discourage that, and I do not reprimand it. We use that to enrich the discussion and to capture the meaning, and to do comparison and contrast. However, I have to have equitable instruction. I also have students who do not come from Arabic speaking backgrounds. So being aware of the class backgrounds is important.”

Teacher 4: Travis

Travis originally started learning Arabic in college. He teaches at a middle school that has a strict MSA-only policy. His class has a mix of students with some prior knowledge of Arabic, and those learning it for the first time. He teaches 99% *FusHa* in the classroom, and does not teach dialects. This is how Travis thinks about *FusHa* and dialects in his Arabic classroom:

"There are many reasons I teach only *FusHa*: *First*, because it is fairer. No one's Arabic dialect is the formal dialect. Everybody has access to at least one dialect which will not be somebody else's own dialect. But *FusHa* is nobody's native dialect. That's why, in some ways, I think it is fairer, it is more democratic to learn *FusHa* than to learn dialects, because it belongs to everybody. *Second*, learning *FusHa* lets students connect with Arab culture through reading. *FusHa* unites the Arab world, and makes it easier to approach it. *Third*, no matter where they are, students will be able to communicate anywhere in the Arab world with knowledge of *FusHa*. *Fourth*, I think all the dialects are derived from the authentic one, *FusHa*. So I think the best way to teach Arabic is to teach the authentic one, and then it's easy for people to learn the different dialects because they have the core. Finally, every single kind of Arabic has variety. People are from different countries and different cultures. Even though the Quran is the perfect language, there are ten ways to read it. I think this is ultimately where the dialects come from."

Part 2: Share and Compare in Pairs

Now that you have heard from these teachers about introducing Arabic varieties to their classrooms, think about what strategies might be successful in your classroom. Take 10 minutes to discuss the following questions with a partner. Remember to think of them specifically in relation to *your own* teaching context:

1. What do you think of the different strategies of these four teachers?
2. Do you see any of these teachers' strategies working successfully in your classroom? Why or why not?

Part 3: Share in Whole-Group Discussion

As a cohort, work with your colleagues to discuss the following questions:

- How important is it to introduce varieties to introductory Arabic students?
- Which of the teachers' approaches do you prefer and why?
- What can you take away from their experiences for your own classroom?
- Would you introduce students not just to Arabic varieties, but to the multiplicity of Arabic varieties?

Exit ticket

Fill out your thoughts about the main topic of this module — introducing Arabic varieties in your classroom.

1. Will I introduce Arabic varieties? Y N
2. What are three strategies I can use?
3. In the future, I will _____

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