

Questioning the “Heritage Speaker:” Arabic, Multiglossia, and Language Ideology

Sonia Shiri (shiri@berkeley.edu)

Near Eastern Studies, UC Berkeley

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Definition

“The term "heritage speaker" is used to refer to a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language.” Valdés, G. (2000).

Arabic Heritage Speakers

Approximately one in every four or five students in our Arabic classrooms are categorized as “heritage:”

- Students of Arab descent (Christian and Muslim)
- Students who are non-Arab but are Muslim (from outside the Arab world)

“Arabic” “Heritage” “Speaker”?

Definition problematic for Arabic:

1. Complex linguistic situation: diglossia (“dialects” vs. MSA), multiglossia
2. Extended history of literacy and cultural influence over large and ethnically diverse, geographical expanse (Morocco to China)
3. Various ways in which “heritage” students come to learn Arabic/Variation in areas of proficiency

Demographics of Arab and Muslim Worlds

- Arab World constitutes over 250 Million of the world population
- Muslims over 1 billion, 200 Million in China

U.S. Demographics – Arabs

Love California

U.S. Census Bureau 2000

- 3.5 million Arab Americans today (Zogby International Polling and Marketing Firm research), Lebanese greatest number
- California: highest number of Arab Americans in the country: 715,000, 62% in the Los Angeles and San Diego areas
- More new immigrants choose California

Demographics – Muslims in the U.S.

- 3 million Muslims in the U.S.
- From Arab and non-Arab countries
- Largely non-Arab US Muslims, e.g., Pakistanis and Iranians

Muslim Immigration to US

- Muslim migration started with the African Muslim slaves in the early 16th century
- Followed by a second wave at the turn of the twentieth century
- Later mini-waves throughout the century

Arab Immigration to US

- Arab migration to the U.S. started around 1880
- Continued throughout the 20th century
- Mainly economic and political reasons
- Greatly slowed down after 9/11

Arab Americans and Religion

U.S. Census Bureau 2000

- The majority of Arab Americans are Christian: 77% (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant)
- 23% Arab-Americans are Muslim (Sunni, Shia and Druze)

Arab Americans are Highly Educated

U.S. Census Bureau 2000

- Arab Americans with B.A. 40%
- Arab Americans with post-graduate degrees 17%
- General American population 24%
- General American population 9%

Arabic in the U.S.

U.S. Census Bureau 2000

- Language retention: 50% of U.S. born Arab Americans bilingual
- Arabic ranked 7th among all foreign languages spoken by American school-aged children

Arabic in U.S. Universities

- Arabic enrollments steadily increasing
- Sharp increase in demand after 9/11

Table 1a**Fall 1998 and 2002 Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Institutions of Higher Education****(Languages in Descending Order of 2002 Totals)**

Language	1998	2002	% Change
Spanish	656,590	746,602	13.7
French	199,064	202,014	1.5
German	89,020	100,112	12.5
Italian	49,287	63,866	29.6
American Sign Language	11,420	60,849	432.8
Japanese	43,141	52,238	21.1
Chinese	28,456	34,153	20.0
Latin	26,145	29,835	14.1
Russian	23,791	23,916	0.5
Ancient Greek	16,402	20,858	27.2
Biblical Hebrew	9,099	14,469	59.0
Arabic	5,505	10,596	92.5
Modern Hebrew	6,734	8,619	28.0
Portuguese	6,926	8,385	21.1
Korean	4,479	5,211	16.3
Other languages	17,771	25,717	44.7
Total	1,193,830	1,407,440	17.9

NMELRC Survey

- 8 American universities
- Several from the UC system
- 13% of students cite ethnic heritage as a motivating factor for enrolling in Arabic

Ethnic Heritage as Motivating Factor

National Middle East Language Resource Center Survey

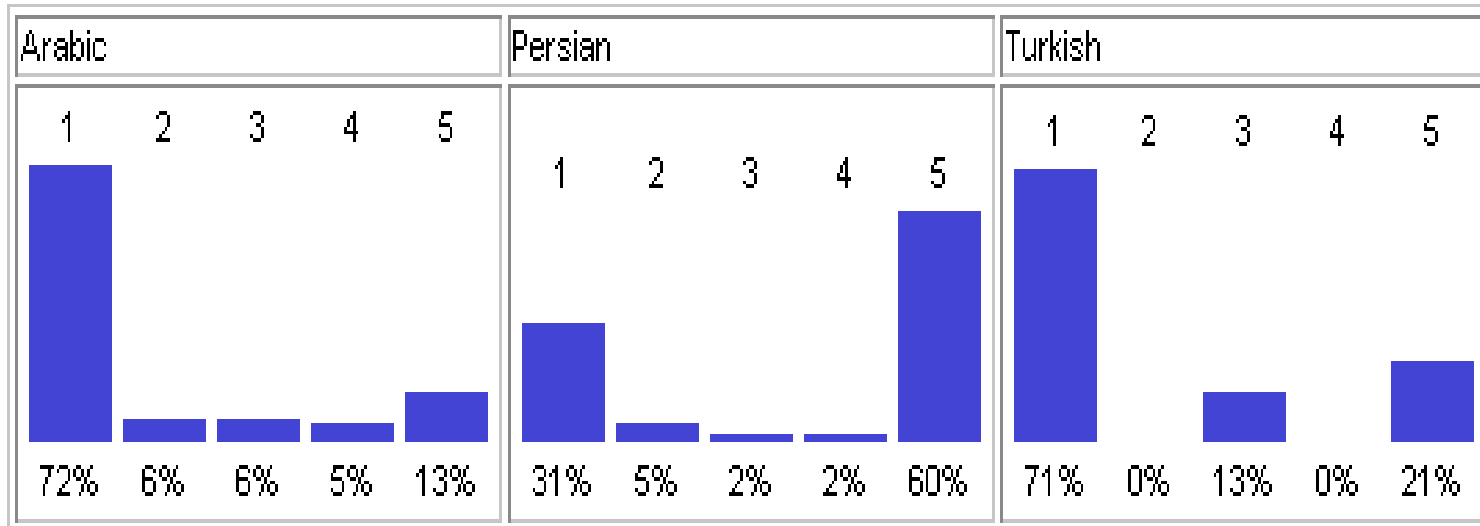
(<http://nmelrc.byu.edu>)

	N	Mean	StDev	CI Low	CI High	1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Arabic :	326	1.81	1.38	-0.95	4.58	<---+-----
Persian :	42	3.23	1.92	-0.61	7.06	<-----+----->
Turkish :	24	2.11	1.66	-1.21	5.44	<---+----->

Arabic : Arabic is important to me because it is part of my ethnic heritage.

Turkish : Turkish is important to me because it is part of my ethnic heritage.

Persian : Persian is important to me because it is part of my ethnic heritage.



UC Berkeley Survey 2003

Questionnaire to students enrolled in first and second year Arabic

Over 30% students who responded are taking Arabic because of:

- Arab ancestry/Arab world connection
- Non-Arab Muslims (Pakistan, India, Iran)

Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Complexities

- Arabic is spoken in 22 “Arab” countries
- Arabic spoken by “Arabs” and other bilingual ethnic groups in the Arab world (Armenians, Nubians, Berbers, etc.)
- Also spoken in communities outside the “Arab World:” Chad, Eritrea, Tajikistan, Nigeria, etc.

Arabic and Diglossia/Multiglossia

- Arabic is a diglossic language: Contains two grammatically and functionally distinct forms of the language – HIGH or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and LOW or “dialects”
- Arabic speakers typically competent in multiple dialects - and MSA as well as “Educated Spoken Arabic,” if educated

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)

- No one's mother tongue
- Learned in school
- Almost all written texts are in MSA
- Spoken in the media and political speeches
- Used by the educated in writing and some formal speaking (60% average literacy rate)
- Inappropriate for conducting spoken daily business

Standard Arabic: Sacred Language of Science

- Sacred language of Quran – God's word
- Arabic cultural legacy: texts on science, mathematics, philosophy, history, geography, sociology, medicine, literature, architecture, astronomy, etc.
- Medieval Arabic equivalent to English today

Language Ideology: Standard Arabic is the Glue of Arab Identity

- Arabic a link to a glorious, bygone past
- Unifying force in times of fragmentation, colonialism, post-colonialism, neo-colonialism and bottomless decline
- Symbol of Arab National identity
- Arab pedagogical perspective: Standard Arabic is the only form of Arabic worth teaching to foreigners

Spoken Arabics: The “Dialects”

- Spoken **almost never** written
- For conducting all daily business, songs, proverbs, jokes, TV and radio shows
- Formal and informal registers of its own
- 4/5 major regional groups and infinite subdivisions even within single country
- Each dialect has its own “Standard,” prestige varieties (e.g., Tunis dialect in Tunisia)

Language Ideology: One Language with Corrupt and Inferior Dialects

Fact:

Dialects can be mutually incomprehensible (Moroccan and Iraqi similar to French and Portuguese)

Ideology:

- Arabs speak ONE Arabic with “slight differences”
- Dialects are corrupt forms of the Standard
- Dialects have no grammar
- Most dialects claim to be the “closest” to MSA

Classical/Standard Arabic Sacred for Muslims Around the World

- Standard Arabic is necessary to observe Islamic prayers: e.g., recitation of memorized Quranic verses
- Many non-Arab Muslims learn how to read Arabic in religious schools and some government schools
- Muslims feel need to know Standard Arabic to understand Islam correctly

U.S. “Arabic” “Heritage” “Speakers”

Focus here is NOT on heritage language seekers but students with some proficiency in Arabic

Two categories with two different profiles in the U.S. emerge:

1. Students with ties to **Arab World**
2. Students from **Non-Arab, Muslim** backgrounds

Complex profiles of Students with Ties to Arab World

Students

- May consider themselves Arab
- May also be of another ethnicity living in the “Arab world” such as Armenians, Berbers, Kurds (bilingually heritage)
- May have resided temporarily in an Arab country – e.g., originally from Pakistan, or Eritrea living in Saudi (adoptive heritage?)

Berkeley Survey: Why they enroll in Arabic in college?

- To maintain/improve their Arabic
- To speak with relatives
- To travel/work in the Arab world
- To learn how to read and write
- To read literature, newspapers
- To understand news and songs

Which Arabic Do Our Students Bring to the Classroom?

- Speak or understand one or more dialects of Arabic
- May be able to identify and/or code-switch in different Arabic accents and dialects
- Varying levels of proficiency:
 - comprehension only
 - frequent Arabic-English code-mixing
 - linguistic and cultural fluency in different Arabic-speaking social contexts

Our Students Are Illiterate?

- Have little or no knowledge of written/standard Arabic, i.e., limited or no literacy skills
- Partially comparable to illiterate Arabic speakers from the Arab World – the latter will rank higher in terms of literacy

Sociolinguistic Proficiency

Often these students

- Internalize community's overwhelmingly disparaging attitudes towards dialects: inferior, ungrammatical
- Aware of the myths regarding the difficulty of learning Standard Arabic: e.g., complex grammar
- May be aware that the dialect/s they speak are stigmatized/prestigious dialects of Arabic

What Do We Know about their Linguistic/Cultural Proficiency?

- Little research on how well these students know the dialect/s they speak or understand
- In classroom, student dialect proficiency is often disregarded, suppressed and dismissed in favor of MSA

ARE Muslim Students Heritage Students of Arabic?

1. A substantial advantage in reading compared to their total beginner and non-literate, dialect speaking classmates (sounds and alphabet)
2. The Arabic we teach them is the same Arabic that they learned before coming to college
3. Possess Arabic vocabulary useful at higher (intermediate or advanced) levels

Classroom Dynamics:

Non-Arab Muslim Students Vs. Dialect-Speaking Students

- Non-Arab Muslim students: No risk of “interference” from other forms of Arabic - only “know” Standard Arabic
- cf. Arabic speaking classmates “mixed up” Arabic
- Both groups can be a source of anxiety and resentment to the total beginner as well as non-native instructor of Arabic

What We Teach Both Groups

- Modern Standard Arabic, pretend that it is a “real life” spoken language (rare exceptions, e.g., UCLA – Egyptian to Egyptians)
- Both groups mixed with total beginners (rare exceptions, e.g., UC San Diego)
- Very few religious/classical texts
- Either no dialects or (usually) beginning level dialect instruction in different class

Outcome of College Arabic Instruction for Students Ties to Arab World

- Rupture and sometimes shift in dialect proficiency because of dialect “weeding out,” no dialect reinforcement
- No assessment of their proficiency unless they are visibly advanced
- Little teacher training focusing on integrating them in the mixed classroom

How Prepared is the College Arabic Classroom for these Students?

Almost non-existent research on how to guide the Arabic dialect speakers to best use their linguistic assets in learning MSA, e.g.,

- strategies for acquiring reading skills
- expanding/adapting grammar and vocabulary (mapping)

Deluding Results

Teachers and students delude themselves about the achievement of these students:

1. compared to achievement of total beginners'
2. follow assessment methods designed for total beginners
3. miss out on strengths of these students (OPI dismisses their knowledge of dialect)

Negative Misconceptions and Results

- These students are often perceived as unmotivated, easy-A seekers
- Some do very badly (compared to their potential) and drop out
- Some do very well but no one knows for sure what/how much they actually learned in that Arabic class

First Step Towards a Solution

- Need to re-examine the terminology used to describe students grouped under umbrella of Arabic Heritage Speakers
- Risk of running counter to the dominant linguistic ideologies and pedagogical practices

Muslims are Heritage Arabic “Readers” NOT “Speakers”

Non-Arab Muslim students belong to the heritage group not as speakers but as READERS (or possibly “reciters”).

- Typically,
 - they learn to read Arabic through an institution in the community (e.g., Mosque etc,) rather the home
 - The register they know is restricted

Avoiding the Trap of the “Heritage Arabic Speaker” Characterization

Calling Arabic dialect speakers “heritage speakers” in a classroom that teaches Modern Standard Arabic is not only incorrect but pedagogically misleading (there is little research, limited teacher training, no materials to support their learning).

This misuse of terminology can be detrimental to

- their retention of their dialects
- their success in the MSA course and ability to reach the advanced level

Countering the Trap of the “Heritage Arabic Speaker” Characterization

- Strictly speaking, heritage speakers of Arabic dialects are **NOT** heritage speakers of Modern Standard Arabic
- Heritage speakers of Arabic dialects should only be considered heritage speakers if they enroll in a class that teaches their dialect
(Egyptian Arabic speakers are heritage students in an Egyptian Arabic class but not so if they enroll in a regular MSA class)

Suggested Re-classification

Students who speak or understand Arabic dialects and who take Standard Arabic should be perceived as students taking a SISTER LANGUAGE not a heritage language.

- They have the advantages and challenges of speakers of sister languages not those of heritage language speakers.
- Expectations associated with heritage language speakers are not applicable to these students (knowledge of sounds, basic grammar and vocabulary does not apply).

Repercussions of Re-classification?

Research needed (Chinese, Romance languages?)

