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Arabic cross-dialectal conversations:
A missing element in the Teaching of Arabic as a Second Language

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1. Introduction

This study was initiated by an ambition of contributing to the field of Teaching Arabic as a Second Language (TASL) through further examination of the issue of the variability in the Arabic language. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has been the main variety taught in Higher Education (HE) institutions in the UK with the majority of them encouraging the students to learn a dialect either by exposure or by seeking instruction during their year abroad (Dickins & Watson, 2006). In recent years, more institutions –especially in the USA– are giving attention to the importance of teaching the dialects alongside MSA and, therefore, some programmes started teaching at least one dialect at different stages of the degrees while others started the integrative approach by teaching both MSA and a dialect concurrently (Younes, 1995). This appreciation of the equal importance of MSA and the dialect is an achievement to be valued; however, the question of which dialect to be taught is still taking the attention of the TASL professionals. Some institutions take a practical approach in answering this question by choosing the dialect taught in their partner institutions in the Arab countries, or the dialect spoken by their appointed staff members, while others choose the dialects that they believe to be the most comprehensible to the rest of the Arabic speakers. This question of which form to teach originates from a continuous focus on the language itself and trying to find a specific form to teach as in the situation of teaching non-diglossic languages. As Giolfo & Sinatora indicate, there is a need to deviate from the dichotomous concept of Arabic having distinct forms to the acceptance of these varieties being used by the native speaker (NS) as facets of one language (Giolfo & Sinatora, 2011:104). Therefore, this paper proposes that the shift should divert from focusing on a specific form to focusing on the language use by the NS including the cross-dialectal communication. Whether an institution chooses to teach a Levantine, Egyptian or another dialect, more concern should be given to how the speakers of these dialects cope with such variability.

2. The Arabic learner

Learning the Arabic language can be prompted by various and distinct needs, and these learning needs can reflect different language skills. For example, an expatriate in an Arab country may need to learn the basics of that region's dialect for survival spoken purposes, while an academic working on translating old Arabic texts would need a different variety of the language and a focus on writing and reading skills. As this study is concerned with the Arabic learners in HE, it was important to have an insight into the reasons behind their choice to learn Arabic.

A pilot questionnaire was conducted at the University of Manchester in which 54 undergraduates and postgraduates students of Arabic were asked about their reasons for choosing to learn Arabic. An analysis of their responses showed that they would like to achieve a near-native level of proficiency and be able to do all the language tasks that the NS can do, including understanding the formal written language of the news, Arabic movies and songs, being able to write correctly and speak fluently with different dialect speakers. Although the number of participants in this pilot questionnaire was relatively small, the responses were very similar to those from a wider study in the USA conducted by Belnap in which more than 600 Arabic learners participated (Belnap, 2006). The various motives explained by the learners confirm that it is not a specific form of Arabic or a specific skill that they aim for, but it is the near-native speaker's level of proficiency in Arabic with its package of varieties and skills.

3. The Arabic native speaker

In this paper, the focus is on the educated native Arabic speaker, who can be considered a target model in TASL and who reflects the learning needs expressed by university students (Belnap, 2006). In the case of Arabic, the native speaker can be anyone brought up in an Arabic speaking community across the world. This? broad background entails a wide range of spoken dialects. However, one common variety among all the educated NS is MSA[1]. Therefore, besides being the variety which the regional dialects stemmed from, MSA has an important role in the political and social Arab identity and unity. In brief, one can say that the educated Arabic speaker usually masters two varieties of Arabic: MSA and his/her

[1] It has been stated that there are also regional variations in the use of MSA but to a much less extent of linguistic differences when compared to the regional dialectal variations. For an example of variations in MSA, see Van Mol (2003).

regional mother tongue dialect. In describing how the educated speaker makes use of these varieties, Wahba states that they have an awareness of how to use each variety, mixing and switching between one and the other appropriately (Wahba, 2006: 146). In an informal inter-dialectal situation, the educated speaker is likely to be speaking mainly in his/her regional dialect, while in a more formal situation, the speaker borrows more from MSA to level his/her speech up to match the formality of the situation. In his paper, Wahba focuses mainly on the importance of teaching MSA and a dialect, and their uses according to the situations. The paper does not demonstrate, though, any linguistic rules of how the mixing between the varieties occurs, neither how the NSs manage to understand each other in cross-dialectal communication. A question is still asked by the learners: "How do they cope when communicating with a speaker of a dialect different than what they have learnt?"

4. Cross-dialectal communication: Language choice and comprehension strategies

4.1. Background

Until the 60s, it was thought by some linguists that the Arabic dialects were as widely different as European languages, and that due to this mutual unintelligibility the Arabic speakers resort to MSA in cross-dialectal situations in order to achieve comprehension (Ezzat, 1974). Few studies since then have investigated Arabic cross-dialectal communication in order to answer questions like: a) is there mutual intelligibility between the Arabic dialects?; b) is there a specific dialect –such as Cairene– that behaves as the lingua franca?; c) if MSA is used in cross-dialectal communication, are there rules for that code-switching? (Abu-Melhim, 1992; Blanc, 1960; Ezzat, 1974). In these three studies, the methodology for data collection was recording conversations between different dialect speakers. The participants were all highly educated speakers and most of the topics of their conversations –with exception to Abu Melhim's study- tended to be formal. These studies stated that there is a high level of mutual intelligibility among the different dialect speakers, and that this intelligibility was achieved through making modifications in their language by borrowing a considerable number of linguistic elements from MSA in order to clarify unfamiliar utterances or to classicize. They also stated that there is not a specific or a pure variety spoken as the lingua franca (Abu-Melhim, 1992:227; Blanc, 1960:131; Ezzat, 1974:8).

Some of the limitations in these studies were the small number of participants (between 5- and 10), their high level of education (all postgraduates), and the formal topics used in the conversations, which raise the question of whether the use of MSA was due to the formality of these topics –even if they were inter-dialectal– or were they initiated mainly because of the cross-dialectal situation. These three studies focused only on the language that the native speakers produced and not on how they managed to understand unfamiliar utterances in other dialects. In my study, on the other hand, the aim is to see whether there are systematic patterns of borrowing from other Arabic varieties in informal cross-dialectal conversations as well as to investigate strategies used by the interlocutors in order to reach comprehension.

4.2. Methodology of this study

Similar to the previous studies, recorded conversations with native speakers of different Arabic dialects is the method of collecting the language data. However, a few points were taken into consideration in the study design in order to present enough justification for any claims made. The number of participants in this study (21 Arabic speakers) was higher than the number in the previous studies and, although most of them were highly educated, there were some participants without a university degree. They represented different ages, genders and levels of exposure to other Arabic varieties. This variability was intended in order to investigate whether any observations were limited to a certain category of speakers. The topics of the conversations were chosen to be informal (such as daily routines and personal experiences), which ensured that the use of MSA was mainly going to be due to the cross-dialectal situation and not prompted by the formality of the topics.

4.2.1. The informants and the setting

Twenty-one Arabic native speakers of twelve different dialects (Western Saudi (precisely from Jeddah), Najd Saudi, Jordanian, Egyptian, Libyan, Algerian, Eritrean, Kuwaiti, Tunisian, Omani, Syrian and Iraqi) agreed to participate in the study. . The demographic information was collected through a short questionnaire which they filled in after the recordings. The informants included six males and 15 females of different ages (from 16 to over 50) and different levels of education (from school level up to PhD holders). The participants were asked about their level of exposure to MSA and other dialects in order to investigate whether that exposure has an influence on the language they use and the level of

comprehension they achieve in cross-dialectal communication. Only one participant was not educated in Arabic and she was the only participant to state that she had a difficulty understanding MSA. Eighteen out of the 21 stated that they did not find any difficulty in understanding most of the Gulf, Levantine, and Egyptian dialects, while 15 participants said they had difficulties understanding North African dialects. Appendix 1 lists the demographic information of the participants, including the languages of their education and the abbreviations of their dialects which are used in referring to them in the study.

The recorded conversations were held between two or three participants at a time. They were asked to converse as naturally as possible and they were given cards with some informal topics as suggestions such as: describing a favourite meal, explaining their weekend plans, usual shopping places, plans for the summer holiday, outings with the children, etc. Some observations and notes were written down during each conversation, including questions on borrowings from varieties other than the speaker's dialect and on comprehension. After the recording, the participants were asked these questions in order to find out whether certain MSA words that they had used are also used in their own dialect. They were asked about how they managed to understand the utterances that differed from their own dialects. The data comprised 11 conversations with a total of 196 minutes of language. Each conversation lasted between 15 to 25 minutes.

4.2.2. The data analysis

The analysis comprised two aspects: the language itself, including instances of borrowing from MSA or from a dialect other than the speakers', and a subjective analysis of the comprehension strategies (how the listener understood or did not understand the variety s/he heard). In order to verify whether a speaker borrowed an element from MSA or another dialect, the researcher asked them whether there was an alternative way of saying the same utterance in their own dialect. In some cases, further verification was carried out through NSs other than the participants. There were three levels of linguistic borrowing observed:

1. **Phonological borrowing**: when the speaker used a word shared between two varieties (for example, their native dialect and MSA) but with phonological differences. An example was observed when Jrd1[2] said *dāʾira* ('circle' in MSA) instead of its Jordanian

[2] Jrd1 refers to the first Jordanian participant. For the list of the participants and the abbreviations of their dialects, please see Appendix 1.

equivalent *dāyra*. In this study, such examples are labelled as phonological borrowing because the differences between the two words are only in pronunciation.

2. **Lexical borrowing**: when the speaker used a word different –in terms of the root– from its equivalent in their own dialect. An example from the conversation between Omn1 and Tns 1 was the MSA word *kaḏālik* ('also') instead of its Tunisian equivalent, *zādah*.

3. **Borrowing a phrase or a sentence**: when more than one single lexical item were used differently from their equivalents in the speaker's dialect. An example from the conversation between Egy2 and Lib2 –which will be explained in the next section in example (4)- was the MSA sentence *fī ḥīn aṭ-ṭabqa al-ġanyya fī miṣr fī ḏalika al-waqt* meaning 'While the rich class in Egypt at that time ...'.

There were observations of lexical items borrowed from another variety but influenced by the pronunciation of the speaker's dialect, which were still classified as lexical borrowing. In analysing the comprehension aspect of the conversations and to determine whether the interlocutors understood certain utterances or not, the researcher made note of responses that suggest a lack of comprehension or uncertainty. Further verification was done by asking them directly after the recording whether they had understood the utterances that are different from their dialects, and how they thought they managed to understand them.

4.2.3. The results:

4.2.3.1 Language choice: borrowing from MSA and other dialects

Borrowings from MSA were observed to be limited to 19 instances only in? seven out of the 21 participants, with the rest of the participants speaking only in their respective dialects[3]. The observed MSA borrowings included two phonological borrowings, nine lexical and eight phrases. The following examples demonstrate some of these borrowings and the context in which they occurred. In example (1), Jrd1 describes how a pie is made and uses the MSA equivalent of the word 'circle' which differs only phonologically from the Jordanian '*dāyra*':

(1) Jrd1: *btiṭla'* *dā'ira*
comes out circle
'It comes out (in the shape of) a circle.'

[3] These seven participants were Jrd1, Lib1, Lib2, Lib3, Omn1, Tns1, and Irq1.

In example (2), an MSA lexical item was used for clarification. When SdiW1 does not understand the Jordanian word '*ṣubba'*, Jrd1 repeates it in MSA:

(2) Jrd1: *b-iš-šitwiyyi byiʿmlū-hā ʿa- ṣ-ṣubba tabʿiti il-kāz*
by-the-winter (they)make-it on-the-heater of (belongs to) the-gas
'In winter, they make it (cook it) on the gas heater'
SdiW1: *ʿalā eaš?*
On what?
'On what?'
Jrd1: *ṣubba…. ṣubbit kaaz… midfaʾa yaʿnī*
Heater (Jordanian)… heater gas …. Heater (MSA) means
'A heater…..gas heater…. I mean a heater (MSA)'
SdiW1: *aaah. daffaya yaʿnī*
oh. Heater (Saudi) means
'oh. You mean a heater'

In example (3), the conversation between Omn1 and Tns1 went from the informal topic of the activities that parents do with their children to a more formal topic of how to bring up Muslim children in a non-Muslim environment. At this point, Omn1 said the whole sentence in MSA. When the topic changed again to talking about how delicious Algerian food is, Omn1 switched back to the dialect:

(3) Omn1: *fa-'iḏā kāna haḏā al-'asās mawjūd wa-kāna ʿindahu taqabbul*
So-if was this the-basis existing and-was has accepting
'So if this concept was there and he was willing to accept (an opinion)'

The next example shows that the formality of the topic initiated the borrowing of a whole phrase from MSA. Lib2 and Egy2 were talking in their dialects about his visits to Egypt, then the topic changed to 'how the social classes in Egypt changed in the last decade':

(4) Lib2: *fī ḥīn aṭ-ṭabqa al-ġanyya fī miṣr fī ḏalika al-waqt*
In time the-class the-rich in Egypt in that the-time
'While the rich class in Egypt at that time...'

The phrase in example (4) by Lib2 was in MSA with the exception of not using case endings. One observation in this example was Egy2 in the same conversation who did not use any elements of MSA, even when she repeated the word '*ṭabqa'* 'social class', she used the Egyptian equivalent 'ṭaba'a' without borrowing the MSA phonological element of the '*qaaf*' sound.

The other observation regarding the language modifications was the borrowing from other dialects. It was not possible in this study to point out all the dialectal borrowings as we do not have full knowledge of all of the participating dialects; however, it was still possible to observe a considerable number of 23 dialectal borrowings. Ten out of these 23 dialectal borrowings were borrowed from the Syrian dialect by Alg2 in her conversation with SdiW3[4]. The rest of the dialectal borrowings were made by five other participants[5]. Most of the 23 instances were nouns borrowed from the interlocutors' dialects and usually followed or preceded by their equivalents in the speaker's dialect. The following are some examples of dialectal borrowings. Example (5) shows how Alg2 used Syrian words when speaking to SdiW3. The word '*hoon'* is a Syrian cognate for the Algerian '*hnaya'*, and the word '*imm'* is the Syrian cognate for the Algerian '*yimma*'.

(5) LK: *enti sakna hoon maʿa imm-ik*?
You live here with mother-your?
'Do you live here with your mother?'

Example (6) shows borrowing a lexical element from the interlocutor's dialect in answering a question and repeating the final word in the question. In this example, Egy1 and Jrd2 were talking about summer holiday plans. Egy1 answered Jrd2's question and repeated the Jordanian word '*mḥall'* with an influence of Egyptian pronunciation '*maḥall'* by inserting an extra vowel after the first consonant. The Egyptian equivalent of the word '*mḥall'* is '*makan'*. It was observed that Egy1 borrowed another two words from the interlocutor's dialect, while Jrd2 spoke only in her dialect even when answering questions and repeating utterances by Egy1. This is illustrated in example (7) in which the phrase "how long have you been" differs in the two dialects; Jrd2 replied in Jordanian and did not repeat the Egyptian verb '*ba'a*'.

[4] After the end of the conversations, Alg2 explained that she has many Syrian friends from whom she had learnt the Syrian dialect and which she believes is easier to understand than her own Algerian dialect.
[5] These were Egy1, Lib1, Lib2, Alg1, and Tns1.

(6) Jrd2: *w-entu* *ḥa-truḥū* *ʾayy mḥall?*
and-you (pl.) will-go(you. Pl.) any place?
'and are you going anywhere?'
Egy1: *laʾ miš ḥa-nruḥ* *maḥall ḳāliṣ*
no not will-go(1st person pl.) place at all
'No, we'll not go anywhere at all'

(7) Egy1: *ba'a-l-ku* *add* *eeh* *fi-l-balad* *hina*?
Became-for-you(pl.) size (or amount) what in-the-country here?
'How long have you been here in the country for?'
Jrd2: *ʾiḥnā ṣār-l-na* *min* *2008*
We became-for-us from 2008
'We have been (here) since 2008'

Example (8) was from the conversation between Lib2 and Egy2, in which Lib2 was observed to have borrowed six lexical items from the Egyptian dialect of the interlocutor (Egy2). In this example, after Lib2 said the Egyptian word *'elʿayš'*, he pointed out how it is said in his Libyan dialect:

(8) Lib2: *el-ʿayš ,* *el-ḳubz* *ʾiḥnā ngūl ʿalī-h*
The-bread, the-bread we say on-it
'The bread (Egyptian), the bread (Libyan) we call it.'

4.2.3.2. Language comprehension

A total of sixty four lexical items elicited form the conversations were chosen to be investigated subjectively by asking the participants after the end of their conversations of whether they understood them or not, and, if they did, then how they thought they achieved this understanding. The 64 items were chosen based on their apparent linguistic differences to their equivalents in the interlocutor's dialect. The level of intelligibility observed in this study was very high even between geographically distant varieties with only ten lexical items –mostly nouns and verbs- causing comprehension failure. Table 1 shows the participants' responses regarding the comprehension of the 64 items.

Participants' response	Number of lexical items	Percentage
Familiar with the item due to previous exposure.	32	50%
Unfamiliar with the item but managed to guess the correct meaning from the context.	8	12.5%
Unfamiliar with the item but managed to guess the correct meaning from the context by relating it to its familiar cognates in other Arabic varieties.	10	15.6%
Unfamiliar with the item and did not understand it, but ignored it as it did not affect the general meaning (non-content words).	4	6.3%
Did not comprehend due to unfamiliarity of a non-cognate and with a lack of adequate contextual clues.	10	15.6%

Table 1. *The participants' responses regarding the comprehension of 64 lexical items*

The following are examples from the investigated items that? demonstrate the five responses given by the participants. In example (9), Egy1 understood the Jordanian verb '*ballaš*' meaning 'helped' -although it comes from a different root from the Egyptian and the MSA equivalent is '*bada'*'– because -as she stated- she was already familiar with it from previous contact and media exposure to Levantine Arabic:

(9) Jrd2: *ʾiḥmā ballašnā nsāʿid māmā*
We started help mum
'We started to help mum'

Example (10) was from the conversation between SdiW3 and Ert1, when SdiW3 was describing cooking a local dish using meat. In this example, Ert1 explained that she was not familiar with the word '*awṣāl*' but she guessed from the context that it should? have meant 'pieces'. In her dialect she would have said? '*qiṭaʿ*'. She also stated that, in a context other than cooking, she could have thought it meant connections, wires or receipts, linking it to other cognates from the MSA root *w-ṣ-l*:

(10) SdiW3: *baʿdīn binḥuṭ ʾawṣāl il-laḥm ʿalā-r-ruzz*
Then put(1st person pl.) pieces the-meat on-the-rice
'Then we put the meat pieces on the rice'

Example (11) shows how the participant could relate an unfamiliar word to its cognate in MSA with the aid of the context in order to guess its meaning. This was from the conversation between Lib3 and SdiW2 when talking about a recipe. SdiW2 asked Lib3 what '*ḥūlī*' was, but before she got an answer she said 'does this come from the MSA word '*ḥawl*' –meaning one year? Is it a one year old lamb?'-, and her guess was correct.:

(11) Lib3: *baʿd-il-ḵuḍār* *nuṭbḵ-āl-ḥūlī*
After-the-vegetables cook (1st person pl.)-the-lamb
'After the vegetables, we cook the lamb'

In example (12), Egy1 after her conversation with Lib1, stated that she ignored the non-content word '*wājid',* as it carried little semantic meaning and did not affect the main point in the sentence:

(12) Lib1: *it-taʿlīm* *yi'ttīr* *wājid fī –n-nās*
The-education affects a lot in-the-people
'Education affects people a lot'

Example (13) shows two verbs that were not understood by Omn1 in his conversation with Tns1. The verbs are in the Tunisian dialect and do not have cognates in MSA neither in the Omani dialect. Omnʾs response regarding comprehending these verbs was that he could not guess their meanings and that the context did not help:

(13) Tns1: *al-ḵuḍār* *nṭayyib-uh* *bi-l-ḥār* *w-al-ʿajīn* *nšayyiḥ-ūh*
the-veggie cook (1st person pl.)-it by-the-spice and-the-dough dry (1st per. pl.)-it
'We cook the vegetables with spices and let the dough dry'

4.3 Discussion of findings

Analysing the results of this study showed that the NSs spoke mainly in their own dialects in informal cross-dialectal situations with minimal borrowings from other dialects and MSA. A clear exception to this finding were the speakers of North African dialects, who tended to make considerable modifications to their language such as Alg2 in example (5), who borrowed a lot from the Syrian dialect. In the most recent study by Abu Melhim, he

observed 1402 MSA borrowing instances in his data of 660 minutes of cross-dialectal conversations (Abu-Melhim, 1992), or 2.124 instances of borrowing per minute. In comparison, the 19 instances in the 196 minutes of this study yields a per-minute rate of 0.097. It can be argued that this limited language modification reflects the speakers' confidence that their dialects are well-understood, an argument that is also supported by the observed high degree of mutual/inter-intelligibility with only ten instances of comprehension breakdown.

The limited MSA and dialectal borrowings were also variable and, as expressed by the participants, they were instigated by different factors and motives such as the speakers' exposure and attitude to MSA and other dialects. Example (3) showed Lib1 switching into MSA for elevating (classicizing) the conversation when the topic became slightly formal; nevertheless, this modification was not applied by Egy2 in the same conversation, who expressed her attitude towards using MSA in conversations as sounding unnatural. In examples (6) and (7) Egy1 was also observed to borrow from other dialects and she explained that she grew up in an Arab country different from Egypt where she used to speak with other dialect speakers and, therefore, she was comfortable switching to another dialect in order to help comprehension. Jrd2 in the same conversation said that, although she understands Egyptian and a few other dialects well, she feels shy speaking in any dialect other than hers. Such variability in the language choice means that it is not possible to describe specific strategies in language modifications to the learners of Arabic but, alternatively, to teach them about this variability and encourage them to make their own choice of language modification in cross-dialectal communication.

As stated above, although the majority of the participants spoke mainly in their native dialects, the level of comprehension was very high. On the one hand, one can argue that this comprehensibility is due to the NSs' exposure to each others' dialects. Table 1 showed that 50% of the investigated lexical items were stated by the participants to be understood because of their familiarity with them from previous exposure. On the other hand, the participants also expressed that they applied different skills in order to understand the unfamiliar utterances. These skills included: a) making use of the context, such as in example (10); b) cognate-pairing by relating an unfamiliar word to its root cognate in MSA, such as in example (11), and c) simply ignoring non-content words that do not affect the general meaning, as in example (12). The results showed only ten instances of lexical non-

cognate items[6] that were not understood due to a lack of contextual clues to aid their understanding. Yet, still in these ten instances, the speakers tried to further explain their meanings by borrowing from another Arabic variety, such as in example (2).

5. Conclusions and recommendations for application in TASL

This paper discussed how the Teaching of Arabic as a Second Language (TASL) should not only focus on specific Arabic varieties but, instead, on the skills that the NSs have. In investigating some of these skills, this study examined how the Arabic NSs modify their language and manage comprehension in cross-dialectal informal conversations. The study showed that there has been an increase in the Arabic cross-dialectal mutual intelligibility which was reflected here by the NSs making minimal modifications to their language, yet achieving a high degree of comprehensibility in their conversations. Such successful communication seemed to be a result of the NSs previous exposure to other Arabic varieties as well as certain comprehension skills that they applied.

Although this study showed limited borrowings from MSA and more dependence on the dialects, it also showed that MSA was still used as a frame of reference in aiding comprehension when the interlocutors related unfamiliar utterances to their cognates using the MSA root system in order to guess the correct meaning. The NSs also made use of the context and sometimes ignored unfamiliar words when they did not hinder the general meaning that was intended by the interlocutors.

In light of these findings, we recommend that the learners of Arabic in HE should still be introduced to MSA as it is not only the variety of most of the written language and the formal situations, but it also contains the root and pattern linguistic system which is shared by all the other Arabic varieties and which has an important role in the recognition of Arabic cognates. In terms of spoken communication, the learners need to master at least one dialect; moreover, the choice of this particular dialect should not be limited to specific varieties that might be thought by the educators as the closest to MSA or believed to be the most intelligible. The third language aspect that is emphasised in this study is the learners' ability to engage successfully in cross-dialectal situations by making use of their knowledge of MSA and a dialect. The Arabic learners should therefore be introduced to the speaking and the listening skills that the NSs apply in such situations, which include: making some

[6] No instances of syntactic comprehension breakdown could be observed in this study. This could be due to the fact that the main linguistic differences between Arabic varieties are lexical and morpho-phonological (Rosenhouse, 2007:653).

modifications –if they wish- to the dialect they speak by borrowing elements from MSA; making use of contextual clues to help understanding; and relating the Arabic cognates using the root and pattern system in order to correctly guess the meanings of unfamiliar utterances. We propose here that training the learners to have these skills would provide for their diverse learning needs. They would be able to communicate naturally and efficiently using a dialect, to understand the MSA used in written and formal language, and to have the confidence to engage in conversations with other Arabic dialect speakers which altogether represent the near-native proficiency level.

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Appendix 1: Background information about the informants

	Participant	Mother tongue	Gender	Age	Highest degree obtained & field	School education language	University education language
1	Jrd1	Jordanian	M	30+	MA (Science)	Arabic	mostly English + Arabic
2	SdiW1	Saudi (Western)	F	30+	MA (Science)	Arabic	mostly English + Arabic
3	SdiN1	Saudi (Najdi)	F	30+	MA (Science)	Arabic	mostly English + Arabic
4	Jrd2	Jordanian	F	16	High School	Arabic and SL	*not applicable*
5	Egy1	Egyptian	F	30+	PhD (Dentistry)	English	English
6	Lib1	Libyan	F	44	PhD (Psychology)	Arabic	English
7	Egy2	Egyptian	F	26	BA (Linguistics)	Arabic	English
8	Lib2	Libyan	M	44	MA (Linguistics)	Arabic	English
9	Egy3	Egyptian	M	28	MA (IT)	Arabic	English
10	Alg1	Algerian	M	47	High school	Arabic	*not applicable*
11	Lib3	Libyan	F	20	High school	Arabic	*not applicable*
12	SdiW2	Saudi (Western)	F	29	MA (Health)	Arabic	English
13	Alg2	Algerian	F	37	BA	Arabic	French
14	SdiW3	Saudi (Western)	F	25	BA (English)	Arabic	English
15	Ert1	Eritrean	F	35	High School	Arabic and SL	*not applicable*
16	Kwt1	Kuwaiti	F	25	BA	English	English
17	Lib4	Libyan	F	29	BA (Arabic Linguistics)	Arabic and SL	English
18	Omn1	Omani	M	24	BA	Arabic	English
19	Tns1	Tunisian	M	40	High School	Arabic and SL	*not applicable*
20	Irq1	Iraqi	F	44	MA	Arabic	English
21	Syr1	Syrian	F	30+	BA	Arabic	Arabic