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Exploring the Importance of Play, Motivation, Identity, and Dialect in Arabic Language Learning and Teaching

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EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY, MOTIVATION, IDENTITY, AND

DIALECT IN ARABIC LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

by

Lindsey Sutherland Mabey

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

Logan, Utah

2020

ABSTRACT

Exploring the Importance of Play, Motivation, Identity, and Dialect in Arabic Language

Learning and Teaching

by

Lindsey Sutherland Mabey: Master of Second Language Teaching

Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Dr. Sarah Gordon

Department: Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies

This portfolio is a compilation of work that the author wrote during her studies in the Master of Second Language Teaching program at Utah State University. During her time in the program, the author also served as an instructor of Arabic at the university and at a local grade school, as well as serving as a teaching assistant. This work is informed by the author's personal reflections on these experiences in conjunction with her studies.

The portfolio consists of three sections: (1) teaching perspectives, (2) research perspectives, and (3) an annotated bibliography. The teaching perspectives revolve around the author's beliefs of surrounding the art of teaching a second language. The research perspectives section contains two papers written during her coursework in the MSLT program, while the annotated bibliography reviews literature regarding identity in second language acquisition (SLA).

(103 pages)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my committee members who were instrumental in me completing this portfolio. I would first like to thank Dr. Sarah Gordon, who was instrumental in helping me to rejoin the MSLT program and finish my portfolio. She supported me and had faith in me in spite of long distances and numerous bumps in the road to my portfolio completion. I would also like to thank Dr. Abdulkafi Albirini has been my mentor since my first semester at Utah State University, providing me advice, support, and opportunities that have enriched my learning. He guided me in teaching Arabic and together we went with the first group of USU students to study abroad in Jordan to learn Arabic. Dr. Joshua Thoms opened my eyes to the possibilities of technology use in SLA, helping to frame much of the research contained in this portfolio. His greatest influence, however, has come after I completed my courses upon my return to the MSLT program after some time away. He helped me to navigate returning to finish my portfolio, and he has supported me the entire time.

In addition to my committee, I would like to thank Dr. Karin DeJonge-Kannan for her unending support and guidance. Her support and positivity have been so helpful as I have been completing this portfolio, and her expansive knowledge of SLA were an incredible guide to me during my courses. I owe a substantial debt to Dr. Jim Rogers for broadening my understanding of learning and introducing me to theories in language acquisition that have greatly shaped my portfolio. His guidance led me to some of my greatest insights into language teaching.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACTFL = American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
AFL = Arabic as a Foreign Language
CA = Classical Arabic
CC = Communicative Competence
CLT = Communicative Language Teaching
CMC = Computer Mediated Communication
CS = Communicative Strategy
EFL = English as a Foreign Language
ELL = English Language Learner
ESA = Educated Spoken Arabic
ESL = English as a Second Language
FL = Foreign Language
L1 = First Language / Native Language
L2 = Second Language
LP = Language Play
MSA = Modern Standard Arabic
MSLT = Master of Second Language Teaching
NNS = Nonnative Speaker
NS = Native Speaker
QA = Colloquial Arabic
SCT = Sociocultural Theory
SLA = Second Language Acquisition
SMS = Short Message Service / Text Message
SNS = Social Networking Site
TA = Teaching Assistant
TAFL = Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language
TBA = Task-Based Activity
TESOL = Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TL = Target Language
TPS = Teaching Philosophy Statement
USU = Utah State University
ZPD = Zone of Proximal Development

INTRODUCTION

This portfolio represents the culmination of my time in the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program at Utah State University. My portfolio is comprised of three sections which demonstrate some of the topics that have had the greatest impact on me during my time in this program. My focus throughout the program has been on teaching Arabic as a second language, but I believe that the ideas contained in this portfolio can be applied to the teaching of any language.

The first section contains my teaching philosophy statement (TPS), which demonstrates my central beliefs regarding language teaching. In it, I define learning and the role of the teacher through the lens of sociocultural theory (SCT) as first described by Vygotsky (1978). I also explain the importance of teaching different styles of Arabic, teaching culture, and using technology to benefit students in their learning. Throughout the remainder of the portfolio, I expound further on these topics. The second section contains two papers that were written largely for two of my MSLT courses, although they have had significant updates as SLA research has progressed. In these papers, I propose a greater focus on play in the foreign language classroom and the importance of teaching an Arabic dialect concurrently with teaching Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Finally, in the third section, I have provided a literature review of select research that explores the topic of identity in SLA. In sum, the topics I have selected demonstrate some of the aspects of SLA that reflect my core beliefs in language teaching and learning.

TEACHING PERSPECTIVES

PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT

I have taught a wide range of learners as I have begun my journey as a language teacher. From kindergarteners to middle schoolers to college students, I have enjoyed working with students of different ages and proficiency levels while teaching Arabic language and cultures. In the future, I hope to continue to teach Arabic to adult learners at the secondary level, and to perhaps teach English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL).

To best prepare for the different opportunities that teaching Arabic will present to me, I will focus mainly on the theory and practice of teaching Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL) to American high school students and adult learners. This remains my preferred focus for future teaching endeavors, but also allows me to incorporate skills that can be useful for teaching younger students. The focus of this portfolio, therefore, will be teaching Arabic as a foreign language to high school and adult American learners.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

In this TPS, I outline my beliefs and some of the pedagogical approaches, methodologies, and techniques I find particularly effective in the classroom in and exploration of my own philosophy of second language teaching. I will discuss some issues and examples specific to teaching Arabic below, but the general principles could be applied to any language. These principles in particular inform my teaching: community, communication, culture, and authenticity.

Language has many purposes, primary among them is communication. To learn to communicate, students need to actually practice communication (Canale & Swain, 1980; Lee & VanPatten, 2003). To focus on this goal, I rely on the Five C's discussed in *Standards for Foreign Language Teaching in the 21st Century* (ACTFL, 2011): communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities as a guide. The ACTFL standards give educators clear objectives and give students discernable goals, and I aim to address all Five C's in my teaching.

With the above principles and ACTFL standards in mind, I will explore the following topics: the process of learning, the role of the teacher, the balance of colloquial versus Modern Standard Arabic, the importance of culture, and technology in SLA. This TPS represents my current understanding of SLA and is framed by my studies in the MSLT program, by my teaching experiences, and by my own experiences as a language learner in the US and abroad.

What is Learning?

Before addressing teaching, it is vital to explore the nature of learning. "Learning is a process of becoming" (Vågan, 2011, p. 44). Learning is thus a process, a journey.

Learning is also tied to identity, making it fluid and ever changing, as well. When something is learned, it becomes a part of who we are. L. S. Vygotsky theorized that something is learned, or rather, acquired, once it becomes automatic. He refers to this type of knowledge as "fossilized" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 63) because it is set, complete, and unchanging. Thus, when we say something has been "acquired," we can say it has become a part of us: our mental processes have been altered by the acquisition of a new psychological tool. Of course, as we acquire new tools or stop using some of these tools, we continue this process of change. Internalization is the process by which outward actions or experiences, social or otherwise, are adapted as internal processes which can then regulate individual behavior. According to Vygotsky, fully internalized actions require no outside assistance to use, while actions that have not been fully internalized require outside assistance. As Shrum and Glisan (2016) explain, "what learners can do with assistance today, they will be able to do on their own tomorrow or at some future point in time" (p. 24).

We live in a world full of physical and cultural tools. These are used to interact with the world, with the people around us, and within ourselves. Physical tools are objects like hammers, shovels, or pens, whereas cultural tools may be items like paintings, symbols, signs, gestures, and words. Cultural tools gain purpose from socially constructed meanings. A cultural artifact in one social setting could have a completely different meaning, and purpose, in a different social setting. A shovel in a garden brings to mind yard work, while a shovel sitting next to a treasure map suggests a treasure hunt.

Tools, and later signs, help us regulate ourselves during tasks. Tools are objects like shovels or pens, while signs are symbolic tools such as words that can be used to call

to mind meanings. Young children can use blocks to count in object-regulation, while older children and adults can use a range of tools, from physical objects to private speech, a form of self-regulation in which people talk quietly to themselves in order to solve problems. As Vygotsky (1978) notes, sign "permits humans, by the aid of extrinsic stimuli, to control their behavior from the outside" (p. 40). This ability allows people to work within what Vygotsky called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is crucial to efficient learning because internalization occurs through, "interaction and collaboration in social settings while the learner responds to those around him or her" (Shrum & Glisan, 2016, p. 28). It is only through this interaction that a skill, or a tool, can be internalized (Vygotsky, 1978). . Because private speech permits people to talk over problems aloud, it decreases the mental load of problem-solving and helps in tackling problems that would otherwise be beyond one's capacity to solve (Broner & Tarone, 2001; Cook, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978)

Internalization does not occur the first time a tool is used. Indeed, it may take a lifetime to fully internalize a tool. Master artisans have internalized the tools of their crafts to the point where they no longer think about how to hold a paint brush, which grade of sandpaper to use, or what angles draw the eye to which part of a canvas. They focus on the mood, the style, the meaning of their final product. They no longer need to concentrate on the process of creating, but, instead, these masters can focus their attention on the intricate details of their goal.

Of particular interest for language teachers is the internalization of speech. Originally an interpersonal tool, speech can become internalized and present itself as private speech. At first, children are guided by their parents' speech as the parents tell

them how to solve problems and accomplish tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). As this speech becomes internalized, children use it externally to guide their own actions. Once the speech has been fully internalized, it is called private speech. The language has been reconstructed into a psychological tool used to regulate actions.

A learner can use skills within the ZPD that have begun to form but are not yet fully mastered.. "These functions could be termed the 'buds' or 'flowers' of development rather than the 'fruits' of development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). To fully master, or grow, these skills, learners need to be able to practice them—which can only happen within the ZPD. It is, therefore, up to instructors to provide the scaffolding and activities for students to act within the ZPD. As learners practice these developing skills within the ZPD, the "buds" are nourished until they mature, and the students can perform the tasks independently. I see learning as a process of growth, and the environment and opportunities for learning in the classroom as the nurturing soil and sun of a well-tended garden, giving students the opportunity to grow and thrive.

As a teacher, I cannot see what processes are taking place internally within the minds of my students at all times. However, the framework of SCT provides insights on the external markers of the internal processes of learning. I can observe how my students interact, take note of what they are capable of doing with and without help, measure learning outcomes, and design activities which allow them to focus on skills within their ZPD, whether through play, working with a mentor, or practicing through another type of scaffolding. It is by focusing on communication and social interactions that I can most aid my students in their own progression toward becoming proficient language users.

The Role of the Teacher

My role as a teacher is more than just assigner of homework and giver of tests. For me, the most valuable job of a teacher is in helping their students, "to ground an exploration of what interests us, what we would like to create and discover, who we are and who we might wish to become, as well as providing a context for sitting at the center of the tension between what is and what ought to be" (Vadeboncoeur, Perone, & Panina-Beard, 2016, p. 300). The greatest gift a teacher can give their students is the future.

Part of my role as a teacher is to foster a classroom environment that promotes learning through communication and interaction. "It is through a sensitive understanding of what students preferred and why they preferred certain voices and identities that teachers can capitalize on the local resources of students to build bridges between students' world and what's required of them in the school world." (Lin & Luk, 2005, pp. 94-95). Through shared experiences, playful interactions, and mutual respect and understanding, my students and I can build bridges together, in a community of practice in which every member of my class can reach their full potential. "Educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it" (Friere, 2005, p. 130). We must get to know our students.

Students spend most of their time outside of the classroom and away from their instructors. Teachers have the duty, therefore, to prepare their students for learning outside of the classroom. Good teachers do not impart seemingly limitless knowledge to their students. Rather, good teachers ignite the desire to learn in students and provide

them with the tools to do so even outside of class. Teachers serve as temporary guides for students: they have the responsibility to prepare their students for the road ahead and encourage them to press on.

As a teacher, I focus on assisting my students in developing the skills which they will be able to apply in their own interactions with language outside of my classroom within "a multiplicity of discourses" (The New London Group, 1996, p. 60). Inspired by the multiliteracies approach (Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016; The New London Group, 1996), each activity I design teaches students one or more skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking, critical thinking, problem solving, interpretation, textual analysis, and more) that aid them in deriving meaning in "an active and dynamic process in which learners combine and creatively apply both linguistic and other semiotic resources (e.g., visual, gesture, sound, etc.)…" (Warner & Michelson, 2018, p. 5). These multiliteracies are becoming ever more necessary as cultural and linguistic diversity increase while at the same time technology continues to evolve and expand in our world.

Modern Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic

Turning to issues specific to my philosophy of teaching Arabic, it is important to remember that Arabic varies significantly between spoken dialects and the standardized written form. A brief overview of these difficulties and a personal example from my own study abroad experience will provide a useful introduction to this issue, and I explore the topic more thoroughly in the section of my portfolio titled, "The Benefits of Informality: A Look into Teaching an Arabic Dialect". For example, educated Arabs from every country write the same way (with minor lexical differences), but spoken Arabic varies widely between regions, socio-economic status, and even neighborhoods. Most people

from Saudi Arabia, for example, do not readily understand the spoken Arabic of Morocco. This variety can seem overwhelming to Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) students, but, with proper guidance and enough practice, communicative competence can be gained across all registers.

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic (QA) are equally necessary in the study of AFL. From my research and my own experience, students should be encouraged to develop MSA as the language is used by native speakers: in text and formal settings, such as when speaking to people from other regions of the Middle East. Along with learning MSA, students should develop proficiency in at least one regional dialect. MSA and QA need to be introduced as early as possible to develop learners' socio-linguistic competence and their linguistic skills in the domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Younes, 2006). The choice of particular dialect is less important than the act of learning one (Trentman, 2011). The ability to use MSA and QA in tandem is an absolute necessity for communicative competence in Arabic.

In theory, spoken interpersonal communication takes place in a dialect, while written interpersonal Arabic and both spoken and written presentational Arabic are in MSA. In reality, however, the two idealized registers are frequently mixed in through codeswitching (Humeidan, 2016). These registers are mixed for many reasons, including building social rapport, demonstrating expertise, communicating with those who speak a different dialect, among numerous other reasons. The concurrent acquisition of both formal and informal Arabic can place a greater burden of time and effort on beginning students of Arabic—and indeed on the teacher—but I argue that learning the two modes

of Arabic simultaneously is much more beneficial to students in the long run than learning each separately.

There is not just one way of speaking any language. Furthermore, beyond different dialects and differences in vocabulary and accents, there are many cultures that add to the richness of a language around the world. As a teacher, I try to help my students understand this, which can help them gain confidence in their own linguistic skills and see the importance of improving their language skills. This view is similar to Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Tejeda's argument about the Third Space coming from learning to mix different languages, dialects, and registers in the classroom (1999). Students can learn to understand, and ultimately perhaps to use, the different registers and dialects to their own benefit and to the benefit of those with whom they interact.

This is not always easy to learn. As a teacher, I remember what it was like to be a learner in more than one Arabic-speaking country, in which multiple different dialects are spoken, and I try to share these challenging experiences with my students. Personally, my first hours in the Arabic world were spent lost in Cairo with a small group of students from my university. We had been let loose by our professor near Tahrir Square instructed to find food and our own way back to the hotel. Eventually, we made our way to one of the suggested restaurants, a *koshari* seller, where we were escorted upstairs to the dining room. Shortly after, a waiter arrived and asked us a question. We stared. We had no idea what he had said. It felt just like my first day in Arabic, when I could not decipher one sound from another. He stood there, just as nervous as we were, probably wishing that he could speak English.

Finally, deciding that if I did not speak up, no one else would, either, I made an attempt to ask, "How big is the large bowl?" and, relieved, the waiter motioned a response. Suddenly, the whole table was abuzz with Arabic: "I'd like large..." "Small, please..." "Coca Cola!" "How much?" We began to speak and to understand. We were no longer afraid to communicate in the L2. As a teacher, I attempt to help my students lower their language learning anxiety and try to communicate despite being afraid to do so.

On a personal note, had it not for my initial exposure to QA being early on, having studied Egyptian Arabic, I doubt that I would have had the temerity to speak up first, it at all. Later, I was worried that my Egyptian QA would be a hindrance upon my arrival to Jordan. However, I found that, within the first couple of weeks, I could easily alternate between the two dialects without much difficulty.

During my study abroad Jordan, I also experienced differences in dialects. There are two major dialects in Jordan: Jordanian Bedouin Arabic, and Palestinian Arabic. Men tend to speak the former (it is generally considered more 'masculine') while women tend to speak the latter (because it is considered by many to sound 'prettier'). Anecdotally, even a Bedouin woman raised in a tent in the desert that I met, would alter her speech around her friends in the city. Some of my male Jordanian friends even took on the Bedouin accent in spite of their Palestinian heritage. Dialect is tied to identity here.

The men in our study abroad group were encouraged to pick up the Bedouin speech patterns, while the women were warned against them. One of my favorite things to do, however, was to walk up to a group of people—I am tall with light hair and skin, marking me as quite clearly foreign—and exclaim *Chayfach?* "How are you?" in my thickest, gruffest Bedouin accent. I would then quickly transition back to the "pretty"

QA, reassuring them that it was just an act. Had I continued in Bedouin, the humor would have faded and I would have seemed uneducated.

On some level, perhaps my codeswitching "game" demonstrated my linguistic and cultural understanding, opening up many doors to me. I did as Garcia (2005) suggests: "Give the impression with a few well-chosen words that you speak the language" (p. 35). I had learned one phrase well, even if I only said it once.

In my language classroom, I can help my students to both MSA and QA through the different authentic texts and audio-visual materials that I introduce them to, as I have suggested above. These resources will be further discussed in the next sections. Culturally-rich texts, stories, videos, songs, and art can be employed to help my students come to understand the Arabic world while increasing their skills in MSA and QA.

Culture

Of course, limited knowledge of a few choice words, understanding of a handful of cultural differences, or knowledge of a dialect does not mean ones knows a language. Culture and language are inextricably tied, and students must also develop cultural knowledge and awareness when studying a language. The study of literature, academic contents, and current events not only increases vocabulary and students' ability to produce the language, but it provides them with avenues to connect to and through the culture. "The uniqueness of foreign language teaching is that the subject matter we are teaching is not solely a subject matter but rather a conduit to other subject matters" (Chouairi, 2009, p. 45). Through learning about the target cultures, we can make these connections and increase our understanding. As a teacher, I must facilitate the learning of culture and cultural connection, following the ACTFL standards mentioned previously.

In my own experience, awareness of the most beloved works of the target culture shows interest, respect, and intelligence on the part of the language learner. Personally, I was lucky enough to learn about two of the most cherished Arabic singers before studying in the Middle East. My knowledge of one in particular, Fairuz, a famous Lebanese singer, offered a connection to the traditions in Jordan. "Fairuz in the morning, Umm Kulthum at night," my friends, their parents, their grandparents, and shopkeepers insisted. I had already heard many of songs, and I could even sing along to a few.

I was able to connect with people through the shared experience of, "enjoying fiction or any other cultural experiences" which was "transformative for [my] self and others" (Zittoun & Gillespie. 2016, p. 229). It also provided me with an avenue to start discussions with people, since Fairuz would play on the radio every morning, no matter where I was. While this example comes from music, the same experiences can occur through reading. As students learn to read in a variety of genres, the topics and concerns most important to members of that culture become more understandable. I share music, media, and texts with my students so that they can begin to make cultural connections and build community around language and culture, in a similar manner.

To provide my students with the best linguistic and cultural opportunities that I can, I strive to rely solely on authentic materials. These realia are often in the form of texts, but can be dramatic plays, songs, television programs, and other media that are created by members of the second language (L2) community for members of that community (Shrum & Glisan, 2016); realia are rich in culture, meaning, and natural language. L2 learners benefit greatly from these texts—their very nature allows students a glimpse into the target culture and adds meaning for the students. By using these

cultural artifacts in my teaching, I can foster the type of critical thinking and cultural understanding that would help my students to reach, "the goal of language and culture teaching" which, "is first and foremost to foster active and critical language users capable of moving beyond literal meanings and of reflecting on the nuanced connections between semiotic form, meaning, context, perspective, and history." (Warner & Michelson, 2018, p. 6). By encouraging my students to immerse themselves in authentic materials, the insights that they gain about humanity and culture engenders multiculturalism.

I value authenticity and cultural awareness in the language classroom. Authentic language use reflects the ultimate goal for using the language (Herrington, Reeves, & Oliver, 2010). Again, as a second language teacher, one of my goals is to rely as much as possible on authentic texts, authentic videos, music, and other media produced by the target culture. Teachers should always aim to "…choose authentic texts that are age- and level- appropriate, and to *edit the task, not the text*" (Shrum & Glisan, 2016, p. 190), or to alter the activity to better suit the learners' needs, not alter the materials. Moreover, authentic experiences (with native speakers, reality, food, items of realia, etc.) and authentic text and video sources add culture, meaning, and context to language courses.

Technology

Technology improves our world every day, particularly the world of education. Many students are not only familiar with technology, but they are rarely separated from it. These "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) grew up surrounded by technology. There are many benefits to using technology in an L2 classroom, such as saving time, individualizing learning, and allowing access to authentic materials and native speakers (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Technology used for technology's sake, or used without

communicative goals and theories, can be destructive (Arnold & Ducate, 2011), technology should therefore be viewed as a tool that supplements sounds pedagogy. When used properly, technology can open new opportunities to students, boost motivation and participation, and promote lifelong learning, especially for Generation Z.

Technology allows students to improve in many traditional aspects of language learning, but computer mediated communication is a mode of communication by itself. Literacy is often simply defined as the ability to read and write, but it is much more than that. However, according the multiliteracies approach to language learning, "literacy is a dynamic and variable social practice in which communities of users collaboratively make meaning through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing" (Turpin, 2019, p. 36). Again, literacy includes critical thinking, problem solving, and interpretive and analytical skills, as well as skills related to ever-changing information technology.

Following this approach, we see that modern literacy includes computer literacy. Not only do students need to know how to write a letter, they should know how to write e-mail for various purposes, how to carry on a text-based chat, texting language and cultural norms through text or platforms such as Twitter, blogging, or other forms of textual and visual social media interaction, and an many other areas in which communicative norms have been or will be established in the future.

As the pragmatics of computer-mediated communication (CMC) can be informed by the language, it becomes the responsibility of the language teacher to guide students in communicating online in the L2. The use of CMC in SLA is becoming more prominent and more useful as these develop. Technologies such as social networking sites (SNSs) can be particularly useful for the learning of AFL, as Chelghoum (2017) suggests:

Thus, it is highly advocated to use SNSs as a means of language interactions, particularly Arabic, in order to face the challenging feature of diglossia. Facebook users, for instance, can use both the spoken and the written forms of Arabic. This may help Arabic learners, i.e. non-natives, to grasp the diversified varieties that Arabic is mainly recognized for, and, therefore enhance their communicative competence (pp. 41-42).

Teachers must not only embrace technology to improve overall FL competency, but they must also teach their students how to use technology to communicate effectively with awareness of cultural norms in the target language.

Conclusion

Language is the vehicle with which we communicate to share our thoughts, ideas, feelings, and stories. We all learned at least one language by focusing on communication, and so it stands to reason that we can and should do so when learning other languages. Each aspect of a language can be taught with interaction, community, authentic texts and true communicative goals. As a language learner, I want to know how to communicate with speakers of the target language. As a language teacher, I should focus on helping my students reach this same goal.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

LANGUAGE PAPER

This is (not) serious:

Learning to play with words, society, and worlds

PURPOSE AND REFLECTION

I imitated the imitating and in the imitating became different. Possibilities for action, expression, and self-enactment were expanded. I became, in play, something other. (Grand, 2016, p. 603)

I began writing this paper for Dr. Jim Rogers' LING 6800 course exploring sociocultural theory, which was my first introduction to SCT. I wrote it in conjunction with the annotated bibliography on identity found at the end of this portfolio, as both were inspired by the same question: how can I help students become free to act on their own accord, rather than being consigned to pre-conceived identities, limitations, and roles? This question is much larger than I could possibly hope to answer in one or two papers, or even a lifetime of work. My hope, however, is that through this and the work of other researchers we come closer to eliminating the social, mental, and emotional barriers that stop us from reaching our full potential, whatever that potential may be.

I am happy to report that since I began writing this paper, the research available regarding play in SLA has grown significantly. While my goal for the original paper was to demonstrate the theoretical reasons for playing in SLA, in light of this new research, I can now examine the benefits of play demonstrated through recent research studies. Through applying the principles laid out in this paper, I believe that we can, as Grand stated above, expand our possibilities.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores play in the L2 classroom. First, definitions of what constitutes play are provided based on a review of the existing literature, and a novel language play taxonomy is suggested. Play in SLA has been suggested as a way to improve learner outcomes. Sociocultural theory suggests that playing allows learners to act within their ZPD, which encourages internalization. Building on previous research on play, including examining theories on frame and figured worlds, the author recategorizes play into a hierarchal taxonomy comprised of three domains: Playing with Words, Playing with Society, and Playing with Worlds. Second, the author explores current research regarding the benefits of incorporating play into an L2 classroom. Play has been shown to have numerous benefits including lowering students' anxiety level, encouraging creativity, development and exploration of identity, community building and relationship development, increasing cultural understanding, the use of heteroglossia and double voicing, linguistic improvement, and measuring linguistic abilities.

Keywords: play, figured world, frame, double voicing, anxiety, humor, motivation

What is Play?

The purpose of this paper is twofold: 1.) to understand what constitutes play, and, 2.) to understand the benefits of incorporating play into an FL classroom. It has been suggested that play entails growth or elevation, as L.S. Vygotsky (1978) stated, "In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior" (p. 102). As stated previously in this portfolio, Vygotsky theorized that during play, children act within their ZPD. Play allows users to critique, analyze, and modify ideas, "In our view, adults' engagement in pretend activity can be traced as having the same goal of learning about and making sense of their experiences" (Göncü & Perone, 2005, p. 141). Adults, just like children rely on play—including imitation, pretending, or make-believe—to understand the world around them.

Play has been described as imagination in action, although imagination can also be understood as play without action, or internalized play (Vygotsky, 1978). To better understand this phenomenon, it is useful to turn to an example from cinema. In Steven Spielberg's *Hook*, there is a scene where an adult Peter Pan sits with the Lost Boys at what appears to be a scrumptious dinner. Pan quickly realizes that there is no food, and he cannot understand how the Lost Boys are eating and enjoying it. When he finally plays with them, one of the boys exclaims, "You're doing it! You're using your imagination!" (Spielberg, 1991).

Based on Vygotsky's (1978) definition of play as "an imaginary, illusory world in which the unrealizable desires can be realized" (1978, p. 93), SLA researchers tend to use three main definitions of play with regards to the foreign language classroom. Lantolf (1997) describes play as a type of "private speech," Cook (2000) describes play as

manipulation of "the forms and functions of language for language learning practice, aesthetic pleasure, entertainment, and often humor" (as stated in Bell, Skalicky, & Salsbury, 2013, p. 72), while Tarone (2000) suggests that play is "a social phenomenon... [which is] nonliterally-oriented, intrinsically motivating, and rule-based" (p. 32). By combining these definitions, we see that play promotes both learning and fun.

Play is ubiquitous, multi-faceted, and extremely difficult to define. Hann (2017) notes, "researchers have been rather lax in their uses of terms such as 'play', 'humor', and 'creativity'. This is hardly surprising given that these associated phenomena are multi-functional and multi-faceted in nature." (p. 221). In order to better understand the many facets of LP, there must be a codification of different types of play. Building on the work of preceding theorists like Warner, I would like to offer my own taxonomy of play.

Playing with Words, Playing with Society, and Playing with Worlds.

This Play Taxonomy may first be illustrated by the following example. During a simple game of catch, one person throws the ball and the other attempts to catch it. After retrieving the ball, their roles are reversed, and the previous thrower is now the catcher. The ball is the tool, representing **Playing with Words**. The relationship and interaction between the two players, their physical distance, perhaps their throwing style (maybe one is trying to throw too high in order to competitively defeat the other) reflects **Playing with Society**. The rules and structure of the game, and the location where they are playing, the game, demonstrate **Playing with Worlds**. While the three domains can be understood separately, each interacts inextricably from the others. As Hann (2017) noted, "these associated phenomena are multi-functional and multi-faceted in nature" (p. 221).

Playing with Words

When we think of playing, one of the first words that comes to mind in the same semantic field is 'toys'. Childhood play involves dolls, building blocks, toy instruments, puzzles, cards games, balls, and innumerable other playthings. We play with our food and we play with our hair. Playing in its most visible form involves the manipulation of tools which become our toys or playthings.

In SLA, the tools that we manipulate are our words. Repetition of sounds, words, or phrases, singing songs or reciting tongue twisters are playing with the language, but when they are performed in front of or with others they have a more social dimension to them, approaching the next level of the taxonomy. Learners may play with the parts of words to create novel ones through play. Belz (2002) describes LP as "the conscious repetition or modification of linguistic forms such as lexemes or syntactic patterns" (p. 16). Metalinguistic play is common among more proficient second language learners and native speakers. This type of Playing with Words is not simply reusing words, but also the creation of neologisms, new words. It allows learners to take ownership of the language and to internalize its forms. The most complex level of Playing with Words involves playing with their meaning. Double entendre, sarcasm, puns, jokes, and irony are examples of speech that falls under Playing with Words. These examples involve manipulation of words, their constructions, and their meanings.

Playing with Society

The next level of play involves the manipulation of social relationships and identities. In Playing with Society, the voices, the words, and, especially, the pragmatics employed, are altered from daily language or the usual routine. Teasing and flirting are

just some examples of playing with relationships. In each case, one interlocuter is temporarily altering their relationship with another person.

Heteroglossia, introduced by Bakhtin (1981), refers to borrowing someone else's words, voice, or phrases. It is "the set of styles and language varieties someone appropriates and internalizes from others" (LaScotte & Tarone, 2019, p. 98). Heteroglossia therefore refers to the phrases, sayings, and words that we take from other people or sources. Hann (2019) notes that words' meanings are "forged and altered by usage, so that words carry within them previous intentions, connotations and contextual flavors" (pp. 222-223). The ability to utilize these different phrases and the social baggage that they carry, is heteroglossia.

In play, heteroglossia often comes in the form of *double voicing*, "a kind of imaginative play that simultaneously draws on a multiplicity of voices" (LaScotte & Tarone, 2019, p. 98). Unlike heteroglossia, double voicing does not require a direct quotation but is more often the paraphrasing of someone's utterance. Double voicing tends to be more playful, and it is a retelling of a story while mimicking the other person's voice or attitude, which may or may not be an accurate recreation.

Fiction and Dramatic Play (as in theater, film, comedy, television, and other forms of performance) fall somewhat between the domains of Playing with Society and Playing with Worlds. For the actors, who are taking on different identities and acting under a different set of rules than normal, Dramatic Play most often falls into the realm of Playing with Worlds. For the audience, they observe rather than themselves acting within the play world, and thus are closer to the realm of Playing with Society.

Again, each domain affects the others and cannot be understood independently.

Playing with Worlds

Both all-encompassing and difficult to see, Playing with Worlds surrounds the other domains of LP. To better understand Playing with Worlds, we examine two important terms from SLA literature: Figured worlds, and Frame.

Figured Worlds

A *Figured World* is a way to describe the "socially constructed and culturally figured nature of language, tools, and interactions…" (Vågan, 2011, p. 45) or the set of rules which determine the roles, relationships, and possible actions for those who participate in it. There are innumerable figured worlds; for example, romantic figured worlds in which love, jealousy, and flirtation, etc. determine the actions of those participating in them (Vågan, 2011, pp. 48-50).

The actions of people within these figured worlds are determined by the rules, and any action that is proscribed by these rules are jarring to the participants. Figured worlds not only influence the actions of those participating in them, but they are also shaped *by* the participants. These worlds "take place as social processes" (Vågan, 2011, p. 55) and are determined by setting and communal consent. By abiding by the rules of the figured world, participants are consenting to its existence.

Frame

Frame is similar to a figured world. Developed by Goffman (1974), the frame is the set of rules and roles expected given a situation. For example, the frame of the classroom defines roles for a teacher and students, along with the different types of students that may be in any given classroom, and defines appropriate behavior given the culturally defined classroom. For instance, classroom in Japan would have slightly

different roles and rules of behavior than one in an American school, just as an Elementary school classroom would look very different from a college amphitheater. It is within these frames that our relationships and behaviors are determined, and anything outside of these culturally agreed upon rules draws attention and surprise.

Another such frame is *play*. Within the play frame, the rules of normal behavior are circumvented and replaced by new rules determined by the play type and instance. In a game, the rules of the game must be explicitly followed or risk changing or ending the game. For example, in dramatic play, uncharacteristic behavior might be considered "breaking the fourth wall" and interacting with the audience in film or theater. The actor steps outside of the dramatic play frame (sometimes even outside of their role) and into the "real" world.

While situational and locational clues are often used to understand a real-world frame, in play there are other signals which inform participants of the change of frame. Hann (2017) offers several examples of how play might be framed: smiling, laughter, exaggerated gestures, silly voices, or comments like, "I was only joking", etc. "When play is signaled—for example, by a dog's wagging tail or a human smile—then the ordinary flow of events is disrupted" (p. 222) and interlocuters enter the play frame.

Within the play frame, people are freed from the constraints placed upon them in daily life. They might fight or flirt, be gallant or gauche, or change their identity from student to princess or ancient wizard. A princess strutting about a classroom lording over the other students would certainly draw their anger if they are not willingly acting as her humble subjects or royal advisors. "It is therefore vitally important that play is signaled as such, otherwise the play-instigator may find themselves in trouble" (Hann, 2017, p.

221). It is important to note that the play frame must be signaled to initiate play in a classroom setting, or the rules of the real world will still apply.

In the existing research on LP, there are several notable examples which illustrate the varied ways of signaling a play frame. For example, a student in a role-play where he acted curt towards a classmate, was concerned that his classmates might think that he is simply a rude person. Rather than "signaling laughter, a smile, or a wink… [he] steps out of the entire simulation, which shows not only that he is playing at being impatient, but also that he is just playing at being a customer in a restaurant and at speaking German." The student so wholly steps out of the play frame that even "[t]he foreign language becomes part of the 'game' for the speakers, rather than a legitimate means of expression" (Warner, 2004, p. 81). Therefore, shifting out of play allows the student to show that they are, in fact, playing.

However, elsewhere, in CMC and other informal text-based communication, laughter, smiles, or gestures on the part of the player cannot signal play if their interlocutors cannot hear or see them. In one study, Belz and Reinhardt (2004) noted that a student was employing "elongated words [as] textual icons of actual, physical play" (p. 342) rather than relying on visual or vocal cues. These play and emotive signals are determined by the CMC medium and the community in which they are employed (Aull, 2019), just as the cues which signal play in face-to-face communication are determined by the community in which they are used.

Despite the freedom from the ordinary which the play frame affords us, there are still rules which must be followed and consequences if they are broken:

> [I]t would be unwise to extrapolate that play does not have consequences in the world beyond the play frame. People and animals may not seriously hurt each other when playing but this does not mean that their play has no effect on the power dynamics of their social group. 'the play bite is not real, but it is also *not not real*' – Bateson 1972 (Hann, 2017, p. 222).

Particularly adept performances may draw admiration and improve social status, or they may draw the ire of social competitors. Even within play, social dynamics are complex.

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With an understanding of figured worlds and frame, we can more clearly understand what Playing with Worlds is, and how it encompasses all other forms of LP.

> It is through the play with situational, relational, and personal identities that the participants manage to momentarily enter an alternative universe unfettered by the roles and the setting of the classroom: the learner becomes a teacher or parent, an assigned task becomes fair trade, and the student becomes a music lover (Waring, 2012, pp. 15-16).

When acting within the figured world or frame of a classroom, there is typically one teacher and many students. Their interactions are determined by their culturally agreed-upon classroom frame (with expectations that might range from students raising their hands before speaking, referring to the teacher as Mr. or Ms., to sitting in a circle). The frame or figured world is determined by those who participate in it, and they tend to want it to work well.

However, these rules and roles can be altered, at least temporarily, by entering a different frame or figured world. When a new frame or figured world is entered into, teachers and students can take on different roles than they would in the classroom frame. There are numerous examples of the play frame or figured worlds in the SLA literature. Play with Worlds can also be spontaneous, and frames can be spontaneously created or modified.

Play with worlds can be seen in Hann's (2017) study which provides an illustration of spontaneous playing with worlds. To summarize, in this particular study, students were given a role-play assignment to act either as a boss or as an employee who is sick. One "boss" student, Juan, when responding to the information that his "employee" is sick, coldly proclaims, "OK," not showing any sympathy or concern for the "employee." The class erupts into laughter. Juan only responded with "OK" because he lacked the linguistic aptitude to respond in a socially appropriate way to his "employee's" plight. The socio-pragmatic misuse of "OK" represents the tension between the students' actual linguistic level and what he would like to be able to say (Cook, 2000; Vadeboncoeur, Perone, & Panina-Beard, 2016), purportedly something more sympathetic.

Rather than mocking the student for being unable to appropriately, the other students entered into a play frame together in which his "OK" was fully intentional. "Thus, Juan's use of the word 'OK' represents the difference between the English level he has reached and the level he strives for as he re-imagines the unintentional impression the word creates as an intentional self-centered response to his interlocuter's plight" (Hann, 2017, p. 239). Together, the students and teacher have transformed Juan's linguistic mistake into a funny story. The students continue this play over several days, even adding to the story and pretending that the employee has died, to which, of course, the boss simply says, "OK" and asks about the now-deceased employee's work. Laughing with the student because of the humorous world he created spurred the classroom culture and units, it becomes a "running joke" (Hann, 2017, p. 238). This

illustrates the ability for social groups to create a play frame or figured world within their currently functioning frame. This frame with in a frame may be spontaneous or planned.

Similarly, the above example demonstrates a case in which words, normally a tool of Playing with Words to be used within the world, have affected the World. Each realm of play can affect the others. "Imaginative play, and the variety of culturally grounded ways in which pretense and imagination are used, are the practices that ultimately enable participants to imagine and create for both personal and social liberation" (Vadeboncoeur, Perone, & Panina-Beard, 2016, p. 302). By spontaneously, accidentally, or intentionally playing with worlds, there is an extraordinary freedom in exploring social rules, linguistic roles, and cultural norms.

Playing with worlds also includes imagination. Cook proclaimed, "It might be that… the first function of language is the creation of imaginative worlds: whether lies, games, fictions or fantasies" (Cook, 2000, p. 47). "Imagination animates play and may very well be the essence of play" (Reichling, 1997, p. 43). Imagination encompasses so much of daily life and thought, that it has been suggested that, perhaps, "playful talk is the norm and that sustaining the non-playful talk is what consumes our energy!" (Waring, 2012, p. 17). We are constantly imagining and reimagining our world, and this happens in the classroom, as well.

With the interconnected domains of Playing with Words, Playing with Society, and Playing with Worlds, it is simpler to understand what constitutes play and what benefits play can have for language learners. LP is the manipulation of words, relationships, or frame, but this alone does not define something as play: "Play can only be so classified if the participants in it regard it as such" (Hann 2016, p. 228).

Benefits of L2 Play

Disconnection from reality, disruption and subversion of social structures, and the introduction of random elements, have particular benefits for all of us, and that is perhaps why we are so fond of them, even when they are forbidden (Cook, 2000, p. 5).

We love to play.

Simply enjoying something, however, is rarely reason enough to include it in the necessary activities of learning or work. While playfulness is too often cast aside in favor of serious work, games and play were not always looked down upon with regards to learning. Tarpey (2007) notes that during the first part of the twentieth century, there was quite a bit of interest in language games for SLA, before the focus turned to other forms of learning. There is a renewed interest in play, games, and gamification in language learning and language learning technology today.

There are important theoretical bases to include play in our modern language classroom. Vygotsky's approach advocated for guided socially-constituted 'scaffolding' activities. Scaffolding can be provided by a teacher or it can occur within the play frame, because, "The constraining rules of games may be viewed as such a scaffolding, while the self-directed egocentric patterning of linguistic form to no obvious communicative purpose may be viewed as part of the internalization" (Cook, 2000, p. 175). The process of internalization requires practice and repetition to occur. Play provides such an opportunity within the ZPD. To reiterate, within play both the scaffolding and the means for internalization are provided by the play frame itself.

There are numerous benefits to including play in SLA methodologies, some of which are investigated below. In reference to Tarone's description of LP, Cook (2000) notes that Tarone "has specifically taken up the notion of language play as an activity

which contributes to language acquisition in specific ways: by lowering affective

barriers; by destabilizing interlanguage; by providing practice in the use of interlanguage

for creative and hypothetical purposes; and by enabling the learner to internalize many

different voices appropriate to many different roles" (p. 175).

By using play within the language classroom, teachers and students gain a

temporary freedom from the roles that would otherwise bind them to only certain sets of

behavior and speech. Play may promote a more interactive, student-centered classroom.

A student might never learn to speak as a manager to his or her employee, for example, if

he or she only ever interacts with peers and those in authority. Playing allows the

freedom necessary to fully develop language skills in the L2 that students might

otherwise not have sufficient opportunity to learn or practice.

Motivation

Perhaps the most obvious benefit to play is that it is fun. Defining play as a ludic

activity acknowledges its influence on motivation. "[Play] may contribute to language

learning by virtue of its close ties with intrinsic motivation—a widely acknowledged

factor in SLL… An intrinsically motivated person gains satisfaction from the work itself

rather than any external rewards such as money or prestige" (Waring, 2012, p. 2).

Motivated students participate more fully in classroom activities and tend to work harder

to develop L2 skills. As Harris and Daley noted,

> Students exceeded expectations as they stretched themselves. Their ideas flowed
> freely as they created titles, tag lines and visual designs. They explored other
> aspects of their presentations—such as play-based techniques and props they
> could use and role-plays they could set up. Their heightened engagement was
> evident in their enthusiastic planning of their presentations, overheard in
> comments like, 'I'm so inspired' (Harris & Daley, 2008, p. 62).

These students were absorbed in their playful classroom and put in much more than the required effort in developing their L2 and the pragmatic skills the teacher taught them.

Play allowed the students to fully invest themselves in the activities of the classroom in this study. "When our adult learners played in our classes, they were involved in collective experiences that they patently found enjoyable and engrossing" (Harris & Daley, 2008, p. 59). As such, they made significant progress. Similarly, Ojeda (2004) found word games to increase motivation in the L2 classroom, while Bushnell (2008) described "LP as a possible *motivator* and *facilitator*" (p. 64). Vandergriff and Fuchs (2009) observed this benefit and suggest framing learning activities as play, since, "If students perceive the language learning activity as a game, they may be more likely to play" (p. 41). An example of this can be seen in the classic American novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in a scene depicting Tom whitewashing a fence. In this scene, he convinces his friends that, rather than a chore, painting was fun: "they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash" (Twain, 1903, p. 32). Sawyer's friends found the task genuinely enjoyable. Work transformed into play.

Play increases motivation through other means. Anecdotally, the subject of Belz and Reinhardt's 2004 study, for example, found motivation through the creation of novel words (both of his own creation and those encountered outside of class), which he would use frequently in conversation. "He uses it because he likes it, and he likes it because it is his own" (Belz & Reinhardt, 2004, p. 343). In addition to feeling a sense of ownership, the student liked his creative language use because he, "had to work hard to develop the knowledge of German morphology that is necessary to creatively and successfully flout it" (p. 343). Hard work often pays off in a sense of fulfilment and ownership, which are

both intrinsic motivators. The "thrill of creating something new and unplanned, release from the concerns of everyday life, self-confidence, acceptance of failure and foolishness, and the transformation of identity" (Göncü & Perone, 2005, p. 144) are highly motivating.

Playfulness in the L2 classroom allows creativity and freedom and engenders motivation in students. Motivation is "the most influential factor in successfully learning a new language" (Shrum & Glisan, 2016, p. 32), and its value should not be understated.

Anxiety

Anxiety can be an obstacle in the classroom that play helps overcome. "One important factor of this ludic environment is that the learners may feel at ease and relaxed; they may not feel the pressure or stress that is often associated with performance in an academic setting, particularly so in a formal language environment. This factor might allow them to open up and speak more freely which would provide opportunities to practice the language" (Ojeda, 2004, pp. 138-139). A playful atmosphere can encourage students to participate more readily in classroom activities, and, by lowering students' affective barriers (Ojeda, 2004; Tarone, 2002), it allows students to participate more readily in classroom activities.

By encouraging a ludic atmosphere in the classroom, students can overcome nervousness and shyness in order to perform tasks that would otherwise be too face threatening. "[T]he exchange filled with laughter and teasing comments have mediated the students' language learning. It was within this playful dialogue that [the student] accomplished the communication task that she was not able to perform at the earlier point of her turn, that is, to be engaged in a one-on-one conversation with the teacher and

making herself understood in [the L2]" (Katayama, 2009, p. 30). The student was able to complete the task at hand and communicate within the L2 only once the classroom atmosphere became jovial and relaxed. "[L]aughter and playfulness encouraged students to become bold and actively participate in a meaningful and purposeful language learning experience" (Katayama, 2009, p. 30). Katayama demonstrates quite clearly the positive effect that playfulness can have on student participation and confidence.

Similarly, when students are submerged within the play frame during classroom activities, they can shift their focus from the mundane to the imaginary world in which they are participants. "The experiential nature of this activity also alleviated pressures that these adult learners usually felt in relation to using English as their non-native language. They put their dictionaries to one side and were relatively uninhibited in using English in explaining their points of view to one another" (Harris & Daley, 2008, p. 61). This immersion allows students to focus more on communicating and less on accuracy or avoiding embarrassment through mistakes.

Increased focus on the activity also allowed the students to be more comfortable with one another, which, in turn, may further lower the learners' anxiety. "With everyone absorbed in the same activity, play seemed to help individuals overcome potential barriers among them and appreciate diversity and flexibility" (Harris & Daley, 2008, pp. 59-60). Classrooms which encourage play and immersive activities can help students to focus on being understood and on understanding one another. Similarly, lower levels of anxiety and increased understanding encourage increased creativity.

Creativity

Again, play promotes inclusivity, understanding, and creativity in the classroom.

Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane (2016) decry the dearth of creativity in education:

> From our point of view, conventional education discourse is anti-
> creativity…Creativity is expected to be postponed until students are out of
> education. Creativity is not encouraged even in teachers as curriculum is
> prescribed by the state… and instruction is defined by the research-based 'best
> practices' or 'evidence-based teaching.' Even in teaching 'creativity,' it is viewed
> as objective and predictable way of problem-solving (pp. 321-322).

If students are to think and act creatively, they must be given opportunities to do so. How

can students be expected to be creative, if they do not explore creativity in the classroom?

Creativity and play go hand in hand. Imagining new creatures, people, places, and

relationships in dramatic and imaginative play requires the use of creativity. When these

types of activities are used within a classroom, the creativity can help students to better

understand the concepts which they have been studying "In the kinds of play provided in

our classes, there was an emphasis on holistic experiences. Our adult learners made

connections among experiences, people and resources, past, present and future, in their

real and imagined worlds" (Harris & Daley, 2008, p. 63). These creative connections help

learners to internalize more concepts and make links between ideas and concepts.

Such creative connections occurred during a joint reading activity, where the

students "explore[d] the symbolic possibilities of signs and subjectivities, while moving

in and out of the text and back and forth between imagined and real worlds" (Laursen &

Kolstrop, 2017, p. 1). While the students examined texts and tried to make sense of the

words, phrases, and pictures with one another, they were able to seamlessly jump in and

out of the text to one another, the classroom, and the outside world. Together, they

created connections between these realms in an effort to decode the meaning of the FL text they studied. Allowing and encouraging students to creatively learn can allow them to create connections between concepts that they might not have otherwise discovered. This also supports the ACTFL standards and the multiliteracy approach to learning.

Identity

Among the most important, and most complicated, aspects of the FL classroom, student and teacher identities can be impacted significantly by play. Students' identities are determined by "... particular contexts and influenced by their dynamic ethnic, national, gender, class, and social identities" (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 155). These factors are all at play within the language classroom. LP has demonstrable benefits for identity exploration, development, expression and protection.

There are several forms of LP that allow learners to temporarily try new identities. Research into CMC and its possibilities in improving language skills has focused on games and immersive environments (Sykes & Holden, 2011; Van Ryneveld, 2005; Warner, 2004). These games allow learners to either play *in* or *with* the target language. CMC also allows students to try out new identities apart from their own. This freedom is a large draw for online immersive environments (Sykes & Holden, 2011), both in and outside of SLA.

The use of heteroglossia and double voicing in LP allows learners to take on the voices of others. Using other voices aside from our own allows us to step outside of ourselves and play as someone else, if only briefly, as when recounting a story or doing comic impressions. Double voicing can be used in conversations to jump in and out of play. "Within a single speaking-slot-in-progress formal and informal speaking roles can

briefly be shifted into or out of—or stacked. Embedding a theatrical stance or speaking voice as an overlay over institutional roles may simultaneously display an orientation on task—and one away from overly rigid institutional parameters" (Van Dam & Bannink, 2017, p. 256). In this example, the teacher engaged in play with the students, marking the play by changing her voice to gently mock the lesson while fully engaging the students in it, allowing them to feel relaxed and comfortable in the lesson and with the teacher.

Belz suggests that, through LP, learners may be able to "...conceptualize themselves as multicompetent language users with respect to all languages they know as opposed to deficient L2 communicators with respect to only their L2(s)" (2002, p. 32).

Play can also free students. "Imaginative play, and the variety of culturally grounded ways in which pretense and imagination are used, are the practices that ultimately enable participants to imagine and create for both personal and social liberation" (Vadeboncoeur, Perone, & Panina-Beard, 2016, p. 302). The freedom to create, imagine, improve, and explore identity is what makes play so instrumental in allowing students to work within their ZPD.

As learners develop in their L2, they develop a new identity that goes along with that language. The L2 might affect the L1 identity and vice versa, as learners internalize language patterns and nuances. Dramatic play and role play activities can bring in multiple benefits, in identity development, as well. Students have the opportunity to put themselves into different scenarios, assume another identity (LaScotte & Tarone, 2019), and develop their own L2 identities (Van Dam & Bannink, 2016).

As part of identity development, students can explore topics that are uniquely interesting to them. "Classrooms are one context through which our playful learning and

learningful play ought to ground an exploration of what interests us, what we would like to create and discover, who we are and who we might wish to become", Vadeboncoeur, Perone, and Panina-Beard (2016) continue, "as well as providing a context for sitting at the center of the tension between what is and what ought to be" (p. 300). Identity play allows learners to imagine what they might become or even, what they hope to become.

Harris and Daley (2008) made a similar observation about LP's benefits. Establishing an atmosphere of LP can engender "the confidence and know-how to reach within oneself to realize latent capabilities, as well as to reach beyond one's immediate situation and access other people and resources, to the benefit of the individual and the group" (Harris & Daley, 2008, p. 64). This increased confidence is a primary and a secondary benefit of LP, as it is influenced by a greater sense of community, a better understanding of oneself, and numerous other benefits.

Different scenarios allow the practice of different tasks, assuming another identity allows saving face while trying out different styles of speaking and being. "Assuming that finding a (new) voice or identity for oneself in the new language is a key element in acquiring L2 competence, it seemed that after three weeks the students were already well on their way to doing so—in *play*: symbolically modelling an L2 character in a story world rather than being 'themselves'" (Van Dam & Bannink, 2016, p. 274). Students were able to explore different aspects of and possibilities for their emergent L2 identities without the fear of long-term consequences because they were taking on temporary roles during play.

In addition to exploring new identities through FLP, students are also able to develop and demonstrate aspects of their identities that would otherwise remain hidden.

LP allows learners' individualities to come to the fore (Bell, Skalicky, & Salsbury, 2014, p. 94). Students' "interest both shapes their playful interaction and *takes shape* through it" (Laursen & Kolstrup, 2017, p. 1). As students play, their interests are both demonstrated and altered.

The ability to choose one's identity is dependent on *voice*. According to Belz (2002), "Voice is the freedom of the individual to claim authorship in selecting how historicity (identity) and collectivity (role) will intersect... the ability to author or make meaning, to choose which role will be enacted in which way in which institutional context" (p. 18). Thus, learners can choose a different identity if they wish.

While developing an L2 identity is important for all learners, it is especially important for students in immersive environments. ESL, DLI, and study abroad students, therefore, often have similar experiences in struggling with emergent L2 identities. "For multilingual children a lot can be at stake because linguistic participation is not only about using and learning languages. It is also a question of 'becoming audible' (Miller, 1999) in a new language, that is, to be heard and recognized as a legitimate speaker of one's own premises when interacting with others" (Laursen & Kolstrup, 2017, p.1). Learners immersed in their L2 culture strive to gain the skills necessary to express themselves in real ways, interacting in the L2 while staying true to their own identities.

LP can be instrumental for these learners, as Laursen and Kolstrup (2017) demonstrated. Their research, "shows how language play contributes to paving the way for a resignifcation of a potentially vulnerable learner position to a subject position as audible" (Laursen & Kolstrup, 2017, p. 1). Quoting Paugh 2012, "Pretend play offers children a prime context for cultural and linguistic exploration and socialization of one

another… children create alternative social realities in which they hold positions of authority, power, and control…" (Grand, 2016, p. 602). In a sense, LP thus helps in the exploration and negotiation of identity and also gives voice to the voiceless.

Playing in the "safe" space of the classroom mediates risk and is liberating. "[T]he very act of identity display or ascription is laminated with a tone of non-seriousness or treated as fun. In other words, the participants are not only playing with identities but also making it evident that they are cognizant of the play" (Waring, 2012, p. 9). Because all members of a play episode must agree that they are playing, it allows them to don numerous different voices and identities without risk to their own identities.

Community Building and Relationship Development

Play builds community. Poetry, double entendre, changes in voice, puns, sarcasm, and other playful linguistic forms are used by adults in everyday life for entertainment and rapport building (Tarone, 2002), so, it follows that similar linguistic manipulations might do the same in the second language. Play increases camaraderie, a sense of community, and collaboration (Cook, 2000; Göncü & Perone, 2005; Hann, 2017; Harris & Daley, 2008; Warner, 2004). Thus, through the playful development of relationships, students can strengthen their community bonds and create a community of practice.

As part of the classroom's community of practice, teachers and students can use humor to reframe mistakes and shortcomings as shared experiences. In the earlier example where "Juan" acts like a cold-hearted boss during a role-play activity, the play frame created by his linguistic foible strengthens the bonds of the entire class. To an outside observer, the word "OK" is not humorous or inventive. But, for the class, "It is distilled to represent the learners' shared experiences together and their shared limitations

in the TL. As such, its significance can only be truly appreciated by those within his group" (Hann, 2017, p. 239). By turning his linguistic "gap into comedy, he cathartically transforms the learners' potentially negative experiences into positive ones which they can literally laugh off. Indeed, he is able to take [their] shortcomings in performance and make them part of their playful repertoire" (Hann, 2017, p. 239). Humor and play strengthened this classroom community and can do so in many learning contexts.

Students within a shared community of practice, "maintained ongoing complicity in the imaginary re-creation of their shared adult learning space. Such complicity was critical in nurturing a sense of community and support amongst them all" (Harris & Daley, 2008, p. 62). LP and shared imaginative experiences solidify learning communities. Indeed, in many cases, LP can create a learning community out of otherwise disconnected—culturally, socially, linguistically—group of learners, allowing them to forge their own "common cultural reference points" (Hann, 2017, p. 219).

As this community of practice emerges, there are more opportunities to play with relationships and identity. In LP, "at least in some cases, play is utilized precisely for the purpose of negotiating relationships as learners venture out of the asymmetrical teacher-student roles" (Waring, 2012, pp. 16-17). Learners take advantage of opportunities within LP to redefine their relationships with one another and with their instructors. They may begin the class as students and teachers, but may find themselves playing as neighbors, grocers, bus drivers, clients, or siblings through role play.

As instructors take part in classroom LP, they have the opportunity to fulfil their educational responsibilities while building bonds with their students. "Again, institutional and default cultural roles are dialogically merged. The teacher is both a character in the

embedded story-world and the director of talk in the embedding classroom world. As a figure in the story the students may mildly mock her while respecting her in her institutional role" (Van Dam & Bannink, 2017, p. 272). Students can play with their teacher without disrespect, even though Waring (2012) emphasizes, "It is important to note that in all cases, the playful talk is oriented to by the participants themselves as fun and 'naughty'" (p. 16). Part of what makes LP, and in particular, identity and relationship play, fun, is in its temporary subversion of traditional rules. Thus, playing different roles or "breaking the rules" may provide numerous linguistic and social benefits.

Cultural Understanding

Intercultural understanding improves significantly with the incorporation of FLP in the classroom. Students have been shown to learn more deeply about cultural values and beliefs and to increase tolerance for people from different backgrounds through FLP. This understanding can come from the broader skill of being able to see the world through the perspective of another person and from the specific knowledge of the learner's target culture. Cultural connections and comparisons can thus be seen.

Improvised drama, or *improv*, "provided opportunities to develop abilities to listen, share, tolerate and be open to ideas and others" (Göncü & Perone, 2005, p. 144). Other types of LP can have a similar effect. "As these adult learners shifted perspectives in role and took ownership of the discussion, they became increasingly engrossed in relating to one another from different standpoints" (Harris & Daley, 2008, p. 59). In each case, LP encouraged students to listen without pre-judging one another and to relate to their classmates with more cultural awareness. "They showed flexibility and willingness in taking on other peoples' points of view and accepting change, qualities which help

foster social capital and learning communities" (Harris & Daley, 2008, p. 61). As the

learners participated in FLP activities, their paradigms shifted toward seeing one another

from different perspectives. I help my students see other ways of thinking and opinions.

In teaching language for specific purposes, temporarily through play, students

may be exposed to what client communication. "I use this play of non-verbal interaction

in training students becoming psychotherapists to experience aspects of the speech and

movement patterns of their clients" (Grand, 2016, p. 603). As learners gain this

understanding, they are better able to relate to and help those with whom they will work.

Within language classrooms, similar strides are taken in helping the students to

understand better the members of communities in which they are hoping to communicate.

In an EFL class for professionals, researchers observed:

> …these adult learners will find themselves dealing with people in different roles
> and relationships such as those they took on here – for example, foremen, clients,
> suppliers, contractors, regulation authorities, workmates and so on. This
> observation highlights role-play as a way of promoting individuals' understanding
> of different roles, relationships and perspectives (Mead, 1934) (Harris & Daley,
> 2008, p. 59).

By including dramatic play, be it pre-planned or improvised, students develop an ability

to see situations from others' perspectives. They are better prepared to interact with

people from different backgrounds (and to make cultural comparisons) through play.

Culturally specific knowledge and understanding increases through LP, too. Play

gives students and teachers unique opportunities to explore authentic content within the

classroom. Students can perform plays, read comic books, watch television programs or

movies, etc. all in the L2 as part of their classwork. Using creative and playful resources

from the target language (TL) allows students a glimpse into cultural beliefs.

> Certain images and tropes are employed to valorize ways of behaving. These behaviors are imitated and embodied, rejected, or altered. As with Wonder Woman, other fiction and figures of the media surround become imitated and played with and form the ground of new ways of living. Images are produced and disseminated as memes. These memes are mimed in turn by individuals and groups of individuals (Grand, 2016, p. 605).

These authentic materials are produced within their respective cultural groups, and they both demonstrate shared cultural values and influence them.

Students, by playing with authentic media, can similarly imitate the tropes, "…enabling the learner to internalize many different voices appropriate to many different roles" (Cook, 2000, p. 175). When learners imitate in play, they explore different aspects of language and culture. As they imitate, they can internalize the different ideas and ways of being in order to change themselves and their understanding of the world. This allows students to participate in the communities of the TL they are studying, as they develop the understanding necessary to fully engage with the cultural artifacts they encounter. "Thus, literacy in this sociocultural sense does not reside in the minds of individuals, but in the relations between language users, texts, and contexts of use" (Warner & Michelson, 2018, p. 5). Such relations are key and play helps us see them more clearly.

Play helps learners understand the cultures of those with whom they interact through imagination, as well. Peleprat and Cole theorized that, "Imagination is the process of resolving and connecting the fragmented, poorly coordinated experience of the world so as to bring about a stable image of the world" (2011, p. 399). Imagination fills the gaps between what people observe physically and what they understand, because

> …[I]magination includes dreaming, daydreaming or mind wandering, remembering, anticipating, exploring alternatives, or enjoying fiction or any other cultural experiences. Imagination is thus an embodied experience, often

emotionally engaging, and potentially transformative for self and others (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016, p. 229).

It is through imagination that adults solve problems and make sense of the world. Were it not for our ability to imagine alternative realities, we would never be able to solve complex problems, empathize with others, invent technologies, or create art.

Linguistic Improvements

Metalinguistic play can help learners acquire more linguistic forms. By altering the rules of language, learners become better at manipulating the language (Tarone, 2002). Learners internalize different forms of the language through LP because they are aware that there are more possibilities and their interlanguage is still in flux.

Van Dam and Bannink (2016) observed a class in which play was encouraged, particularly through dramatic performances. They noted significant improvements in L2 capacity. They stated, "Their performances were truly stunning: fluent and authentic-sounding in spite of occasional slips and hitches. There was a great flow and motivation was high: everybody volunteered for a part" (p. 274). Because the students were able to play using different identities, they were able to act without concern for losing face.

In order to be fully proficient in the L2, "What is needed is a full range of interactions" (Cook, 2000, p. 200). Play allows this development to occur naturally by allowing all types of interaction and relationships to, at least temporarily, exist in the language classroom. "In fact, one might argue that the overarching accomplishment of all three types of identity play is, to a certain extent, leveling the playing field between the teachers and students as learners momentarily become teachers, peers, or human beings with a life outside the classroom" (Waring, 2012, p. 16). This allows students to

practice other forms of speaking than the usual classroom dynamic would allow, and also encourages the development of a strong learning community.

Play encourages memorization. "The instances of language use which people most readily memorize verbatim are not from the mundane discourses of every-day life, where exact wording is unimportant, but those marked by unusual, elevated, or archaic language, those reinforced by parallel structures such as rhythm and rhyme, and those with important or emotional content" (Cook, 2000, p. 199). These memorized "chunks" of language become voices that learners can draw from, as LaScotte and Tarone (2019) explain, "Such complexes are relatively vivid in our memory and are easily called up for re-enactment for our own purposes, making us heteroglossic" (p. 97). Memorization is not always a negative phenomenon in language learning, as it facilitates heteroglossia, changes to the interlanguage, and grammatical accuracy, and increases in vocabulary.

Metalinguistic play can help learners acquire more linguistic forms. By altering the rules of language during LP, learners become better at manipulating the language in general, and, in turn, improve their interlanguage (Tarone, 2002). They can internalize different forms of the language because they are aware that there are more possibilities and their interlanguage is still in flux. Poetry, double entendre, changes in voice, puns, sarcasm, and other playful linguistic forms are used by adults in everyday life for entertainment and rapport building (Tarone, 2002), so it would follow that similar linguistic manipulations would do the same in the second language.

During LP, students can focus on language forms without sacrificing communication. "[L]anguage play seems to encourage learners to independently focus on language forms through noting, comparing forms within and between languages, and

receiving feedback from interlocuters" (Tarpey, 2007, p. 12). Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015) observed notable linguistic benefits, as well: "[L]anguage play improved the grammatical accuracy of the learners during the present study, it also helped them to recall the language items better and finally, it caused the learners to have a positive attitude towards form-focused activities in the classroom" (p. 130). In another study, Matusov and Marianovic-Shane (2016) observed that by turning a difficult homework assignment into a game, the task was much more easily completed and even enhanced by allowing the student to find connections that would have otherwise been ignored. Students notice different forms and receive feedback during LP even while they practice. Encouraging play in SLA can transform difficult or boring tasks into interesting puzzles for students. Allowing the scaffolding of play to help students increases their focus on a task while allowing them to practice their skills within the ZPD.

Borrowing someone's voice can be a powerful means of SLA. LaScotte and Tarone (2019) found that the imagined "voices" of their subjects were more accurate and fluent. "One way in which we see these voices, according to Bakhtin, is in ludic language play, when a speaker manipulates language for his or her own amusement and pleasure, or for irony, sarcasm, or resistance, exploiting an interplay among the voices" (LaScotte & Tarone, 2019, p. 98). Playing with voices and tones is pleasurable and empowering.

Heteroglossia and Double Voicing noticeably improve L2 performance. LaScotte & Tarone (2019) noticed huge jumps in accuracy and fluency when L2 learners used the "voice" of someone more advanced in the L2. Sometimes the learners would even make a particular error before and after the instance of double voicing, but they would use the construct or phrase correctly while using the voice. They found that, during a narration

activity, "when these bilinguals enacted the voices of more proficient speakers of English, the accuracy, fluency, and (sometimes) complexity of their own speech almost always improved" (LaScotte & Tarone, 2019, p. 99). These learners' ability to use the L2 in this manner suggests that they are practicing the L2 within their ZPD during the double voiced narrations.

Measure of Linguistic Ability

Employing play in the L2 classroom can also measure students' progress in acquiring the language (Belz & Reinhardt, 2004; Cook, 2000; Tarpey, 2007). Through play, multiple skills can be demonstrated. "[F]oreign language play—and multilingual foreign language play in particular—may function not only as a sign of how the FL is 'going in', but also as an externalized index (in the medium of language) of what the learner has already learned and how he or she has been changed in the proves of FL internalization" (Belz & Reinhardt, 2004, p. 330). Playing with the language demonstrates a higher command and a higher level of internalization than may otherwise be demonstrated. If a student "can play with a language in creative and socially-effective ways—to tell a joke or a story— [he or she] could certainly also buy an airline ticket. The reverse however is not necessarily true. The ability to play with the language effectively is indicative of a broader command, and can thus be used as a test of proficiency" (Cook, 2000, p. 204). In other words, if learners can play well with the L2, they can also accomplish a number of other tasks. Play works well with task-based instruction.

Not only does the ability to play with and the manner with which learners use the language in their play demonstrate their proficiency, but the ability to play with language is part of proficiency. "Knowing a language, and being able to function in communities…

makes [being able to play with language] a necessary part of advanced proficiency"

(Cook, 2000, p. 150). If a learner can play with the L2, he or she has developed numerous

linguistic and pragmatic skills that can be applied in social situations in the language.

Play is a requirement of advanced communication.

Conclusions on Play

There are far-reaching benefits from incorporating play in FL classroom. While

further study of *how* to play for the greatest benefit is needed, there are clear advantages

shown through SLA research. These benefits include lowering learners' anxiety levels,

encouraging creativity, development of and exploration of identity, community building

and relationship development, increasing cultural understanding, the use of heteroglossia

and double voicing, linguistic improvement, and measuring linguistic abilities.

What now?

Should instructors want to incorporate LP into their curriculum? If so, how do

they do it?

Sometimes, all students need to play is permission to play. "If students perceive

the language learning activity as a game, they may be more likely to play" (Vandergriff

& Fuchs, 2009, p. 41). As directors of talk, teachers can, "model language play just like

they would model new grammar structures, thus giving clear signals that language play is

appropriate" (Vandergriff & Fuchs, 2009, p. 41), and demonstrating *how* to play in the

L2. Instructors can find creative means of incorporating LP into their classes.

Perhaps the most common suggestion offered by researchers is to create an

appropriate classroom environment, one which is conducive to play and positive for the

students. Creating an environment in which LP can occur naturally within the lesson

requires several important factors. "What is crucial here as well is that there are practices of mentoring, collaboration, and group and individual practice, all of which lay ground for improvisatory inspiration to occur" (Grand, 2016, p. 610). As was observed in another study, play was most fluidly incorporated into the L2 classroom through "recognizing affordances for play in the moment-by-moment unfolding of ritual task-oriented discourses" (Van Dam & Bannink, 2017, p. 256). Again, play may be spontaneous and joyful: "The possibilities for playful teaching are limited only by our ability to imagine what might connect to students' sources of life, love, and laughter and to believe in our ability to fulfill curricular mandates even as we explore ways to generate joy in our secondary classrooms" (Ferguson, 2018, pp. 46-7).

Incorporating humor is a much more dangerous endeavor. "There is a thin line that separates laughter and pain, comedy and tragedy, humor and hurt" (Bombeck, 1978, p. 231). Indeed, teasing is a dangerous activity that teachers might be better off avoiding altogether (Bell, Skalicky, & Salsbury, 2014; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018). Humor can easily fall flat, be misunderstood, or be offensive. It might be suggested that, should an instructor wish to incorporate humor into their classroom discourse, they would do well to study professional comedians who have honed their craft over years.

"There is no doubt that a rich array of pedagogical puzzles regarding playful talk in the classroom is yet to be solved, such as how teachers can regain control when play imposes a subversive order in the classroom or what teachers' decision-making processes are regarding when to permit or cut off play" (Waring, 2012, p. 17). The answer to this question will require more research than is currently available. Until researchers have

solved these puzzles, Waring (2012) proclaims, "we will simply have to settle with an empirical appreciation for the license to play" (p. 17).

LANGUAGE PAPER

The Benefits of Informality:

A Look into Teaching an Arabic Dialect

PURPOSE AND REFLECTION

This paper was first presented in its original form at the USU Graduate Student Research Symposium in Logan, UT, April 12, 2013.

When I came to USU, the Arabic program was in its second year. The fledgling program was being designed and implemented by Dr. Albirini, and I had the opportunity to work under him both as a teaching assistant and as a teacher. I became keenly aware of some of the curricular decisions that need to be made in order to run an effective Arabic program. With Dr. Albirini's guidance, I navigated the questions of when to teach what, and how much of it to teach, and how to teach it. I began to create my own classroom materials and activities that reflected both the institution's goals and my own goals for Arabic language teaching.

When I was presented with an opportunity to teach Arabic at a local grade school, I jumped at the chance. I soon discovered, however, that there was little guidance available to me with regards to material, curricula, or even learning goals. I relied on my fellow Arabic teacher to help me navigate this new experience. Throughout my time there, I found myself making administrative decisions regarding the Arabic program, even writing the school's Arabic language curriculum.

This paper is aimed at guiding all those who make curricular decisions for an Arabic language program, including instructors, administrators, and program directors: even those who do not have an in-depth understanding of the Arabic language and of the field of teaching Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL).

ABSTRACT

The Arabic language consists of multiple registers, dialects, and levels of formality, a phenomenon often referred to as *diglossia* (Ferguson, 1959). While this dichotomy has been demonstrated to be an oversimplification of the state of the Arabic language, it still remains a useful tool in understanding how Arabic functions. While many Arabic language programs rely heavily on the teaching of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), there are compelling reasons to shift to a greater focus on the teaching of Colloquial Arabic (QA), including the sociopragmatic uses of codeswitching, or mixing the linguistic registers. The author, while acknowledging some of the pedagogical reasons for a focus on MSA, argues in favor of an early introduction of QA in engendering communicative competence in Arabic language learners. This paper is designed as a guide for program administrators, teachers, curriculum developers, and others who have the responsibility to design or run an Arabic language program.

Key Words: diglossia, codeswitching, colloquial Arabic, dialect, communicative competence, goals

Introduction

Arabic is spoken from Northern Africa to the Arabian Peninsula and up through the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. It is spoken by more than 200 million native speakers and is a heritage language spoken throughout the world, including for the roughly 1.8 billion Muslims for whom it is the language of faith. Some of the most geopolitically critical areas of the modern world are home to native Arabic speakers, making it "urgent that Americans learn Arabic. If the United States is going to try to understand, rather than bomb, invade, and occupy part of the world that has been our government's central obsession for almost a decade and a half, then more colleges need to teach Arabic and do so in a vibrant way" (Edwards, 2015). Learning Arabic is a means to achieving geopolitical stability and peace. As Edwards (2015) proclaims, "Higher education has never had a more crucial role to play in achieving peace".

While the influence of the Arab world on worldwide political affairs has led to an increase in the study of AFL in the United States and Europe, there have always been those hoping to learn Arabic for more exalted purposes. "As the language of Islamic scholarship and liturgy, Arabic is used by millions of non-Arab Muslims who can often read it but do not have oral fluency in it" (Albirini, 2016, p. 3). Arabic is the language of the Qur'an, the hadith, and of salah. For millions of Muslims throughout the world, Arabic is a sublime language.

Classical linguists have found their own beauty in the language. "The sentimental attachment of Arabs to CA [Classical Arabic] is not surprising, especially since the language represents important elements in the history of Arab civilisation" (Al-Wer, 1997, p. 261). Albirini explains a similar sentiment, Arabic, "has an uninterrupted literary

tradition that is more than fourteen hundred years old" (Albirini, 2016, p. 3). Indeed, the

loyalty to Classical Arabic has encouraged a following by numerous linguists (Al-Sobh,

Abu-Melhim, & Bani-Hani, 2015; Al-Wer, 1997; Nimis & Nimis, 2009). And, as Nimis

and Nimis (2009) point out, the study of classical works of literature provide an

unparalleled window into the thoughts, beliefs, and values of a culture:

> It is impossible to 'understand' in the sense of being able to decode words and
> actions without also learning to 'understand' in the sense of seeing a different
> world view as human and containing its own logic. Multiculturalism is precisely
> the ability to understand how another person can espouse different beliefs and still
> be as rational and as human as oneself, without necessarily agreeing with those
> beliefs or adopting them (p. 156).

Through the study of Arabic, students gain access to new worlds of thought and

experience.

There is a common understanding throughout the United States that Arabic is a

hard language. "It is also one of most difficult languages, with many national dialects as

well as a formal level that is complex and grammatically rich" (Edwards, 2015). For L1

speakers of English, Arabic shares few cognates and has very different syntactical and

grammatical rules. Indeed, the Defense Language Institute considers Arabic among the

most difficult to learn (AUSA Staff, 2010). This perception of learners in the US is due to

several factors, some of which will be examined in the following sections.

Purpose

The ACTFL World Readiness Standards suggest competence in 5 areas:

communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. For this paper, I

will focus largely on communication. Communicative competence, requires proficiency

in speaking, reading, writing, and listening on a variety of topics and across a range of

contexts. Learners must master complex pragmatic, linguistic and cultural rules to master these proficiencies.

Arabic communicative competence is further complicated by the existence of distinctive formal and colloquial Arabic, which are used for different purposes and in different contexts. Researchers have suggested that these categories were easily separated into contexts where either formal or informal Arabic would be used without cross over between the two registers. However, more recent research has shown that the context in which formal and informal Arabic are significantly more mixed. It has become increasingly clear that Arabic speakers must have an active proficiency in both formal and dialectical Arabic in order to gain true communicative competence. In spite of the need for colloquial Arabic in developing communicative competence, many American Arabic programs neglect or reject the teaching of a dialect in favor of a singular focus on formal Modern Standard Arabic (MSA).

The purpose of this paper is to analyze current research regarding the study of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and colloquial Arabic (QA) in Arabic language courses in the United States, as well as to demonstrate the benefits of informality for non-native speakers of Arabic and to explore options for making use of these benefits.

Diglossia

The Arabic language has been termed *diglossic* (Ferguson, 1959) because of the presence of distinct formal, or high, and informal, or low, varieties. Ferguson (1959) defines diglossia as:

> a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed

variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation. (p. 336).

This paradigm, based on Ferguson's 1959 work, holds that formal Arabic is used in formal situations or situations in which the speaker or writer wishes to appear knowledgeable, professional, or educated. Informal Arabic is used when formality is not required or desirable, such as conversations with friends and family.

For AFL learners, "What makes the learning of Arabic even more challenging and time-consuming is the duality of the language (diglossia) – that is, the strong distinction between the standard variety (fuṣḥa) or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), on the one hand, and the spoken one [QA] (ʿammiyya, or darija), on the other hand" (Brosh, 2019, p. 353). As complicated as the Arabic situation may appear upon realizing that there are two varieties of Arabic to learn, Ferguson's theory on diglossia is, in reality, oversimplified.

Many researchers argue that Arabic should be considered multi-glossic, or a spectrum, rather than purely diglossic (for example, Al-Sobh, Abu-Melhim, & Bani-Hani, 2015; Al-Wer, 1997; Albirini, 2011; Alsahafi, 2016; Brosh, 2019; Holes, 2004; Palmer, 2007, 2008; Parkinson, 2003; Ryding, 2009; Wilmsen, 2006; Younes, 2006). There are numerous forms of Arabic: "Classical Arabic (CA), the traditional language of the Qur'an, used for religious purposes; and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the written language of contemporary literature, journalism, and formal education—as well as an intermediate variety, known as Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA), between the high (standard) and low (colloquial) varieties" (Al-Sobh, Abu-Melhim, & Bani-Hani, 2015, p. 275). Ryding (2009) describes ESA as a, "'cultivated,' 'literate,' 'formal,' or 'educated'

spoken Arabic or the inter-regional koine" (pp. 49-50) that exists somewhere between QA and MSA.

The dichotomy between MSA and QA is further complicated by the existence of multiple colloquial varieties: "Colloquial Arabic, a term used to refer to a large number of nonstandard spoken varieties, varies both horizontally (geographical variation) and vertically (social variation) across the Arab World. Thus, colloquial Arabic is a collective term which refers to a wide range of non-standard Arabic varieties existing along a dialect continuum…" (Alsahafi, 2016, p. 5-6).

Thus, we see that, "The concept of Arabic as a 'diglossic' language, if it was ever accurate, is now an oversimplification: the behavior of most Arabic speakers, educated or not, is rather one of constant style shifting along a cline at opposite ends of which are 'pure' MSA and the 'pure' regional dialect, more accurately conceived of as idealized constructs than real entities" (Holes, 2004, p. 49). The rich spectrum of use is complex.

In spite of its oversimplification, the concept of Arabic diglossia can still be useful for understanding the realities of Arabic use. For simplicity in this paper, I refer to formal Arabic, Classical Arabic, and fusha (Modern Standard Arabic) using the broad term of MSA, while I refer to informal Arabic and regional dialects, or colloquial Arabic generally as QA. Understanding the two extremes of the Arabic language provides a window into how and why MSA and QA are mixed. Some do so because of a lack of fluency in MSA (Albirini, 2019; Parkinson, 1996). Albirini (2019) observed that, "some speakers were able to sustain conversations in SA, others resorted to [QA] quite frequently… educated Arabic speakers have a functional ability to use SA in their speech because they are able to produce large chunks of discourse in SA only with intermittent

shifts to CA and English" (p. 52). It is important to keep in mind that while there are

many native speakers of various colloquial Arabic dialects, many researchers argue there

are no native speakers of MSA (Al-Wer, 1997; Cowan, 1968; Parkinson, 2006), although

others disagree with this viewpoint (Albirini, 2019). There are several important

sociolinguistic factors in combining Arabic registers which will be discussed in the next

section.

Codeswitching

The ability to jump back and forth between dialects, languages, or registers is

often referred to as *codeswitching.* Unlike alternating between languages or dialects

because of a lack of fluency or vocabulary, codeswitching is more often based on

sociolinguistic factors. "In the Arab context, codeswitching is intricately related to such

issues as diglossia, identity, language attitudes, language variation and other aspects of

the broader Arab sociolinguistic situation" (Albirini, 2016, p. 2). Codeswitching requires

a sociolinguistic understanding of the historical, political, and social aspects of language.

Codeswitching is a purposeful mixture of MSA and QA. Albirini (2011) suggests eight

reasons that Arabic speakers include some MSA in their otherwise QA conversations:

> (i) to introduce formulaic expressions; (ii) to highlight the importance of a
> segment of discourse; (iii) to mark emphasis; (iv) to introduce direct quotations;
> (v) to signal a shift in tone from comic to serious; (vi) to produce rhyming
> stretches of discourse; (vii) to take a pedantic stand; and (viii) to indicate pan-
> Arab or Muslim identity (p. 541).

These sociocultural factors affect the use of MSA or QA and the mixing of the two.

The use of MSA instead of QA does not depend entirely on formality, "one finds

significant code-switching (CS) between and among them in both formal and informal

settings" (Humeidan, 2016, p. 12), but rather on the purposes of the speaker and listener.

Additionally, "Speakers switch codes intentionally to converge to the addressee's education, occupation, knowledge, and backgrounds" (Hassan, 2019, p. 56), in order to more appropriately and meaningfully communicate with their interlocuters.

Developing Communicative Competence

Communicative competence is the ability to use language appropriately across "a variety of settings, taking into account the relationship between speakers and differences in situations… for a range of different purposes and… using language appropriately for a particular context in a particular community" (Humeidan, 2016, p. 15). Communicative competence requires the ability to make oneself understood and to communicate appropriately given different interlocuters and situations.

Canale and Swain (1980) suggest three components of communicative competence: Grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence (rules of use and rules of discourse), and strategic competence (knowing how to overcome communicative break downs). The ability to properly use codeswitching, knowing when to use MSA and when to use QA, and the ability to appropriately blend the registers is necessary for communicative competence in Arabic.

Learners' Goals

Modern curriculum planning states that one of the first steps in curriculum development is to understand the goals of the learners for whom it is being developed. "Finding out the initial motivations of different learners will be of great value for teachers, material designers, and program coordinators-even more so in the case of teaching AFL due to the sociolinguistic complexity that is present in Arabic speaking communities: diglossia" (Husseinali, 2006, p. 396). The choices of what to teach and

when to teach it are particularly important in TAFL. Anderson and Suleiman (2019) made a similar observation when they asked, "Should educational institutions focus on teaching literature, culture and religious texts, or should they teach the Arabic used in the news media, or should they focus on spoken dialects of Arabic?" (p. 129). They noted a tension between the traditional focus on teaching MSA and the newer teaching focus on QA and the ability to speak. The authors observed, "The gap between these two approaches was a particular issue for Arabic, because of the distance between the spoken and written languages" (Anderson & Suleiman, 2019, p. 129). Curriculum design should ask, which register should be the focus of teaching? If QA will be taught, which dialect should be chosen? What will be useful for AFL students, given their language goals?

The stated goal of most AFL students is communicative competence (Al-Mohsen, 2016; Anderson & Suleiman, 2009; Belnap, 1987; Brosh, 2019; Humeidan, 2016; Husseinali, 2006; Nimis & Nimis, 2009; Palmer, 2008); in particular, students want to be able to communicate with native speakers of Arabic (Belnap, 1987). There are a number of reasons that these learners chose communicating with native speakers to be their main goal, including the desire to travel (Humeidan, 2016; Husseinali, 2006), to conduct business, or to develop a career (Nimis & Nimis, 2009). These goals require the ability to use both MSA and QA, and the exclusion of one or the other would weaken the learners' abilities to accomplish these tasks.

When students travel abroad or go on line and find themselves unable to speak to those around them, they may feel as though their language learning has been for naught (Al-Mohsen, 2016; Humeidan, 2016; Nimis & Nimis, 2009). If learners have not gained proficiency in QA, the may "have difficulty understanding native speakers when they are

conversing with them, which students find quite discouraging" (Al-Mohsen, 2016, pp. 41-42). After months or years of studying Arabic, some students may discover that they have been studying a register of Arabic that they cannot use to speak with members of the TL community. Several studies have found that student motivation is increased with the addition of a QA dialect (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004; Husseinali, 2006; Al-Mamari, 2011; Winke, 2005). This is likely in part due to learners' increased ability to communicate with L1 speakers of Arabic.

In general, while many students prefer to develop their ability to communicate with native Arabic speakers, there are many other reasons that they may wish to study AFL. It is only after discovering what students hope to get out of a language program can appropriate decisions regarding focus and scope be made.

To Be (Informal) or Not to Be (Informal), That is the Question…

Ferguson's distinction between Modern Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic has led to the decision to focus on MSA in many Arabic programs in the United States over the years (Hashem-Aramouni, 2011). "Abundant literature, written by renowned Arabic-language scholars, advocated for an integrated-language approach to teaching Arabic, consisting of teaching MSA and a spoken Arabic variety in a single course of instruction to increase students' communicative competence. Yet, teaching only MSA in classrooms remains the norm." (Al-Mohsen, 2016, p. 125). There are a number of theoretical and pragmatic reasons for these choices.

Some researchers suggest that a singular focus on MSA is needed (Al-Sobh, Abu-Melhim, & Bani-Hani, 2015; Hashem-Aramouni, 2011; Mili, 2011; Nimis & Nimis, 2009). Al-Sobh, Abu-Melhim, and Bani-Hani (2015) argue that MSA should be taught in

an effort to conserve the classical, 'educated' registers of Arabic. MSA, "should be the language of teaching and learning Arabic and other subjects at schools. Using modern standard Arabic in television programs, series and radio programs… [and in] children's literacy... should be implemented in modern standard Arabic.." (Al-Sobh, Abu-Melhim, & Bani-Hani, 2015, p. 277). The authors suggest that not only should AFL learners focus on MSA, but also that native speakers of Arabic should focus more heavily on the use of MSA.

Similarly, but to preserve and promote the use of MSA, the use of MSA in CMC has been championed. Chelghoum (2017) suggests, "…giving equal interest to both Colloquial and Literary Arabic in order to protect their status in the Arab World" (pp. 41-42). She continues, suggesting that, "Facebook users, for instance, can use both the spoken and the written forms of Arabic. This may help Arabic learners, i.e. non-natives, to grasp the diversified varieties that Arabic is mainly recognized for, and, therefore enhance their communicative competence (Chelghoum, 2017, pp. 41-42). In this view, using MSA and QA in CMC may benefit both native and non-native speakers of Arabic.

In some cases, it is simply not feasible to teach QA and MSA: "sometimes, departments of world language improvise with what they have during budget constraints. Poems, stories, films, etc. are used to expose students to the dialects rather than instructional tapes or videos on the dialects, which the university cannot afford" (Hashem-Aramouni, 2011, p. 113). These stories are nearly all in MSA: even children's books are generally only published in MSA (Shendy, 2019). Budget, time constraints, and staff availability can sometimes, due to necessity, play a larger role in program and curriculum decisions than pedagogy.

Another argument for focusing solely on MSA come from Nimis and Nimis (2009) where the authors champion the study of MSA for its literary, cultural, and multicultural benefits. "In the case of Arabic, the humanistic enterprise of studying the language as a component of an entire cultural system is just as valid and valuable as in the case of Classics [ie. Latin]" (p. 165). Studying classical texts elevates and increases understanding of diverse cultures. "In contrast, the pressure to implement a more instrumental view of language, imported from business and government, is based on a false separation of culture and language, leading to the idea that Arabic can somehow be understood without understanding Arabs and Arab cultures" (Nimis & Nimis, 2009, p. 165). After all, "Generations of classicists have learned Latin and Greek in this fashion, just as generations of scholars from the West have learned to read, write, and speak classical Arabic without ever learning a colloquial dialect, but this is not for the faint-hearted" (Nimis & Nimis, 2009, p. 153). The goals of study of MSA, or more specifically, CA, for reading ancient texts and spiritual texts should not be ignored.

Nimis and Nimis (2009) further argue for focusing only on MSA due to the limited exposure that most students will receive to Arabic, "What profit can students who only study a language for a short time in college, and who never travel to a place where it is spoken, expect to achieve?… they will retain [their cultural] insight into the place of Arabic in Arabic-speaking societies much longer than they will remember particular lexica they managed to memorize. It is just such an understanding of different styles of communication and social organization that language study can contribute to the humanist enterprise in a global community" (pp. 163-164). Students who do not have the opportunity to study Arabic for the amount of time necessary to master a level of fluency

can still benefit from studying the language. The paradigm shifts and multicultural

understanding that can come through connecting to the texts of another culture can be just

as meaningful as the ability to speak with someone in a foreign land. As Edwards

remarks, "Higher education has never had a more crucial role to play in achieving peace"

(Edwards, 2015). Humanism and intercultural exchange are certainly worthy pursuits.

However, if the purpose of studying a language is to understand other cultures,

then the living cultures should not be overlooked. "The very culture and language the

students are trying to study is somewhat off-limits to those who do not speak the

appropriate code or register" (Palmer, 2007, p. 112). By focusing only on MSA,

extensive parts of the target cultures are inaccessible.

Not all of the suggestions to focus solely on MSA are purely humanist. Mili

(2011) argues that only MSA should be taught to American business students, because

businesspeople need to interact with speakers of Arabic from a number of different

countries who speak different dialects, because of the formality of business associations,

and because of the need to fully understand and be able to draft legal contracts. MSA "is

the language in which laws and contracts are written, business transactions are carried

out, and business correspondence is written. From the standpoint of a business student or

a businessperson, country-specific dialects are not significant, with at best some limited

cultural value" (Mili, 2011, p. 6). This argument pragmatically suggests that the broad

usability of MSA throughout the Arab world is reason enough for a sole focus on MSA.

Prior research has shown, however, that this viewpoint does not tell the entire

story. The author of *Understanding Arabs: A guide for Westerners* (Nydell, 2002) notes

that Arabic businesspeople are frequently bothered by their Western counterparts'

directness. Arabs tend to prefer to develop some rapport before engaging in business, while Americans and other Westerners tend to go directly into negotiations (Nydell, 2002). As mentioned previously, this type of interaction is not generally suited to MSA, but it would normally be conducted in QA. A rudimentary ability to perform business tasks can be developed through a narrow focus on MSA, but the most successful businesspeople, according to Nydell, establish friendly relationships with their business partners: relationships developed through using QA.

In order to become communicatively competent in Arabic, there must be balance between MSA and QA. "The MSA-only approach of teaching Arabic does not reflect the linguistic reality of Arab communities, where spoken-Arabic varieties are the mother tongue of the people and MSA is the formally learned language. Therefore, nonnative speakers' communicative need will not be met by Arabic programs employing the MSA-only approach" (Al-Mohsen, 2016, p. 61). It is apparent, then, that a student of the Arabic language needs to become proficient in both MSA and QA in order to function appropriately within an Arabic speaking community.

When should QA dialects be introduced to L2 Arabic speakers?

The most common practice in the United States is to introduce QA after some proficiency has been gained in MSA, sometimes only once students have begun to study abroad (Alosh, 2009; Hashem-Aramouni, 2011; Palmer, 2007, 2008; Wilmsen, 2006; Younes, 2006). For example, "many instructors believed that for students to learn spoken Arabic, they must have taken two years of MSA" (Hashem-Aramouni, 2011, p. 114). However, research calls this into question. Chouairi (2009) wonders, "But is it a given that students should learn how to read and write before learning how to speak? Are we

perhaps accepting a political and even theocratic definition of how language should function?" (pp. 40-41).

Research suggests that QA should be taught early (Al-Raies, 2011; Anderson & Suleiman, 2009; Belnap, 1987; Chouairi, 2009; Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004; Edwards, 2015; Humeidan, 2016; McLoughlin, 2009; Younes, 2009). Teachers should "give more classroom time to the dialects, which are notably easier to learn than modern standard Arabic, and to put them at the heart of college training" (Edwards, 2015). By focusing on QA, Edwards hopes to encourage a natural balance between MSA and QA. "Part of what's holding back Arabic study in the United States is a resistance to embracing the relationship between these various forms" (Edwards, 2015).

In a study of Hebrew-speaking Israelis studying Arabic, "…it seems to improve attitudes and increase motivation to study the language" (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004, p. 227) and, that including QA early "may eventually lead to improved cultural understanding and better relations between the two ethnolinguistic groups [Arabs and Israelis]" (p. 227). Increased satisfaction, motivation, and cultural understanding were all observed through early introduction of QA to a school curriculum. "It seems, therefore, that the twofold reform in the educational context—the lowering of starting age and the teaching of spoken Arabic—had a positive impact on student attitudes and motivation" (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004, p. 226).

Current methodologies suggest that teaching QA and MSA in tandem is the most effective method (Al-Mamari, 2011; Anderson & Suleiman, 2009; Chouairi, 2009; Ferrari, 2018; Younes, 2009). MSA and QA must be integrated, argues Younes (2009), because, "Without one or the other, the proficiency of the Arabic speaker is incomplete.

The language is treated as one indivisible system. Attempts at segmentation run counter to the very nature of the language" (p. 66). Teaching MSA and QA in tandem allows learners to better understand the relationship between the two forms. After all, "Fusha and CV [QA], being varieties of the same language, share most of their linguistic features" (Younes, 2009, p. 62). QA and MSA are two sides of the same language coin.

Which Dialect Should be Taught?

Dialect preference comes down to a number of factors. These might include teacher preference, study abroad availability, program focus, and student needs and objectives. The two most commonly taught dialects in the United States are Egyptian and Levantine Colloquial Arabic (Trentman, 2011; Younes, 2009). Each provides its own benefits, such as access to large numbers of native speakers and media. Younes (2009) explains:

> … I believe that this is primarily an administrative, not a pedagogical issue. In terms of the needs of the students themselves, it should not matter which major dialect they master. A high level of proficiency in one Arabic dialect is sufficient for communication with speakers, especially educated speakers of other major dialects, as evidenced by students who master Egyptian Arabic and visit or live in the Levant or Iraq, and students who master Levantine and visit Egypt (p. 64).

The decision of which dialect to teach, then, is largely a practical one.

Trentman (2011) reassures, "program designers and teachers of Arabic should focus less on worrying about which dialect to teach, and more on implementing the teaching of both MSA and at least an Egyptian or Levantine dialect in the classroom in a pedagogically sound way" (p. 46). Since comprehension of QA may transfer between dialects, learning any QA dialect may facilitate comprehension of the others. "This study provides the first empirical evidence that knowledge of Egyptian Arabic does not limit a

student to understanding Egyptian Arabic only, but also assists them in understanding Levantine varieties, and vice versa" (Trentman, 2011, p. 45). Students who are familiar with one QA dialect are prepared to learn others.

How to Teach a Dialect

The next question we must answer is, "How *do* we teach a dialect?" There are a handful of issues that can interfere with this endeavor, but, thankfully, many of them have solutions. An obvious constraint is the limited availability of Arabic instructors who speak a particular dialect, or any dialect at all. While Trentman (2011) assures that dialects can be transferred readily, this still presents a challenge. Younes (2006) has observed, however, that in spite of exposure to a number of different dialects, students did not tend to have much trouble understanding or differentiating the dialects. In Cornell's language program, he notes, they generally try to keep students in one dialect to help counteract this issue. In my own experience as a non-native speaker and teacher of Arabic, I found that some exposure to multiple dialects through authentic materials or immersion was generally beneficial. When called upon to teach a less-familiar dialect, I could do so with relative ease, with the help of supporting materials and co-workers.

Another area of concern relates to the prior issue: access to materials in QA. In the past, access to films, music, and spoken Arabic was restricted by distance, availability, and budget. This limited the access to which programs would have to a dialect. "As one instructor explained to the researcher in his interview, sometimes, departments of world language improvise with what they have during budget constraints. Poems, stories, films, etc. are used to expose students to the dialects rather than instructional tapes or videos on the dialects, which the university cannot afford"

(Hashem-Aramouni , 2011, p. 113). However, this issue can largely be overcome by the increase in information technology available within the modern classroom.

Technology can "offer significant inroads for making instructional material available for teachers and learners that would otherwise not be feasible, both in terms of content and scale" (Sykes, 2018, p. 123). These materials allow exploration of the target language and culture, and "the dynamic nature of human interaction in ways that have never-before been possible" (Sykes, 2018, p. 133). Realia and authentic materials abound through the use of technology, as Shrum and Glisan (2016) note, "Television from almost any country is streamed online, newspapers have all moved to a digital format, and magazines, blogs, and Wikis are available on any subject… The Internet has been a treasure trove of teaching materials for language educators" (p. 419). In the case of Arabic, many of these materials might be in MSA; thus, the opportunity to observe the authentic and natural code-switching that might take place in some of these media would offer helpful insights into the pragmatics of code-switching and when to use MSA and QA, in both verbal and written online sources, particularly for advanced learners.

Similarly, online environments provide opportunities for learners to come into contact with native speakers of Arabic through CMC, both spoken, through video chats and recordings, and written, through social media sites and email. "The kind of immersion that only took place abroad can now be nearly simulated through the seamlessly unlimited kinds of input available on the Internet. The challenge for educators is no longer access to authentic materials, but rather how to be integrate these mediational tools into a sociocultural learning environment" (Shrum & Glisan, 2016, p. 420). Chelghoum (2017) offers the medium of online chatting to help learners better

understand the diglossia and codeswitching which native speakers employ in these environments.

Even with innumerable cultural artifacts at our disposal online and in print, there still remains a dearth of Arabic teaching materials which focus on teaching a dialect. While there are some textbooks that include QA, particularly the Al-Kitaab series by Brustad, Al-Batal, and Al-Tonsi (Georgetown University Press), they are not necessarily the norm. To overcome this difficulty, Wilmsen suggests, "What is needed is an entire reworking of the curriculum along with as great a commitment to producing teaching materials for vernacular Arabic as has been expended in the production of those for formal written Arabic" (Wilmsen, 2006, p. 134). In other words, instructors and researchers will need to create teaching materials (or share them via open educational resources) until teaching a dialect in conjunction with MSA has become normalized.

There remains a worry that the introduction of MSA and QA simultaneously could bring about confusion between the registers. However, as Younes (2006) noted, students tend to quickly grasp the different purposes of each register. Indeed, in my own experience of learning AFL, I had little difficulty in grasping the concept. "Treating Arabic as one system of communication with a spoken side and a written side and a common core is not only an accurate reflection of the sociolinguistic realities of the language but is also pedagogically more effective" (Younes, 2006, p. 164).

Personally, however, I learned Arabic as an adult, and I had been exposed to formal versions of English that allowed me to make more readily understand the different registers of Arabic. Having taught Arabic to learners as young as 4 years old, however, I cannot say that I know how or when to best introduce the idea of diglossia or

codeswitching. How can we expect a student to learn to read and write in Arabic, a language for which they have no complete oral language system, when they still cannot write in their own native language? Certainly, in order to better understand the best practices of teaching younger students MSA, significantly more research must be done. Thankfully, with the increasing demand for dual-immersion programs throughout the United States, this is an area of research which should soon be receiving much more attention.

For adolescent and adult learners, McLoughlin (2009) suggests transparency regarding the Arabic language:

> Psychologically what the student needs is to understand from Day 1 that Arabic is not uniquely difficult… What the student gains from the integrated approach is impossible to overstate: he or she feels in contact with the whole of the language, spoken and written, from the first day, indeed from the first hour, which is absolutely crucial to determining the success of any course of TAFL (p. 70).

Similarly to McLoughlin's suggestion, Younes (2006) and Wahba (2006) both suggest an integrated approach beginning with a greater focus on QA, then transition more to MSA as students reach advanced proficiencies. "Arabic language programs aim at producing language users, not native users, and those language users should be viewed as successful (diglossic) competent speakers of Arabic" (Wahba, 2006, p. 145).

Conclusion

The existence of multiple registers in Arabic, often referred to as diglossia, can complicate the decisions that administrators and teacher must make regarding the teaching of MSA and QA. However, codeswitching and other sociocultural factors necessitate the acquisition of both MSA and QA in order for learners to develop

communicative competence. While each program has different needs and goals, the goal of communicative competence can best be achieved, according to current research, by the concurrent MSA and QA. QA must be "at the heart of college training" (Edwards, 2015) in order to engender communicative ability. Students who are able to gain fluency in both MSA and QA are well on their way to developing communicative competence in Arabic.

While there are clear benefits to teaching MSA and QA simultaneously, further research is needed to demonstrate best practices in implementation. Likewise, individual AFL programs must determine their own best practices based on their goals and the goals of their students. As with so many things, there is no one answer to the question, "What is the best way to teach Arabic?"

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

IDENTITY

In this annotated bibliography, I want to explore the effects of identity on SLA. Specifically, I want to better understand select major factors which affect some students' understandings of their own identities as they effect their language learning journey. This annotated bibliography came in part in conjunction with the research on play that I performed while writing the research perspective titled, "This is (not) serious: Learning to play with words, society, and worlds", which can be found in the previous section of this portfolio. Although there is some overlap between the papers, I chose to include these particular works in this annotated bibliography because I felt that they added more insight into identity's role in SLA than was applicable to the scope of that particular paper.

I first became curious about the effects on identity in SLA when I read an article (**Vågan, 2011**) where the author talked about medical students being referred to as "Dr." instead of students. The author found that when referring to their students as if they were professionals instead of students, that the students' abilities to make the medically appropriate calls and decisions increased significantly. By calling them doctors, they thought and acted like doctors. At that time, my sister was teaching at the school where she had obtained her pilot's license. She told me that previously, the students had been called "student pilots", but now, instructors referred to the students as "pilots in training." I wondered how this proactive re-signifying of the students' roles and identities might apply in SLA.

Vågan states, "Learning is a process of becoming" (2011, p. 44). Students do not just gain factual knowledge when they learn, they learn how to do and how to be.

Between the identity of novice student and professional lies a transformative period where students discover their identities in relation to their new community of practice.

In order to determine how identity forms, we must understand how cultural artifacts influence its formation. One aspect of identity formation is interactional positioning within a figured world, the idea that people position themselves in particular roles in interactions with others, "people enact and perform their senses of self, thereby establishing certain social positions of influence and prestige in (and across) a figured world" (Vågan, 2011, p. 49). Figured worlds are cultural settings which determine the roles and actions of those participating in them, they are sociocultural contexts which shape behavior and identity (p. 48).

There are several ways which Vågan describes how speakers can demonstrate their social position in a figured world. Speakers choose, "whom to quote, and in what way," which, "always positions the speaker" (2011, p. 47). How the speaker chooses to express his or herself shows the presumed identity of the narrator easily as an active participant, an innocent bystander, or anything else the narrator chooses to be.

In a Sociocultural perspective, the roles in figured worlds are extremely important. As people take on the roles in these social worlds, their roles represent their identities. As they perform tasks according to these identities, they internalize the processes and become more of that role. Medical students first act as, then eventually become, doctors. They practice using the knowledge, physical and psychological tools, and even speak using medical terminology as they find their ways through the figured world of medical practice. Eventually, as they internalize these skills, they become doctors as they can act fully inside of their chosen figured world.

As I was researching, I wondered about the ethical implications of forcing students' identities to be altered. This led me to research learner agency. Agency has a significant influence on students' ability to learn. "The main principle involved is that learning depends on the activity and the initiative of the learner, more so than on any 'inputs' that are transmitted to the learner by a teacher or a textbook" (**van Lier, 2008**, p. 163). Students only learn when they choose to do so, whether that choice is made out of fear or curiosity. In a Sociocultural perspective, students are not merely receptacles of knowledge, but active participants in the learning. Agency is usually simply understood as the ability to choose what to do. However, this simplistic definition is problematic when social and physical constraints are considered. Some argue, as van Lier puts it, that, "agency is not simply an individual character trait or activity, but a contextually enacted way of being in the world" (p. 163). People's ability to choose is determined by the context in which they find themselves.

Learner agency does not imply complete learner autonomy. As van Lier notes, "Learners' initiative does not necessarily conflict with a teacher's control in terms of structuring the work and managing the classroom. Rather, a teacher's control in this sense in fact enhances the possibilities for initiative to emerge" (p. 172). Teachers are responsible for creating opportunities for their students to choose. The teacher provides a support, or scaffold, for the students to experiment with their agency within the context of the classroom or the subject area.

While teachers cannot force their students to do anything, teachers *can* give their students tools and opportunities which they can use in choosing who they want to be. "Shaping new identities requires ongoing struggles and reconciliations and these can

reflect resistance as well as accommodation" (p. 177). Learning a new skill can be embarrassing or stressful. We are experts in many things we already know, so becoming a novice in something can conflict with our self-perception. This is especially true of foreign language, since once eloquent and intelligent-sounding people suddenly speak awkwardly and simply.

In order to understand more about identity formation and anxiety, I read an article by **Huang (2014)**. In it, the author revisits the existing literature regarding the interplay of self and language anxiety. Language anxiety is defined as, "anxiety related to target language learning, the reaction or emotion of general anxieties, or simply associated with social or certain situations while learning the target language" (p. 66). It can affect students' performance in class and their willingness to participate. If a student is very anxious, they will have a hard time learning and participating. Self-confidence can act as a counter to high anxiety and lead to higher learning outcomes. Because expressing oneself in the L2 is stunted until high enough levels of proficiency are reached, students can feel incompetent in the L2. "In comparison to in L2 or FL contexts, they know who they are and what they want to say in their native languages" (p. 72) as opposed to the loss of identity they may feel in the L2. When learners sense this loss of self, their language anxiety increases.

The next selected article is **Devos (2016)**, regarding social interactions in classroom learning. This chapter provided a good overview of research done on SCT, in particular. There were numerous research studies and articles cited, which would allow for in-depth follow-up of a broad range of topics related to SCT, ZPD, scaffolding, and student interaction. Devos notes that, "overall language production in class may still be

limited due to the continued widespread use of teacher-centered methods. Evidence thus implies that more student-centered activities, such as group work and role-plays, may allow learners to engage in longer sequences of fluid FL use" (pp. 81-82). Unfortunately, research reveals that while the theoretical frameworks are changing to more interaction-based classes, the methodologies of teachers are still lagging behind.

In order to explore the topic of figured worlds further, I read an article by **Urrieta (2007)**. He begins by noting that "Identity and Self are concepts that are not only constituted by the labels—'smart girl', 'delinquent', 'incompetent', or 'beloved teacher'—that people place on themselves and others, especially in schools. Identity is also very much about how people come to understand themselves, how they come to 'figure' who they are, through the 'worlds' that they participate in and how they relate to others within and outside of these worlds" (p. 107). The labels that we adopt are only part of our identities, and our roles in figured worlds are only part of what makes us, us.

Because figured worlds are socially constructed, those who are within the figured world are, ultimately, the ones who decide the rules. As Urrieta explains, "In these new (novel) figured worlds lies the possibility for making/creating new ways, artifacts, discourses, acts, perhaps even more liberatory worlds" (p. 111). Figured worlds, in other words, are malleable. If the members of the community within the figured world decide, together, to alter their world, they can do so. Urrieta makes a case for discovering the potential of figured worlds in allowing all students, particularly the underprivileged students, the chance to succeed.

In my next reading, I wanted to explore how language affects our figured worlds, identities, and groups. I read an article by **Lantalf and Thorne (2006)**, in which the

authors provide another look at SCT. They briefly describe mediation, particularly mediation of psychological functions through artifacts. The authors explain that words serve to reshape perception, first by others speaking to the child, then by the child learning to use the same words to regulate his or her own actions through private speech. Private speech helps regulate the actions of the individual, such as when we "think out loud" and talk to ourselves when solving a difficult problem. They also describe internalization, which is the process by which physical or social tools are reconstructed as psychological artifacts. Imitation, and its role in language acquisition are likewise discussed.

Lantolf and Thorne state, "Language is the most pervasive and powerful cultural artifact that humans possess to mediate their connection to the world, to each other, and to themselves" (p. 201). Words shape our perception of ourselves and the world around us. They also shape our figured worlds and alter our relationships with the people around us. Language allows significant growth in higher psychological functions in a number of ways, through the internalization of new tools for understanding and mediating our world. This research demonstrates the crucial point that because language can shape our perceptions, the language that we choose to use with one another is extremely important.

Continuing my research on figured worlds, I read an article by **Varghese and Snyder (2018)**. In their study, they followed four teachers through the end of their teacher preparation course. They were all intending to teach in Spanish-English dual language immersion programs. Three of the four teachers considered themselves to be Latinx, bilingual Spanish and English speakers, while the fourth, even though she came from a similar background as the others, considered herself to be White and a second

language speaker of Spanish. The research was interesting in that the authors demonstrated the impact that teachers' backgrounds can have on their teaching ideologies, and because they highlighted the importance of including the parents of their students in the learning process. It was also interesting to see that the teachers chose their first teaching positions based on how they saw themselves vis-à-vis the figured world of the school community. The Latinx teachers chose to continue in dual immersion programs, while the White teacher ended up teaching in an all English school, in spite of her training and expertise in Spanish and dual immersion.

Inspired by the previous article, I wanted to gain a better understanding of my own place in the world, as a White, educated, American woman. I found an article by **Olson (1998),** titled "White Privilege in schools" to be helpful in understanding more about my own experiences and how they relate to those I teach, especially for students who might be, like the three teachers in the Varghese and Snyder study, marginalized within the American school system. Olson begins by stating, "It is important to distinguish between prejudice and privilege. Whereas racial prejudice is negative action directed against an individual, privilege is passive advantage that accrues to an individual or group. Good teachers recognize and actively address prejudice" (p. 83), although most privileged people fail to see their privilege. She concludes, "And while I have been blind to the existence of our privileges, people who don't share them cannot help but see them and feel resentment, puzzlement, disappointment and rage at the fact that their children are excluded from the privileged class" (p. 84). The article is brief, but poignant. In it, the author points out several ways in which her own family has been privileged and encourages the reader to consider their own experiences with privilege. Olson's article

opens privileged eyes to the injustices that we tend to take for granted. Knowing about these privileges demonstrates the need to reshape the figured world of the school so that each student can have the same chances of success. It also demonstrates how much work we still have to do to overcome inequality.

In an effort to understand what I can do to help overcome inequality in the classroom, I read an article by **Bartolomé (1994).** Bartolomé argues that, rather than trying to find the right methodology to help traditionally marginalized, and, therefore, poorly performing, students there needs to be a focus on correcting the social factors that have led to their poor performance. Instead of looking for a "one size fits all" (p. 175) approach, the real question we should be asking is, "why in our society, subordinated students do not generally succeed academically in schools. In fact, schools often reproduce the existing asymmetrical power relations among cultural groups" (p. 176). She suggests that teachers need to balance methodology with reflection in order to "support positive social change in the classroom" (p. 178). Bartolomé also states that when teachers can provide opportunities for students "traditionally perceived as low status" to, "demonstrate their possession of knowledge and expertise, they are then able to see themselves, and be seen by others, as capable and competent" (p. 176). Allowing students to reframe their roles as "capable and competent" gives them greater autonomy and improves their performance in the classroom. I aim to emphasize autonomy as well.

In order to dig deeper into how our language changes how we are seen by others, I read **Stubbs (2002)** in which he discusses the relationship between language and perception. Stubbs mentions several ideas that people develop about others simply based on their particular accent. People hear someone speaking, and, depending on the

stereotypes associated with their accent, they draw conclusions about the speaker. These can be positive or negative conclusions.

As Stubbs notes throughout this article, there are many distinctive language varieties, each of which is perfectly legitimate. They all, however, perform different functions. There is a difference between *correctness* and *appropriateness*. It is very important for teachers to understand this difference. Students swearing in class are not by default "bad" people, they are using language not appropriate for school, intentions and motivations aside. Believing that there is only one correct language or only one correct way of speaking can diminish the value of students' own identities and cultural backgrounds. Stubbs underlines that there is no one perfect dialect, though there are linguistic varieties appropriate and inappropriate for school, work, and other situations.

While researching more about identity construction, I came across an interesting article by **Lefkowitz and Hedgcock (2016)**. In it, they investigate *anti-language,* which "refers to a linguistic variety generated by an '*anti-society*' that wishes to assert its uniqueness relative to a superordinate discourse community and its 'everyday language'" (p. 349). Anti-language, then is a linguistic variety used by in order to set that group of people apart from society at large. An anti-language can be any language variety; it is only considered an anti-language because of its use to demonstrate a group's uniqueness. Anti-language is used, "both to resist external pressure and to enhance internal cohesion" (p. 350). It is a means of increasing group solidarity within a speech community. In the FL classroom, anti-languages can also form, contrasting with the standardized language of the teacher and textbook. Anti-language serves in the, "resistance to mainstream practices, the reconstruction of identities, the pursuit of peer approval, social solidarity,

the assertion of counter-realities, the provocation of mainstream disapproval, and exclusion" (p. 360). How students use their language may have more to do with social interactions than with actual linguistic abilities. Group cohesion can be more important than grades, in many cases.

I wanted to learn more about how identity formation takes place in SLA. **Park (2015)** examines the aspects of learning identity, particularly focused on how it applies for adult learners. "The knowledge, however, includes not only intellectual aspects, but knowing oneself, in a broader sense, knowing one's identity. In this sense, realizing oneself, that is, the process of constructing identity is learning as a sociocultural phenomenon" (p. 5). Learning one's identity, as Park explains, is inextricably linked with learning in a broader sense. It is also important to realize that identity is not a fixed construct, "identity is continually changing and developing according to the influence of everyday social constructs…" (p.5) and as people gain more knowledge, interact with the world, and go about their lives, their identities change.

Returning to my search for information on how teachers can help students to alter their identities in the classroom in order to improve learning outcomes, I turned to an educational study from outside of SLA, **Fields and Enyedy (2013).** In this study, the authors examine the process of changing the already established roles of two students in a classroom during a computer programming activity. The teacher named two students with previous programming experience as "experts" for the activity, and then put them in groups of other students to help lead and teach their peers. The teacher's attempts at reidentification of the students was not sufficient to alter their identities, instead, it required work from the students themselves and acceptance from their peers. Identity

shifts can only take place with the cooperation of the rest of the class, because, "this shift in their own roles required a shift of others' roles as their partners had to take up reciprocal roles as novices to acknowledge Tyrone and Lucetta as experts" (p. 7). Identification of oneself means alternate identification of others in the group.

At the beginning of the activity, the students' interactions were unchanged. Tyrone's established role as a bully and Lucetta's established role as a peacemaker were the biggest influences in their initial interactions, with Tyrone's group falling apart through bickering and Lucetta placidly going along with any suggestions her partner made. It went poorly for both groups. Tyrone's group bickered so much that the teacher reassigned him to another group. In Lucetta's group, her friend "would say she wanted to quit whenever Lucetta explained or demonstrated a more advanced programming concept" (p. 9), a pattern which the authors believe could have been her rejecting her friend's expertise in order to avoid altering her own identity into a novice: she rejected Lucetta's expertise in order to save face.

Similar face-saving rebuffs took place in Tyrone's group, but, because of the "more obvious conflict" within his group, the teacher came to observe them and reminded them that Tyrone should be the leader. "This was the first time Tyrone ever referred to himself as an expert… Though it had little immediate effect in practice with his partners, it was the beginning of his appropriating an explicit self-narrative as a programming expert" (p. 10). The teacher's reinforcement of his new role helped him to begin to internalize this part of his identity. A similar shift in identity happened with Lucetta after she and her partner interacted with an online programming community, showing them that Lucetta was, in fact, correct in her suggestions. Each student was able

to realign their identities after external feedback asserted their expertise to them and to their peers.

Fields and Enyedy demonstrated several factors that affect shifts in identity in the classroom. First, that "identity and one's position in a social system are join accomplishments… picking up or asserting an identity is often a good place to start" (p. 14) in order to alter identity. Second, introducing a new classroom activity creates opportunities to change identity in relation to other students. And, finally, that, by having multiple types of these activities which allow students to experience different relational roles within their classroom's figured worlds, "it highlights for students that they can have multiple academic identities, rather than one monolithic school identity" (p. 15), allowing students to exercise their agency in choosing their preferred identities and in exploring their own possibilities for change and improvement.

I wanted to try to find more information on this topic in the field of SLA. I read an article by **Kraut (2018)**. In this study, he examines the effect on framing on classroom tasks. Kraut framed conversational partners as either "adversaries" or "mediators" in order to observe how the framing altered their interactions. He found that, "adversaries ask[ed] substantially more content questions which functioned to maintain a highly argumentative dialogue… [and] with mediators providing more co-constructions, other-corrections and continuers" (p. 207). Students who were framed as adversaries were adversarial, while students framed as mediators helped one another. Kraut proposes that this result stems from the students' "need-to-mean", or that, in order to have their place in the conversational frame, they must assert their identities within the task frame. He suggests that framing tasks in different ways allows students to gain different skills in the

L2. This same framing could also be used in reshaping students' roles in the classroom to give them the agency to identify themselves as they wish. This article informed my approach to framing and identity in language play.

Through my research into identity, I have learned that there are ways to positively influences students' identities as a teacher. I learned that students act out their roles according to the figured world of the classroom. By altering how they see themselves and are seen by their peers, the roles, and perhaps the rules, of the figured world are changed. It is through this change that I hope to engender equality and agency for my students.

LOOKING FORWARD

Looking to the future, I hope to continue this journey of growth as a teacher. While numbers of programs and majors in Arabic are growing, Arabic teaching positions in secondary schools are still rare, so I will need to be flexible and creative in my future teaching opportunities. I aim to be prepared to teach students of any age and situation who are interested in learning Arabic. Because I had the opportunity to take Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)-focused courses during my time in the MSLT program, I may choose to teach ESL along with an Arabic course, or I may go abroad and teach EFL to students in another part of the world. Part of the reason I chose the MSLT program rather than one specific to Arabic was to allow me this flexibility and broad background in language pedagogy theory and practice.

While I do not know exactly where my future will lead me, my commitment to making the world a better place for my fellow human-beings and for those who come after me is not limited to traditional language teaching. Our technology-driven, ever-shrinking world will present me with unique opportunities to apply what I have learned as part of the MSLT program. Especially now, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic which has put us at a stand-still, our world is changing into something new. In this new world, I hope to contribute something meaningful to the art of teaching, whether that be through conducting research, shaping policy, writing curriculum, or, simply, teaching.

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