

Diglossic Curricula

A Comparative Study of the Designs of Spoken Arabic Curricula and the Students' Learning Outcome of National Chengchi University and the University of Oslo

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Abstract

Diglossia, as a dominant socio-linguistic phenomenon in the Arabic-speaking regions, has a multi-layered impact on Arabic teaching strategies. The Arabic department of National Chengchi University, Taiwan, which include only Modern Standard Arabic, and the undergraduate program of the University of Oslo, Norway, which implement Spoken Arabic varieties in the teaching, have significantly different curricula designs. The research treats exclusion or inclusion of Spoken Arabic varieties as the higher education institutions' reactions to Arabic diglossia. Similarly, the students' learning outcomes at both universities can be discussed as results of in/direct effects of Arabic diglossia through the curricula, in joint of the learners' empirical understanding of the socio-linguistic realities in the Arabic-speaking world. By interviewing the learners who have attended the Arabic programs at these two universities and traveled to an Arabic-speaking country and the teachers who participated in the initial linguistic training of these students, the thesis investigates how diglossia affects teachers' instructing approaches and students' learning outcomes. The findings of the research aim to provide a more profound understanding of how Arabic programs have been designed in response to Arabic diglossia in the unique contexts of Taiwan and Norway, and to offer insights for Arabic programs worldwide with similar social circumstances to these two countries.

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Salim Yuhe Fang

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Notes on transliterations and translations

All translations from Arabic, Chinese or Norwegian to English are my own.

Arabic transliterations

The Arabic transliterations in this thesis are based on the guidelines provided by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES).¹ For Formal Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, or Classical Arabic terms, I will base the transliterations entirely on the IJMES guidelines. For Spoken Arabic terms, some certain alphabets are adjusted according to the words' actual pronunciation, thus do not meet the IJMES guidelines completely. I have also used some scripted names and expressions that are provided formally or widely accepted, they were thus not transliterated with the IJMES guidelines.

Mandarin Chinese transliterations

For Mandarin Chinese transliterations, I have partially followed the Pinyin system from the guidelines provided by Yale University Library for the phonetical romanizations.² In order to avoid confusion, the tone marks are not omitted in the main text, as tonemes cause semantic differences in Mandarin Chinese. The tone marks are omitted in the bibliography. Syllables are joined or separated according to the meaning of original words and contexts.

¹ "IJMES Translation and Transliteration Guide," Cambridge Core, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/information/author-resources/ijmes-translation-and-transliteration-guide>.

² Michael Meng, "Yale University Library Research Guides: Romanization Guide for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Languages: Chinese," accessed April 20, 2021, <https://guides.library.yale.edu/cjk-romanization/chinese-romanization>.

List of abbreviations, acronyms, and glossary

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>‘āmmiyya</i> | Spoken Arabic, colloquial Arabic, or Arabic dialects |
| <i>al-Kitāb</i> | <i>Al-Kitāb fī Ta‘allum al-‘Arabiyya</i> |
| <i>Bayna Yadayk</i> | <i>Al-‘Arabiyya Bayna Yadayk</i> |
| <i>fushhā</i> | Classical Arabic, Formal Arabic, or Modern Standard Arabic |
| MSA | Modern Standard Arabic |
| NCCU | National Chengchi University (<i>Gúoli Zhèngzhì Dàxué</i>) |
| SA | Spoken Arabic |
| T AFL | Teaching Arabic as a foreign language |
| UiO | University of Oslo (<i>Universitetet i Oslo</i>) |

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For me, to have a new language ... [means that] you have a new perspective to life. You are able to communicate with more people [to] share more ideas, and get more from the culture from their ideas. What about, if I learn a language by closing the window [and] telling me [to] just learn it in this room? But you're not allowed to go out, and to use it? ... Why are they limiting the language that much and [limiting] the students that much? ³

1. Introduction

Why does one learn the Arabic language? The motivations have shifted massively over times, from the importance of the Oriental scientific materials in the Middle Ages to the classical literary, religious, and philosophical in the eyes of European orientalist.⁴ In modern days, according to a survey study of 120 Arabic learners at a university in 2006, more than 90% of the participants agree that they learn the language to converse with people.⁵ Here arises the fundamental question: do Arabic courses allow one to communicate by using the language, if it is the main motivation for learning nowadays? Arabic is a special case within the academic field of second language acquisition as a result of the language's different written and spoken varieties used in different contexts, occasions, and geographical regions. It is still debated whether one should learn Arabic or several Arabic languages/varieties. As some argue that the unified notion of the language is only codified and put in context to enhance the linguistic orthodoxy, within this notion, Arabic is a collective term consisting of different dialects, languages or forms of languages.⁶ Then, how do the students who major in "Arabic", which is essentially a collective concept, learn to speak "a language" at universities?

In the last decades, National Chengchi University (NCCU), the only Taiwanese university which offers an undergraduate program specializing in Arabic language and culture, does not include any mandatory Spoken Arabic (SA) courses in its curriculum.⁷ Modern

³ Interlocutor B, Arabic teacher at UiO, author's interview, online via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

⁴ Abeer Obeid Al-Shbail, "The Role of Orientalists in Presenting" Arabic" to the World," *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics* 52 (2019): 24–27.

⁵ Ghassan Husseinali, "Who Is Studying Arabic and Why? A Survey of Arabic Students' Orientations at a Major University," *Foreign Language Annals* 39, no. 3 (2006): 401–2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2006.tb02896.x>.

⁶ Franck Salameh, "Does Anyone Speak Arabic?," *Middle East Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2011), <https://www.meforum.org/3066/does-anyone-speak-arabic>.

⁷ In the essay, the term Spoken Arabic and its abbreviation SA are employed. The main reason is that other commonly-used terms such as Colloquial Arabic, 'amiyya, or Arabic dialects can cause confusion. (1) The abbreviation of Colloquial Arabic may be confused with Classical Arabic. (2) In western parts of the Arabic-

Standard Arabic (MSA) has been the main focus in this language training program.⁸ In the meantime, University of Oslo (UiO) requires its students who specialize in Arabic to take mandatory Levantine or Egyptian SA courses in recent years.⁹ As a graduate of NCCU and a current student at UiO, I have observed that the students from these two universities have different skillsets and interests of the Arabic language. While the students at UiO seem to conduct colloquial conversations better, those at NCCU lack orality but excel in reading skills and grammatical analysis. In addition, the students from the two universities seem to have different understandings of the concept of the Arabic language.

As the two programs of the two universities are planned in different contexts, they might have different academic focuses on the language. Founded in 1957, the undergraduate program of Arabic of the department of Oriental Language and Literature at NCCU was the first academic section that offered Arabic courses. The program was later transformed and became an independent department as the Department of Arabic Language and Literature in 1978. The department is now a part of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, and it has been the only tertiary educational institution offering a four-year undergraduate program in Arabic language and Middle East studies in Taiwan until today.¹⁰ ¹¹The three-year undergraduate Arabic program at UiO, on the other hand, is a part of the Bachelor's program of Asia and Middle East Studies, which has been offered under the Faculty of Humanities.¹² The program is currently one of the three Arabic programs that are offered in Norwegian higher education institutions.¹³

speaking world, the spoken variants are called *dārīja*, not *‘āmmīyya*. Also, *fuṣḥā*, the contrary to *‘āmmīyya*, can refer to Classical Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic. (3) The boundary between a dialect and a language has never been clearly defined.

⁸ National Chengchi University, "Kecheng zixun 課程資訊 [Course Information]," accessed May 10, 2020, <https://arabic.nccu.edu.tw/curriculum/pages.php?ID=page4>.

⁹ Universitetet i Oslo, "Arabisk A [Arabic A]," accessed November 3, 2019, <https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ikos/ARA1010/>.

¹⁰ "Ben xi yange 本系沿革 [History of the Department]," National Chengchi University, September 22, 2020, <https://arabic.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7679&id=6725>.

¹¹ The name of the department now has been changed into "the Department of Arabic Language and Culture", but the exact year and purpose of the shift are unknown.

¹² "Asia- og Midtøsten-studier (bachelor) [Asia and Middle East Studies (Bachelor)]," Universitetet i Oslo, accessed October 30, 2021, <https://www.uio.no/studier/program/aas/index.html>.

¹³ The other two institutions are the University of Bergen and the Norwegian Defense Intelligence School. Stine Beate Dahle and Unn Gyda Næss, "Teaching Arabic in Norway in the Age of Communicative Approaches," in *Philologists in the world: a Festschrift in honour of Gunvor Mejdell*, ed. Gunvor Mejdell and Nora S Eggen, 2017, 460–64.

After investigating closely, with in-depth discussions with students from the two universities, I started to wonder why these educational institutions have chosen different approaches to teach Arabic, and how these decisions have influenced the way a student think of, and most importantly, employ the language. I consider the Arabic curricula of UiO and NCCU “diglossic” for a few reasons. In the field of Arabic socio-linguistics, diglossia, albeit constantly challenged, is one of the most discussed theories applied to conceptualize the phenomenon of adopting different SA varieties and formal Arabic varieties, including MSA, in different occasions within Arabic-speaking communities. No matter one considers Arabic diglossia as an empirical fact or an ideological concept, it is generally agreed that there are certain factors that affect one to choose an Arabic variety over others to employ in some certain occasions. Likewise, SA varieties and MSA are also chosen, taught, and discussed in Arabic courses for differing reasons, either separately or simultaneously.

1.1 Research question

To further investigate and analyze the phenomenon, the main research question of the thesis is:

How does diglossia affect teachers’ instructing methods and students’ learning outcome in the Arabic programs at NCCU and UiO?

The three probes stemming from the main research question are: (1) why do the teachers of the two universities support the designs of curricula? How do they teach Arabic according to certain academic reasons or theories regarding the socio-linguistic realities in the Arabic-speaking countries? (2) How did the students from both universities learn the skills required in order for them to employ the language when facing the socio-linguistic realities in Arabic-speaking countries? (3) How have the curricula affected the students’ perspectives on the Arabic language? Most questions mentioned above will be investigated and answered after a series of interviews and research on the backgrounds of the educational institutions.

Although the main focus of the thesis is the learning outcomes and teaching strategies of Taiwanese and Norwegian educational institutions, I will centralize influences of socio-linguistic phenomena in Arabic-speaking countries. The answers to the research questions will be considered as reflections of the students and the teachers on the linguistic realities in Arabic-speaking countries.

1.2 Gap in literature

The gap in literature regarding the research topic results from, firstly, the lack of research that takes Taiwan and Norway as study cases. Most studies on Arabic teaching methods and students' learning outcome have been done in the United States, Europe and some language institutions in the Middle East. Little research has been done regarding the Arabic teaching methods in Norway. Furthermore, no academic research has been conducted regarding the Arabic teaching methods in Taiwan so far either. Although Niu analyzes the history and the current trends of Middle East studies in Taiwan and states that the institutions in the field focus mainly on language training, the research is only based on the official statements from the website of the university. No further discussion on the language teaching strategies was included.¹⁴

Secondly, although enormous studies on teaching Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL) have been done in different contexts, Taiwan and Norway are unique cases which are worth studying. As this project is a comparative study, it aims to provide insights from these two enormously different societies in which the first language is not English. Taiwanese Arabic students' lack of orality, besides the lack of training provided in class, might result from the fact that they come from a country with less than 0.0001% of the entire population or about 0.0004% of foreign residents from Arabic-speaking countries.¹⁵ On the other hand, in Norway, a sum of 19,844 pupils have requested to receive Arabic language courses as the language is their mother tongue (*morsmålsopplæring*), which stands for almost 0.1% of the entire group in 2013, not to mention the growing Arabic-speaking community of immigrants.¹⁶ In Taiwan, Arabic examinations for government positions are always given in MSA, even the official qualification exams for Arabic-speaking tour guides are designed in MSA only, while there are relatively more job opportunities in Norway that require SA skills, such as positions in public sectors of immigration affairs, humanitarian aids, or NGOs.

¹⁴ Song Niu, "Middle East Studies in Taiwan since 1957," *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, no. 42 (2016): 32–37.

¹⁵ National Immigration Agency of the Ministry of the Interior, Republic of China (Taiwan), "Waiqiao Juliu Renshu Tongjibiao 外僑居留人數統計表 [Foreign Residents Population Statistics]," June 30, 2021, <https://www.immigration.gov.tw/5385/7344/7350/%E5%A4%96%E5%83%91%E5%B1%85%E7%95%99/>.

¹⁶ Marit Wilhelmsen et al., "Minoritetsspråk i Norge: En Kartlegging Av Eksisterende Datakilder Og Drøfting Av Ulike Fremgangsmåter for Statistikk Om Språk [Minority Languages in Norway: A Survey of Existing Data Sources and Discussion of Various Procedures for Language Statistics]" (Statistics Norway, March 2013).

In conclusion, the project aims to give an inspiration for future TAFL studies in similar contexts to the Taiwanese and the Norwegian societies.

1.3 Fieldwork method

Discussion and analysis of the thesis will be based on individual interviews, which serve as the main primary sources. I have chosen fieldwork as the main method of my research based on three main reasons.

Firstly, I consider “students’ learning outcome” as how they define their own achievement after they have lived in an Arabic-speaking country and have communicated freely with native speakers outside of classroom settings, based on a few reasons. It is not common for Arabic students to take proficiency tests and it is difficult to judge their learning outcome only according to their grades from the Arabic courses they have taken. Moreover, it is not possible to have the access to the data, which should remain confidential in educational institutions. It would be also difficult to employ common frameworks of language proficiency, for instance the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR), as it would require much more carefully designed assessment methods to place the students in a certain level. As a result, how I examine students’ proficiency of Arabic is not based on the length of learning time or any objective achievements, but students’ own judgement. That is, how well do they handle conversations with the native speakers? Or how fluently did they speak the language to deal with daily issues? These are all judged by themselves from the interaction between their language ability and the linguistic realities, and thus could be only obtained in detail through conversation.

Secondly, it is unrealistic to analyze the reasons behind the designs of curricula only using the official course plans published online by the departments, as they aim to provide overviews on the programs. In contrary, conducting interviews with the teachers might give insights based on their own teaching experiences, academic concerns and even some decisions made in administrative meetings. Lastly, as teaching-Arabic-as-a-foreign-language in Norway and Taiwan has rarely been discussed academically, there have been hardly any sources and data I am able to employ. As a result, conducting fieldwork might be the most reliable method to ensure that I acquire sufficient primary sources for my research.

For this research project I have interviewed nineteen interlocutors. The interlocutors include one Arabic teacher at NCCU, one Arabic teacher at UiO, eleven students at NCCU and six students at UiO. Each interview lasted from thirty minutes to one and half hours.

The main method of data collection for the thesis as semi-structured interviews, in which I have used an interview guide with standardized questions to make sure the main topics and information needed for this research were covered.¹⁷ However, in order to obtain personal opinions of a wider range from the interlocutors I kept the interviews rather conversational, which allowed the interviewees to share their perspectives freely in a less controlled setting.

1.3.1 Challenges and concerns

Case selection and ethical concerns

Among the interviewees, the students at NCCU or UiO are those who attended the full-time bachelor's program of the Arabic language, and who have lived (or were still living) in at least one Arabic-speaking country. Also, the students at UiO who participated needed to have received their linguistic training in both SA and MSA, resulting from the shift of the curriculum design in recent years at UiO. Also, I have avoided the students who are currently in the study programs, as they would not have a better overview and their perspectives might be affected by ongoing frustration. As a result, all students I interviewed have either completed the Arabic language program or have finished the degree at the universities, with only one exception of a student at UiO, whose experience is unique and worth discussing in the research. As for the teachers, they have been teaching (but not limited to) first-year Arabic language courses at UiO or NCCU. I managed to contact the interlocutors through personal connections at NCCU and with the help of academic staff and peer students at UiO.

As all the interlocutors were university students and teachers and the topic of the research was not considered sensitive, I have not encountered any difficulties when I asked for their consent to participate in recorded interviews. However, in spite of my fieldwork plan in which I decided to keep my interlocutors anonymous, as I contacted some of the Taiwanese students regarding the interviews, a couple of them questioned whether the research would show their

¹⁷ Margaret C. Harrell and Melissa A. Bradley, "Data Collection Methods. Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups" (RAND NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INST SANTA MONICA CA, January 1, 2009), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA512853>.

identities by using some of their background information as a part of analysis in the thesis and whether this could affect their relations to the teachers. As a result, the main challenge for me regarding ethical considerations was to decide what types of personal background information were relevant, and thus to discard irrelevant information in the thesis to protect the interlocutors' anonymity.

Regarding the choice of platforms to conduct the interviews, I have encountered one major problem. Due to the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19, most educational institutions have been using online meeting software, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Hangouts, as their main teaching platform. However, as the Taiwanese Ministry of Education banned Zoom based on the security issues exposed and its Chinese background, it is not a commonly trusted platform for online meetings in Taiwan.¹⁸ As a result, with those who have concerns regarding the choice platforms, I used Line, which is the most popular instant messaging software in Taiwan, based on its end-to-end encryption which protects both text messages and 1-to-1 audio calls.¹⁹

Positionality

As a graduate from NCCU myself, it is rather easy for me to collect contact information of my interviewees, thus I did not need to deal with any “gatekeepers” during the fieldwork. However, since I know most personals at NCCU whom I intended to interview, as a matter of fact I even participated in some of the teachers' classes or have studied with some of the students, it has been rather difficult to me to stay neutral and to be an “outsider” when I conducted my research. In addition, my personal experience with the teacher in her classes sometimes does not match what she stated during the interview. This has led to some confusions and made my analysis rather difficult. Also, in the social context of the Taiwanese society, it is uncommon to question teachers in person and this has made me somewhat uncomfortable during the interview occasionally. As a result, when I interviewed the Taiwanese teacher, I realized that I phrased more carefully and became less critical than I did when I interviewed another teacher at UiO in

¹⁸ Sophia Yang, “Taiwan MOE Bars Schools from Using Zoom over Security Concerns,” Taiwan News, April 8, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3912255>.

¹⁹ “LINE Transparency Report,” LINE Corporation, accessed November 29, 2020, <https://linecorp.com/en/security/encryption/2019h1>.

the beginning. Nevertheless, the attitude of speech was corrected as I realized the problem and it did not affect the research results.

Language and terminology

The main languages I employ during the fieldwork are English, Mandarin Chinese and Arabic on a smaller scale. As my proficiency in Norwegian is notably limited. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin with Taiwanese interlocutors and in English with other interlocutors. As a result, I will have to translate between Mandarin (or Chinese) and English frequently and it is a challenge for me to keep consistency and to not allow any important information to be lost in translation.

For example, in the interviews I have conducted, the interlocutors employed a wide range of vocabulary in English, Arabic and Mandarin to refer to MSA and SA. The vocabulary which refers to MSA includes Modern Standard Arabic (or its abbreviation), *fuṣḥā*, and *biāozhǔnyǔ* (標準語, literally “the standard language”). While referring to Spoken Arabic, Colloquial Arabic, dialects (or the Norwegian term *dialekt*), *‘āmmiyya*, *fāngyán* (方言, “local language” or “dialect” depending on different contexts) and *kǒuyǔ* (口語, literally “colloquial language”) are employed. It is thus worth discussing whether all the different words represent the same concept, or if they are employed in different contexts. Also, this has led to considerations of my own terminology, when indicating different variants of the Arabic language. As I planned to employ only “Spoken Arabic” and “Modern Standard Arabic” in English and “*biāozhǔnyǔ*” and “*kǒuyǔ*” in Mandarin, my wording constantly changed according to what words the interlocutors were using.

1.4 Structure

The second chapter aims to give an overview of existing studies in the fields of teaching Arabic as a foreign language (TASL), socio-linguistics and Arabic dialectology, and accordingly situate this study within some theoretical frameworks.

The third chapter then focuses on how the educational institutions designed the curricula and how the teachers have been following the curricula. It also aims to explore how the teaching strategies can be improved and why they have or have not been changed.

In *chapter 4*, I discuss how Arabic majors from the Norwegian and Taiwanese universities experienced the linguistic realities after they had lived in an Arabic-speaking country and how the experience shaped their understanding of the Arabic language. In addition, I explore the shifts of their perceptions and examine how the curricula of Arabic courses have contributed to the changes.

In *the last chapter*, I present a summary of the main findings and discuss how future studies can be proceeded, in order to conclude this study.

2. Literature review

2.1 Previous studies

2.1.1 The traditional notion of diglossia

In order to understand the dilemmas that the teachers and the students at both universities encountered, diglossia is an important concept that cannot be ignored in the academic discussions on the Arabic language. To conceptualize the phenomenon of different varieties of the same language employed under different conditions, Ferguson's diglossia theory divides those varieties into two levels: the superposed one as the high variety, and the regional dialects as the low varieties.²⁰ The coexistence of these varieties on different social levels is named diglossia.

In Ferguson's analysis, he employed four sets of language varieties as his main study cases: Classical Arabic versus Egyptian Arabic, Standard German versus Swiss German, French versus Haitian Creole, and finally, the high versus the low variety of Greek.²¹ The varieties were examined with nine main areas as following: function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, lexicon, phonology.²² The high variety is often tied to the speaking community's literary heritage and, occasionally, religious tradition, thus represents great cultural importance. As a consequence, the high variety often enjoys superiority over the low varieties. The speakers share a common belief that the high variety is "more logical, more beautiful, and better able to express important thoughts" than the low varieties, albeit sometimes lacking feelings regarding the superiority.²³

However, some scholars argue that the dichotomic model is inadequate to describe the rather complicated linguistic phenomenon of the usages of Arabic in specific contexts.²⁴ One of the most discussed is Badawi's analysis based on the usage of contemporary Arabic varieties in Egypt, coming up with five different levels: the classical language (*fushā al-turāth*), the modern classical language (*fushā al-ʿaṣr*), the spoken language of the educated (*ʿāmmiyya al-*

²⁰ Charles A. Ferguson, "Diglossia," *WORD* 15, no. 2 (1959): 325–27.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 327.

²² *Ibid.*, 328–36.

²³ *Ibid.*, 328–30.

²⁴ Munther Younes, *The Integrated Approach to Arabic Instruction* (London: Routledge, 2015), 5–8.

muthaqqafīn), the spoken language of the enlightened (‘*āmmiyya al-mutanawwirīn*), and the spoken language of the illiterates (‘*āmmiyya al-ummiyyīn*).²⁵ Badawi’s model clearly shows particular functions of each Egyptian Arabic variety. For instance, the classical language is restricted to religious usage, while the spoken language of the enlightened is used by non-illiterates in daily occasions. As seen in the example of the modeling, different variants of a specific Arabic variety are not absolutely bipolar, nor belong to a binary differentiation, and rather lie on a spectrum of socio-linguistic realities. However, the model still shows a certain type of hierarchy of the linguistic usages of each variant.

2.1.2 Diglossia as an empirical fact or an ideological concept

Despite being one of the main-stream research frameworks, applying the diglossia theory to Arabic-speaking communities can be problematic, and it has been criticized by scholars for various reasons, aside from being inadequate. Some argue that it does not reflect the linguistic reality. Applying the linguistic anthropological framework of language ideology, Brustad argues that the binary terminologies derived from diglossia theory, such as *fuṣḥā/‘āmmiyya*, standard/non-standard, or written/spoken, are ideological rather than practical.²⁶ Theoretically, MSA enjoys definite superior reputation among Arabic speakers, as the high variety and functions explicitly differently from SA varieties. That is to say, according to the traditional diglossia theory, there has been a clear border separating the high and low varieties. However, it is merely a belief shared in the language community, as according to contemporary scholars, the boundary between Arabic varieties has been crossed for centuries.²⁷

In addition, theoretically, the high variety, which is supposed to enjoy great esteem and high status, should be appreciated by the upper class in the society. However, the upper class in Egypt is rather likely to have expertized in other Western foreign languages rather than MSA or Classical Arabic.²⁸ It shows that the linguistic realities have been constructed and reconstructed by the speech community. As a result, the core of the phenomenon of diglossia is based on the

²⁵ ElSaid M. Badawi, “Educated Spoken Arabic: A Problem in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language,” *Scientific and Humanistic Dimensions of Language*, January 1, 1985, 16–17.

²⁶ Kristen Brustad, “Diglossia as Ideology,” in *In The Politics of Written Language in the Arab World: Writing Change*, ed. Jacob Høigilt and Gunvor Mejdell (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 41–42.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 41–42.

²⁸ Niloofar Haeri, “Form and Ideology: Arabic Sociolinguistics and Beyond,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29 (2000): 68–69, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.61>.

language ideology — more specifically, the ideology of *the standard* — not the linguistic realities.²⁹ In this context, diglossia is seen a shifting ideological concept and not an ever-lasting linguistic phenomenon.

2.1.3 Arabic teaching methods: A typology

Due to the diglossic phenomenon in the Arabic-speaking world, there has been a long-lasting debate in the field of Arabic teaching about which Arabic varieties should be taught. Al-Batal classifies the main existing approaches of Arabic teaching, based on the main variety employed, into five different approaches: the Classical Arabic approach, the MSA approach, the colloquial approach, the middle language approach, and the simultaneous approach.³¹ As NCCU applies the MSA approach and UiO takes the simultaneous approach, these two approaches will be highlighted in next separate sections.

The Classical Arabic approach focuses concentratively on grammar and translation of the Quranic texts and other medieval Arabic sources, and merely trains the student's oral proficiency, since it is only limited to academic and intellectual purposes.³² On the other hand, the instruction of the colloquial approach, namely focusing specifically on an SA variety, does not require any reading skills and only provides students with basic knowledge of the spoken language.³³ Although the colloquial approach may seem to be practical and convenient, it is not widely applied, due to the concerns of threatening the preservation of the *standard* language.³⁴

Al-Busaidi states, there are no native speakers of this language, although MSA is used in most formal occasions, it is not at all employed to hold daily conversations. However, native Arabic speakers employ Educated Spoken Arabic, a variant of MSA, to conduct inter-dialectal conversations.³⁵ Similar to the concept of Educated Spoken Arabic, as a compromised instruction approach, Ryding suggests teaching “Formal Spoken Arabic,” which is a middle language

²⁹ Brustad, “Diglossia as Ideology,” 46–47.

³¹ Mahmoud Al-Batal, “Diglossia Proficiency: The Need for an Alternative Approach to Teaching,” in *The Arabic Language in America*, ed. Aleya Rouchdy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 292–302.

³² *Ibid.*, 202–3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁴ Fatma Al-Busaidi, “Arabic in Foreign Language Programmes: Difficulties and Challenges,” *Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies* 9, no. 4 (2015): 706.

³⁵ Al-Busaidi states that “this kind of language has produced a new form of comprehensible spoken Arabic called ‘Educated Spoken Arabic’ (ESA),” as a result, I consider ESA as a descendant variant of MSA, not only a separative variant on its own. *Ibid.*, 704.

between MSA and SA. The suggestion is based on the growing population of the users of this Arabic variety.³⁷

The MSA Approach

The MSA approach has six advantages: (1) MSA shows a part of the linguistic realities in the Arabic-speaking world, as it is spoken in some occasions; (2) MSA programs emphasize the importance of oral skills, thus helps the student internalize its linguistic features; (3) knowledge of MSA eases successive courses of SA varieties; (4) the MSA approach is the most efficient to deal with the diglossic situation; (5) teachers do not have to choose an SA variety if employing the MSA method; (6) learning MSA first facilitates the student's learning of SA varieties, but not vice-versa.³⁸ Also, learning MSA allows students to gain access to cultural and religious resources of the Arabic-speaking world.³⁹

Aside from scholars and teachers' view of the teaching method, according to Belnap's survey of the reasons why students participated in Arabic programs, among institutions in the United States and Canada, the top three reasons for students to enroll in Arabic courses are their interests in literature and culture, consideration to travel or live in the Middle East, and to be able to talk with Arabs.⁴⁰ It seems that the MSA approach generally meets students' needs, referring to its advantages that al-Batal summarizes. However, as reported by the survey, over twenty percent of the students suggest to include more speaking in class in order to improve the program.⁴¹

On the other hand, many scholars show their concerns for the MSA approach. Teaching only MSA has multiple limitations, as stated by al-Busaidi. First and foremost, it may create a gap between the student's classroom achievements and real-life experiences, since it is a linguistic reality that native Arabic speakers do not use MSA to hold daily conversations. As a

³⁷ Karin C. Ryding, "Proficiency Despite Diglossia: A New Approach for Arabic," *The Modern Language Journal* 75, no. 2 (1991): 212–18.

³⁸ Al-Batal, "Diglossia Proficiency: The Need for an Alternative Approach to Teaching," 294–95.

³⁹ Al-Busaidi, "Arabic in Foreign Language Programmes: Difficulties and Challenges," 705–6.

⁴⁰ R. KIRK BELNAP, "WHO'S TAKING ARABIC AND WHAT ON EARTH FOR? A Survey Of Students in Arabic Language Programs," *Al-'Arabiyya* 20, no. 1/2 (1987): 32–36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

result, students may eventually find it difficult to become integrated into local communities, and they often feel embarrassed, frustrated, or disappointed when using MSA with the locals.⁴²

Similarly, in a quantitative research on students' perceptions about SA and MSA, students who lived in the Arabic-speaking world believe that they "should learn spoken Arabic before traveling to the Arabic-speaking world."⁴³ Palmer even describes only teaching MSA as "a disservice to students," and he started the argument with the theory of language prestige. In this case, SA is considered as "unworthy of linguistic attention or research," thus, is often not taught in academic institutions.⁴⁴ Apart from the possible local experiences in the Arabic-speaking world, al-Wer indicates that MSA, despite being a modernized standard Arabic language, still is regarded as a language not standardized or codified by some scholars, and is a diffuse variety, thus has little legitimacy in some educational and religious institutions.⁴⁵

The Simultaneous Approach

As Palmer states that teaching only MSA does not benefit the students, he suggests that MSA and SA should be taught at the same time, so that the students can prepare to face "the linguistic realities in the Arab world."⁴⁶ Similarly, al-Batal states that the philosophy of the simultaneous approach is the soundest provided, since it reflects the linguistic realities most accurately.⁴⁷

However, it is indicated that the simultaneous approach takes the student more time and focus to gain proficiency, and that since two systems are taught synchronically, the student may experience confusion in early stages of learning.⁴⁸ To respond to the concerns, al-Batal states that the problems that the student faces are similar to what native Arabic speakers experience when first learning MSA formally, thus "it is a product of the diglossic situation."⁴⁹ Also, according to

⁴² Al-Busaidi, "Arabic in Foreign Language Programmes: Difficulties and Challenges," 705–6.

⁴³ Jeremy Palmer, "ARABIC DIGLOSSIA: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SPOKEN ARABIC AFTER LIVING IN THE ARABIC-SPEAKING WORLD," *Journal of Second Language Acquisition and Teaching* 15 (December 31, 2008): 87–88.

⁴⁴ Jeremy Palmer, "ARABIC DIGLOSSIA: TEACHING ONLY THE STANDARD VARIETY IS A DISSERVICE TO STUDENTS," *Journal of Second Language Acquisition and Teaching* 14 (December 31, 2007): 111–12.

⁴⁵ Enam Al-Wer, "Arabic Between Reality and Ideology," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 7, no. 2 (1997): 254–55.

⁴⁶ Palmer, "ARABIC DIGLOSSIA," December 31, 2007, 111–12.

⁴⁷ Al-Batal, "Diglossia Proficiency: The Need for an Alternative Approach to Teaching," 297–99.

⁴⁸ Al-Busaidi, "Arabic in Foreign Language Programmes: Difficulties and Challenges," 707–8.

⁴⁹ Al-Batal, "Diglossia Proficiency: The Need for an Alternative Approach to Teaching," 301–2.

Younes' response to the same concern, he refers to his own teaching experiences and state that students usually "develop a sense for the appropriate use of Fusha and CV [i.e. MSA and SA] at a surprisingly early stage in their learning of the language."⁵⁰

The simultaneous approach is often criticized since a difficult choice must be made: which SA variety to teach? However, Younes responds with his teaching experience and states that the challenge is rather limited to academic discussion but less influential in reality. In the program that he teaches, teachers from different backgrounds all teach the Educated Levantine variety, and it does not affect students' learning outcome.⁵¹

2.2 How diglossia is defined and employed in the thesis

Since diglossia plays an important role in the language realities of the Arabic-speaking world and further influences the designs of the TAFL curricula worldwide, the thesis takes this theory as the underlying factor. However, the term "diglossia" has been employed in socio-linguistic studies with several conceptual modifications,⁵² and it does not necessarily meet the original criteria as how Ferguson defines the phenomenon. As a result, it is crucial to clarify what the academic term means when it is used in the research. When the term "diglossia" or anything "diglossic" is mentioned in the following chapters, it can refer to, or contain both: first, Ferguson's traditional notion of diglossia, in which treats MSA as the higher form of the language, and SA as the lower. Second, the empirical experience of the coexistence of Arabic languages or varieties/variants/dialects as one system, which might or might not consist of a hierarchy of the usages of the varieties. As definitions differ, the contexts will be given in the analysis when the term is used, if needed.

⁵⁰ Munther Younes, "The Case for Integration in the Arabic-as-a-Foreign Language Classroom," *NECTFL Review* 64 (2009): 62–64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 64–66.

⁵² Lotfi Sayahi, *Diglossia and Language Contact: Language Variation and Change in North Africa*, Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact (Cambridge: University Press, 2014), 1.

3. The strategies of Arabic teaching at NCCU and UiO

To investigate into the teaching methods and the decisions behind the curricula designs at NCCU and UiO, I interviewed one teacher at each university regarding their personal opinions on Arabic teaching methods and how their students' learning outcome has been. This chapter also aims to provide background and contexts for the analysis in the following chapter.

The teacher at the Taiwanese institution is a non-native Arabic speaker and only teaches MSA. As she claims, the decision to only include MSA in the curriculum was not made by her, but through the administrative meetings of the department's teaching staff.⁵³ The Arabic teacher at the Norwegian institution, oppositely, is a native speaker and teaches MSA as well as Syrian and Egyptian SA. Both teachers instruct first year bachelor's students. Despite different curricula designs and students' learning outcome, the educational conditions at NCCU and UiO are somewhat similar: students receive six hours of Arabic language training weekly during the semesters, and there were three Arabic language teachers at both institutions when the interviews were conducted, including native and non-native speakers.

In this chapter, I will carry out three main themes of discussion based on the interviews. Firstly, I will investigate into the notion of teaching "one language" in the Arabic programs, and discuss the definitions of the "one language" according to both lecturers. Secondly, I will discuss the roles of culture and cultural contents in Arabic teaching, and how Arabic diglossia affects these roles. Lastly, I will analyze the challenges that the teachers face in classrooms.

Textbooks used at NCCU and UiO

It is worth noticing that both universities chose to use the same series of Arabic textbooks, *al-Kitāb fī Ta'allum al-'Arabiyya (al-Kitāb)*, but different editions, and this shows the attitudes towards the role of SA in the curricula. There has been a huge shift in the structure of the widely used textbooks published by Georgetown University Press. Its third, namely the latest, edition lists all vocabularies and grammatical examples in MSA, Egyptian, and Syrian SA at the same time,⁵⁴ instead of a short separate section for Egyptian SA as it appeared in the second edition. In

⁵³ Interlocutor A, Arabic teacher at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipei via Line, October 14, 2020.

⁵⁴ Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud Al-Batal, and Abbas Al-Tonsi, *Al-Kitāb Fī Ta'allum al-'Arabiyya: Al-Juz' al-Awwal* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2011), xxiv.

the second edition of *al-Kitāb*, it is mentioned that the goal of the SA sections in the book do not intend to teach it as a language system, but to make students familiar with the difference between two language registers.⁵⁵ Whereas in the third edition, the importance of learning SA varieties is strongly emphasized. Until now, students and teachers at NCCU still use the second edition of *al-Kitāb*,^{56 57} while the latest edition of the book is used in Arabic courses at UiO.⁵⁸

While *al-Kitāb* is used as the main textbooks throughout the three-year Arabic program at UiO, but serves as a complementary material at NCCU, for first-year students, NCCU uses another textbook *al-‘Arabiyya Bayna Yadayk (Bayna Yadayk)*, which is entirely designed for MSA and Classical Arabic training. The *Bayna Yadayk* textbooks were first published by Arabic For All (*al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Jamī‘*), an organization specialized in Arabic language teaching based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 2003. The publisher describes themselves as “a non-profit program for spreading Arabic worldwide,” and claims that “around 300,000 students, 3000 teachers and hundreds of universities, institutes and schools” worldwide are using their books and curriculum.⁵⁹ The *Bayna Yadayk* textbooks focus largely on Islamic values, and some of the main texts aim to train Muslim Arabic learners with phrases and terms related to the religion.⁶⁰ The beginner level textbook of the series also employs Quranic texts in every chapter to train students’ pronunciation.

3.2 Teaching “one language”

Similarly, the curricula of Arabic programs at both universities focus on “one language”, yet the definitions differ. As for UiO, the teaching method treats MSA and SA as an entity, and ideally there should not be separation of varieties when the students learn and later employ the “one

⁵⁵ Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud Al-Batal, and Abbas Al-Tonsi, *Al-Kitāb Fī Ta‘allum al-‘Arabiyya: Al-Juz’ al-Awwal* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2004), xiv.

⁵⁶ Interlocutor A, Arabic teacher at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Line, October 14, 2020.

⁵⁷ National Chengchi University, “Alaboyu (yi) 阿拉伯語 (一) [Arabic (1)],” accessed November 19, 2021, <https://newdoc.nccu.edu.tw/teaschm/1101/schmPrv.jsp-yy=110&smt=1&num=502101&gop=00&s=1.html>.

⁵⁸ “ARA1010 H21 Arabisk A [ARA1010 H21 Arabisk A],” Universitetet i Oslo, accessed November 19, 2021, [https://bibsys-](https://bibsys-k.alma.exlibrisgroup.com/leganto/readinglist/lists/12859454560002204?institute=47BIBSYS_UBO&auth=SAML)

[k.alma.exlibrisgroup.com/leganto/readinglist/lists/12859454560002204?institute=47BIBSYS_UBO&auth=SAML](https://bibsys-k.alma.exlibrisgroup.com/leganto/readinglist/lists/12859454560002204?institute=47BIBSYS_UBO&auth=SAML).

⁵⁹ “Arabic for All,” Arabic for All, accessed November 22, 2021, <https://www.arabicforall.net/en>.

⁶⁰ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bin ‘Ibrāhīm al-Fawzān, Mukhtār al-Ṭāhir Ḥusayn, and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Khāliq Muḥammad Faḍl, *Al-‘Arabiyya Bayna Yadayk: Kitāb al-Tālib (1) [Arabic Between Your Hands: Student’s Textbook (1)]* (Riyadh: Arabic for All, 2003), 26–27.

language”. On the other hand, at NCCU, MSA is the only language that is offered to the students in the program, thus it is the “one language” to which students should pay their sole attention.

3.2.1 “Arabic as one”

The teacher at UiO insists that MSA and SA should be, and have been taught simultaneously since she was employed by the faculty. This practice belongs to the simultaneous approach in the typology of Arabic teaching methods, as she states firmly:

We consider the Arabic language as one language. So, from day one, we let this idea be very clear to the students: that is one language. You don't have to have this firewall between the *‘āmmiyya* and the *fuṣḥā*. And we don't need to consider that, “oh, now I'm communicating I need to use the dialect. Oh, when I'm writing, it is the *fuṣḥā*.” I don't want that separation in the beginning, we want to treat it as the one language.⁶¹

What the teacher meant by “one language” is rather “one language system”. On this account, what the teacher at UiO describes theoretically matches the so-called “Arabic as one” vision when different methods of integration of MSA and SA in Arabic teaching programs are discussed. This vision is constructed on the basis of the belief which includes any Arabic varieties as one entity, that is, a language system called “Arabic”.⁶² Another term worth noticing that she mentions is “firewall”, which is the name to the opposing theoretical vision. The “firewall of separation” vision addresses directly to a belief that the relationship between MSA and SA is bidimensional, which stems from Ferguson’s diglossia theory. SA is kept out from the curriculum of an Arabic language program based on the argument that it is “the vulgar language of the street”, which should not be included in the educational domain.⁶³

In the design of the Arabic program at UiO, different SA varieties are regarded as “the flavor of the language”, and people are supposed to understand the students when they speak any varieties (including MSA) of the Arabic language, in order to emphasize the importance of the communicative method that they have employed. Accordingly, UiO students are encouraged to mix MSA into SA when they speak, because according to the teacher, it is what the native

⁶¹ Interlocutor B, Arabic teacher at UiO, author’s interview, online via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

⁶² Mahmoud Al-Batal, “Dialect Integration in the Arabic Foreign Language Curriculum:,” in *Arabic as One Language*, ed. Mahmoud Al-Batal, Integrating Dialect in the Arabic Language Curriculum (Georgetown University Press, 2018), 8, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1fj85jd.5>.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4–7.

speakers would do. She allows the students to employ any words they could search out within their Arabic (as one) vocabulary in a colloquial sentence. As a result, the main difference of her claim from the traditional notion of Arabic diglossia is MSA is not regarded only as the written language, but also a spoken form with which native speakers would code-switch naturally in daily life.⁶⁴

3.2.2 MSA as the one language

The Arabic program at NCCU fits the “firewall of separation vision,” which was mentioned in the previous section. Although, according to the definition of the vision, SA varieties are completely kept out from the classroom. The teacher at NCCU does engage some expressions in the Levantine SA in her class, for instance, *tamām* (“good”) and *māshī* (“going well” or “okay”) in certain contexts, to familiarize students with common colloquial usages, but in a very small amount.⁶⁵

The teacher at NCCU states that, although any varieties of the Arabic language are crucial in the cultural context, MSA nevertheless has more benefits than SA varieties for non-native speakers to learn. She further explains that MSA is the basis of the written forms of the Arabic language, and SA varieties were based on Classical Arabic and have applied regional changes. As a result, it is most beneficial to solely learn the MSA at the starting point, and then learners will be able to adjust themselves faster in SA varieties based on their knowledge in MSA. On the other hand, she does emphasize that she does not regard MSA as the superior form of the language, and state repeatedly that she does not intend to negate the importance of SA. However, she does prioritize MSA over SA varieties, as she poses the question:

If I do not have enough time for MSA, how can I even learn dialects? ⁶⁶

The question can be analyzed in three aspects. Firstly, it implies that the students generally do not have enough time to learn the language, either it is MSA or SA varieties. Secondly, MSA and SA learning processes are, or should be, separated. Lastly, within students’ limited precious learning hours, MSA is more worth learning than SA, which shows the superior status of MSA over SA in her speech. She also states that, if the students plan to proceed in

⁶⁴ Interlocutor B, Arabic teacher at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

⁶⁵ Interlocutor A, Arabic teacher at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Line, October 14, 2020.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

academia, MSA has more benefits for the students, as literature or linguistic (grammatical) studies are based on MSA, or Classical Arabic.⁶⁷

The teacher at NCCU, however, claims that she would promise the students when being asked to provide trainings in SA that they would learn the varieties when they proceed in the program, although she does not mention if the learning or teaching will be in Taiwan or abroad, initiated by students or teaching staff, and within educational institutes or on the streets.⁶⁸

3.2.3 Which varieties should be included?

The Arabic teacher at NCCU expressed her concerns if the institution should choose to offer SA varieties in the future. In her opinion, if the program includes a certain SA variety, or two varieties as what UiO provides, teachers from a certain region would not be able to teach the designated variety of another region.⁶⁹ To support her stance, an example used was that the only teacher who offered a selective SA course, which is now discontinued as he left the position, was Iraqi. Although most Arabic students at NCCU choose to have their semesters abroad in Jordan, Kuwait, and Egypt, the Iraqi teacher taught Iraqi SA, instead of offering Levantine SA varieties or the Egyptian dialect. In addition, since the Arabic language program at NCCU was established, the department has hired language lecturers from different regions of the Arabic-speaking world including Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Iraq, Syria, Jordan etc. She argues that either the department will have to hire teachers from certain regions and sacrifice potential excellent candidates for the position, or the curriculum has to be updated according to the nationalities of the teaching staff.⁷⁰

Oppositely, when discussing the choice of specific varieties of SA offered in the program, the teacher at UiO takes herself as an example: she is fluent in the Egyptian SA although she is not Egyptian, and any native Arabic speakers would at least understand or even speak this variety. She states that it would be the same for Levantine SA varieties, including Syrian SA which is taught at UiO. She claims that there have been no difficulties for her to teach the Egyptian SA. In addition, the reason why UiO offers only Egyptian and Syrian SA, instead of other varieties, is that these two are the most understood ones in the Arabic-speaking world. This

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Interlocutor A, Arabic teacher at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipei via Line, October 14, 2020.

⁷⁰ Author's personal communication with the teacher at NCCU.

is based on the rich amount of exported cultural contents from Egypt and Levantine countries, as she states. In addition, the main reason of not teaching two SA varieties simultaneously, according to the teacher at UiO, is that it would be too difficult for the students to handle two different varieties and MSA at the same time.⁷¹

3.2.4 Fusion or confusion

While the teacher at UiO states that it is more beneficial for the students to learn MSA and SA as one language simultaneously,⁷² the teacher at NCCU argues that teaching SA from the very beginning can cause confusion for the students. She reports according to her teaching experience that, when the students read the *al-Kitāb* textbooks, they were not able to differentiate between MSA and SA usages. She also expresses the concerns that the students would not be able to code-switch when learning different variants at the same time, since those would be new languages to them.⁷³ The teacher at UiO shows an entirely different aspect. As she started to teach first year Bachelor's students at UiO for the first time in 2020, she observed that the students would be able to use different variants flexibly, even with only eight weeks of learning at the time we spoke. She admits that she would have some fears beforehand, and it is exactly the same fear of teachers who chose other approaches. She states that she would simply answer any Arabic teachers who have the same fear: "try it, and then you can judge about it." She further emphasizes that, as she has observed, the students have more potentials than she imagined, and it is the reason why she believes deeply in the teaching method she employs now.⁷⁴

Although the teacher at UiO seems to be optimistic regarding the concerns of causing confusion teaching SA and MSA simultaneously, as she observes positive outcomes in classrooms, there are certain blind spots of the statement. This instructing method does cause confusion for the students, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.3 Learning the culture

The teacher at NCCU has encountered some students who expressed their need and eagerness to learn more about SA, as they consider it as more of a living language and rather useful. She argues that the idea might come from students' misunderstandings of MSA, "possibly from

⁷¹ Interlocutor B, Arabic teacher at UiO, author's interview, Oslo via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Interlocutor A, Arabic teacher at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipei via Line, October 14, 2020.

⁷⁴ Interlocutor B, Arabic teacher at UiO, author's interview, Oslo via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

online resources,” such as this variety is not as important and is a dead language spoken by only “ancient Arabs”. As a result, she feels that it is her obligation to clarify the linguistic situation, so that the students do not consider their efforts in learning MSA worthless. However, as I asked the teacher at UiO about what her opinions on the Arabic programs in which only MSA is included were, she answers that:

To be honest, I feel very sad. ... Because they are not enjoying learning the language, they are not having fun. ... If you learn only the *fushā*, it is the dead language for you. The language, you are only going to see it in the media for specific things to do with it. ⁷⁵

The teacher at UiO, who is a native Arabic speaker, grew up in an Arabic-speaking country, and has been teaching the language in different countries for several years, seems to have an entirely opposite stance regarding the sociolinguistic status of MSA. She then supports her arguments by referring to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines, which refers to the culture in the target language as an important deciding element of learners’ proficiency,⁷⁶ and The National Standards for Foreign Language Education (also known as “the five Cs”), which consider culture and communication as two of the five main targets of foreign language teaching.⁷⁷ She further explains:

One of the things in our culture is, when you are speaking, speak *‘āmiyya*. You are never gonna see two people speaking *fushā* on the street. So this setting will make it the same in classroom, we don't change it, because when this student is going to go out of the class, I do not want them to be shocked. ⁷⁸

Another pair of opposing statements that both teachers mention on the same theme is on the cultural materials they employ in the classes. The teacher at NCCU admits that it is important for the students to know some SA, if they want to talk in daily life, or to listen to songs, which builds a firewall between MSA and SA, and implies that SA is the variety that carries

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, “ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012,” 2012, <https://www.actfl.org/resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012>.

⁷⁷ American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, “World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages,” accessed November 12, 2021, <https://www.actfl.org/resources/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages>.

⁷⁸ Interlocutor B, Arabic teacher at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

contemporary cultural contents.⁷⁹ The teacher at UiO, on the other hand, emphasizes that there are massive amounts of cultural contents offered in MSA, like poetry or songs.⁸⁰

3.4 An ideal curriculum design and the difficulties to implement

Although the teacher at NCCU agrees that SA should be offered for the students, and has an imagined ideal design of the curriculum, she states that it is difficult to implement her ideal way of teaching, based on three main administrative reasons. Firstly, the freshmen only receive six hours of language training, and as a result, it is challenging for her to teach two varieties, either simultaneously or separately. Secondly, there are not enough teachers at the department, so it is also difficult to offer additional SA training, whether it is to be mandatory or optional. Lastly, it would be difficult for the department to decide which varieties of SA to teach, as it depends largely on teachers' countries of origin and educational background.⁸¹

Despite the fact that the teacher at NCCU regards the inability of teaching any SA as caused by administrative difficulties, UiO fulfills it with the same teaching hours per week, and the same number of teachers. In addition, the Arabic teacher at UiO mentions that the amount of students' learning hours in classroom is sufficient in her opinion, as it requires equal amount of the time for the students to study spontaneously outside of the classroom. In other words, the students at UiO are expected to preview and review on their own.⁸² In contrary, as the teacher at NCCU observes, she would also request the students to review at home, and suggested that those who are interested in SA usages to refer to some parts in the textbook, but so far no students have done so.⁸³ This shows systematic flaws of the Taiwanese higher education system, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.5 How does diglossia affect Arabic teachers' instructing methods?

The only fact that both teachers agree on is that there is no doubt that teaching SA is necessary, despite their different opinions regarding the proper proportion of MSA and SA in classroom and the different fields of importance of both varieties. All the main opposing statements are listed and shown below:

⁷⁹ Interlocutor A, Arabic teacher at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipai via Line, October 14, 2020.

⁸⁰ Interlocutor B, Arabic teacher at UiO, author's interview, Oslo via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

⁸¹ Interlocutor A, Arabic teacher at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipai via Line, October 14, 2020.

⁸² Interlocutor B, Arabic teacher at UiO, author's interview, Oslo via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

⁸³ Interlocutor A, Arabic teacher at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipai via Line, October 14, 2020.

| Arabic teacher at NCCU | Arabic teacher at UiO |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. MSA is more worth learning, if the learning time is limited. b. MSA and SA are separated entities. c. To prevent confusion, students should not mix varieties. d. The learning time of SA should increase as students reach higher proficiency in MSA. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. MSA and SA should be learn at the same time. b. MSA and SA altogether form one language system. c. It is natural to mix MSA and SA in speech, as the native speakers also do so. d. There is little confusion caused in the beginning when MSA and SA are taught simultaneously. e. The learning time of MSA and SA should be equal. |

Table 3.4.1 The beliefs of the educators

I argue that the way the teacher at NCCU regards to the linguistic phenomenon stems from the traditional notion of diglossia. On the other hand, the language training at UiO reflects more on the empirical phenomenon, and further I argue that the teaching method essentially is designed and employed to contend against the popular common understanding of Arabic diglossia.

In NCCU's program, the boundary between MSA and SA is clearly drawn. While MSA is academic, prioritized and literary, SA is (pop-) cultural, secondary and conversational. The clear domains of the two varieties then make them strictly two entities. It is the distinguishment between the two entities that caused the incompatibility of the two varieties in the curriculum – even if they can be taught simultaneously, they cannot be taught in an integrated manner. In contrary, Arabic diglossia affected UiO's curriculum in another way: although the two varieties are considered as one system, and the separation of the domains are more or less discarded, the instructor still has to face the reality that there are two sets of knowledge for the students to deal with. In order to ease the students with the pressure of having to learn two registers at the same time, the program has to emphasize that mixing codes is allowed, so that the confusion of the two sets can be accepted. Also, in order to contend against the diglossic ideology, the program tends to create a speech environment that is somewhat artificial - the boundary between MSA and SA is more blurred than the reality. How the two universities understand the distance

between traditional diglossia and the socio-linguistic situation in Arabic-speaking countries lie on two ends of the spectrum, and the empirical fact of the reality is perhaps somewhere in the middle of the two ends.

While what the teacher at UiO states seems to answer the concerns of the other teacher at NCCU, and the teaching method that UiO's Arabic program provides seems to be the perfect one to prepare the students with linguistic realities in the Arabic-speaking world, the students I interviewed only agree to certain degrees. To proceed, in the next chapter, I will examine if the beliefs of the educators have been passed onto the students, and what the students' feedback are on the curricula designs.

4. Students' perceptions on their learning outcomes

In order to tackle the research question, I have interviewed six UiO students and eleven NCCU students. Almost all students have graduated from the full-time Bachelor's programs at the universities, and have traveled to at least one of the Arabic-speaking countries for a full-time language training program. I treat the interlocutors from the two universities as two speech communities, although they all learn speak the Arabic language. The teacher and the students from NCCU as one community, and those from UiO are another. By examining what they have expressed, I come out with conclusions if the ideological concepts have been passed down from the educators to the learners.

4.1 The destinations of the students

4.1.1 NCCU

The Department of Arabic Language and Culture at NCCU does not necessitate its students to travel and receive trainings abroad, however, studying abroad is recommended and encouraged. The students can choose to participate in the yearly examination held in joint by the department and the Office of International Cooperation of NCCU, and compete for the places in scholarship programs with the scores of the examination. During the time my interlocutors studied at NCCU, the institutions that had agreements with the Taiwanese government and offered scholarship and funding were Kuwait University and the University of Jordan. Others who do not wish to join the exam or are not qualified for the sponsored programs would apply for self-financed programs in Middle Eastern countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine. Among the popular destinations, my interlocutors who attended self-financed programs chose Egypt, Jordan, and Oman.

The language center of Kuwait University offers a one-year full-time Arabic program with scholarship, which is the program that all the interlocutors who studied in Kuwait attended. All students in the program are divided into three or four levels according to their proficiency, as a result, not all my interlocutors studied in the same class, although they started the Arabic program at NCCU at the same time. The curriculum of the program includes only MSA, although with *al-Kitāb* as the main textbook, and mainly aims to train its students with grammatical knowledge and reading skills. A Kuwaiti SA course which had been organized by

Kuwaiti students at Kuwait University had also been offered. However, according to Jiang, the SA course was only offered during the summer semester, and it was voluntary and only lasted one hour per week, as it was not a part of the official curriculum.⁸⁴

The Taiwanese students I interviewed who chose Jordan as the destination all attended the Arabic program at the University of Jordan, regardless of whether or not they received the scholarship. All students in the program are required to take a placement test in the beginning of each semester, and put into six levels.⁸⁵ The curriculum takes the textbooks that were written by the teaching staff of the language center as the main teaching material, focuses mostly on MSA, and offers a mandatory Jordanian SA class which takes place once a week.⁸⁶

4.1.2 UiO

The students who attend the undergraduate program of Middle East Studies with Arabic at UiO are requested to choose between the Egyptian dialect and the Syrian dialect when they enroll in the program, and it is obligatory for the students to study abroad in the fourth semester at the destination according to their choice of the SA variety.⁸⁷ As UiO has formal agreements with language institutions abroad, Jordan (for those who choose the Syrian dialect) and Egypt (for those who choose the Egyptian dialect) are the fixed destinations.⁸⁸ According to both the teacher and students at UiO, the faculty makes sure that the institutions abroad employ the same approach and the same teaching materials. As a result, the semester abroad serves as a complement of the curriculum design of UiO.⁸⁹ One of the interlocutors confirms that UiO had “interfered” the teaching method of the Jordanian institute, as they had almost entire training in MSA, but the teachers changed in the middle and focused more on SA.

The UiO students I interviewed who chose Syrian SA were sent to Qasid Arabic Institute. As Kari describes, the students were divided into groups, however not based on their proficiency,

⁸⁴ Interlocutor F “Jiang”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 13, 2021.

⁸⁵ The University of Jordan, “Language Center,” accessed November 13, 2021, <http://centers.ju.edu.jo/en/ujlc/Pages/ASOL-info.aspx>.

⁸⁶ Interlocutor J “Zheng”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Amman via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

⁸⁷ Universitetet i Oslo, “Studieopphold i utlandet [Study abroad],” May 11, 2021, <https://www.uio.no/studier/program/aas/studieretninger/arabisk/utlandet/index.html>.

⁸⁸ Universitetet i Oslo, “ARA2010 - Arabisk D: Obligatorisk utlandsopphald [ARA2010 - Arabic D: Obligatory Stay Abroad],” November 15, 2021, <https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ikos/ARA2010/obligatorisk-utlandsopphald/index.html>.

⁸⁹ Interlocutor B, Arabic teacher at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

and they studied with the same classmates at UiO.^{90 91} Also, among those who received the training at Qasid Arabic Institute, most mention that the main focus of the curriculum was MSA. When Marit attended the program in 2018, as she recalls, she had four hours of MSA classes and one hour of the SA class per day.⁹²

The students who chose the Egyptian SA, on the other hand, have been sent to different language institutions. As I conduct the research, UiO currently have their agreement with Alexandria University.⁹³ However, one of the interlocutors who had her semester abroad in Egypt attended the language courses at International House Cairo. The main focus of the curriculum of the language institution was MSA, and SA was taught separately. As Inger states, the SA training was unorganized and not so efficient, as the teachers would encourage the students to learn the SA “on the street.”⁹⁴

4.1 NCCU students’ perceptions

4.1.2 Classroom versus real life

As Norwegian students are more likely to have the chance to converse with native Arabic speakers than most Taiwanese Arabic students, Qian’s first impressions of how the Arabic language is used practically in daily life were from online sources. Long before he had the chance to talk to any native speakers outside of the classroom, he already realized the importance of knowing SA varieties.⁹⁵ However, he is a rare case among my interviewees, as most of the students did not have a completely clear idea about the diglossic situation in Arabic-speaking countries. Although the teacher briefly introduced Arabic diglossia in the very beginning of the first class, Chen felt rather indifferent about the phenomenon. Not until she landed in Egypt did she realize the Arabic she had been learning was not the language that locals mostly use in daily conversation, and would not be understood in many occasions.⁹⁶ Similarly, Zhou states that she had always known the fact that MSA and SA coexist in Arabic-speaking countries, but she did

⁹⁰ Interlocutor D, “Kari”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo via Zoom, November 21, 2020.

⁹¹ As all interlocutors remain anonymous in the project, I assigned a pseudonym to each interviewee. The students at UiO are given common Norwegian names, and those from NCCU are given common Chinese last names, in order to make it clearer to read and understand the contexts.

⁹² Interlocutor R “Marit”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Cairo via Zoom, November 19, 2021.

⁹³ Universitetet i Oslo, “ARA2010 - Arabisk D.”

⁹⁴ Interlocutor C “Inger”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Reykjavík via Zoom, November 21, 2020.

⁹⁵ Interlocutor E “Qian”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 12, 2021.

⁹⁶ Interlocutor M “Chen”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Line, May 21, 2021.

not realize how difficult it could be to know only one variety, if she would want to talk to the locals, until she traveled abroad.⁹⁷

The realization of the diglossic phenomenon could be even belated depending on the students' destinations, on the other hand. Most NCCU students who studied in Kuwait express that they did not really feel the need to learn the dialect, since Kuwaiti locals often speak fluent English as the country consists of more than two third of immigrants.⁹⁸ Jiang states that not knowing the Kuwaiti dialect was not a disadvantage for her, and would not cause any inconvenience in daily life, but at the same time, not speaking Arabic at all would not be an issue at all either.⁹⁹ The same applies to Wang, who studied in Oman, that although she would always try to speak Arabic outside of the campus, she felt it was unnecessary.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, although Qian had a certain understanding of how Arabic varieties are used before he traveled, he did not start to learn the local SA shortly after he realized that it was completely not needed in Kuwait. He later experienced another shift of mentality when he traveled to Jordan, and started paying attention to how he should speak Arabic accordingly to the linguistic reality.¹⁰¹

As Qian's knowledge in Levantine SA varieties was limited, he would mix MSA into his speaking, and Jordanians would mostly respond to him in MSA or English, knowing that he did not speak the local SA. Nevertheless, he felt his linguistic knowledge was useful, and did not feel that it was abnormal to use MSA as a spoken language, as long as he could express himself.¹⁰² On the other hand, Feng, whose first destination in the Middle East was Jordan, had a similar experience, yet with a different mindset. She claims that she had "never learned the dialect in Jordan," and she would always speak MSA, although with a few SA words occasionally. She does not agree that one needs to know the Jordanian or Levantine SA varieties to live in the country, and was satisfied with her linguistic knowledge of MSA. She does admit that MSA is not naturally spoken by the locals, and states that:

⁹⁷ Interlocutor H "Zhou", student at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 14, 2021.

⁹⁸ "Kuwait Population 2021 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)," World Population Review, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kuwait-population>.

⁹⁹ Interlocutor F "Jiang", student at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 13, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Interlocutor K "Wang", student at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

¹⁰¹ Interlocutor E "Qian", student at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 12, 2021.

¹⁰² Ibid.

What I have learned is not useless, it is just not used here. Or, shall I say, they use it differently.¹⁰³

The two students who stayed in Jordan had similar experiences and comprehensions of how MSA was accepted as a spoken language there, but the main difference was that Qian had to speak it since he had little knowledge of the Levantine SA, as he tried to grab any opportunities to practice Arabic speaking, which he was not provided as much in Kuwait, while Feng consciously chose to not learn the Jordanian SA, because she thought MSA was useful enough. Another common point of the two students' perspectives was that they consider they were prepared with the MSA training beforehand, which allowed them to interact with the locals in Arabic. They were two rare cases among the interviewees.

Most Taiwanese students do not agree that they were well-prepared before they traveled abroad. As Jiang mentioned, she felt that she only had a very basic range of knowledge in MSA when she first arrived in Kuwait, which was only enough for simple daily conversation, if she would try to speak. However, she could barely talk in a casual setting when she attended the language exchange meeting arranged by Kuwait University.¹⁰⁴ The feeling of not being well-prepared results from two factors. First, the MSA courses were not solid enough, and second, SA was excluded from the curriculum.

4.1.3 Starting to speak a dialect

Although all of the interlocutors who studied in Kuwait or Oman mentioned that a large part of their daily conversation was conducted in English, Jiang still feels that having some basic knowledge of SA would be beneficial. Some locals, though not necessarily Kuwaitis, would try to communicate with her in Kuwaiti Arabic.¹⁰⁵ Most interviewees who lived in Jordan and Egypt, on the other hand, feel a stronger need to know the local SA varieties to connect with the locals. Wei, who studied in Jordan, mentions that it would be much more difficult to connect with locals if one does not know any Jordanian SA.

Most common experiences for the Taiwanese students who tried to speak MSA in Arabic-speaking countries were similar to Wu's encounter. When Wu first arrived in Egypt, she

¹⁰³ Interlocutor L "Feng", student at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-New York via Zoom, May 20, 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Interlocutor F "Jiang", student at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 13, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

spoke MSA, as she only knew this variety. Although the locals comprehended what she was trying to express, they would always reply in the Egyptian SA, which she had not learned at the time. Afterwards, she would switch to English, but then the locals did not understand. This kind of frustration happened on a daily basis, as Wu remembers, before she learned the SA.¹⁰⁶ It is similar to what Chen argues:

We [Taiwanese students] spoke MSA, and they [Egyptian locals] replied entirely in SA. We did not understand anything... after a while we just gave up. ... I feel SA is more important than MSA, because you use it every day. However, I would still learn MSA first, because it gives a good foundation for one to learn SA.¹⁰⁷

Chen expresses that her experience learning the Egyptian SA was particularly enjoyable, as it allowed much smoother communications for her stay in Egypt. In her opinion, SA is crucial for Arabic learners to build confidence and “a sense of achievement,” especially after all the frustrations when she first arrived. In addition, she explains that she has been interested in and motivated by Arabic pop music and films, in which SA is used mainly. Nevertheless, she still agrees that MSA is definitely necessary for the learners, although her Arab friends would tell her “no one speaks MSA,” as she consider MSA a medium which eases her learning process of the Egyptian SA.¹⁰⁸

Almost all Taiwanese students express that they would love to learn an SA variety if they have the chance, which shows a relatively passive attitude, and implies that no opportunities for the students to learn SA have been offered at NCCU. However, the chance was once given, as a selectable Iraqi SA course was offered in 2017 and 2018, which had been the only course which fully focused on an SA variety offered at NCCU in the last decades.

The Iraqi Arabic course, which was the first attempt in recent years to train students with an SA variety, generally disappointed the students. When Qian took the course, he felt that it was clumsily planned, as it mostly focused on grammatical structures and translation, instead of speaking and listening comprehension. He expresses that he immediately lost his interests and wanted to drop out from the course.¹⁰⁹ Zheng, who also signed up for the course, had the same

¹⁰⁶ Interlocutor I “Wu”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Interlocutor M “Chen”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Line, May 21, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Interlocutor E “Qian”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 12, 2021.

feedback. He reflects his experience learning different SA varieties, either participating in classes or studying spontaneously, and comments that this badly designed course shows SA teaching also requires proper training for the teachers.¹¹⁰ He emphasizes that any Arabic learners should know MSA and at least one SA variety, since it is essential for one to both communicate colloquially and understand written materials, but within carefully designed curriculum structure. The only good or neutral comment he gave regarding the Iraqi Arabic course was that the teacher made it extremely clear that the SA variety is another different language from MSA, and also since it was separated from the MSA courses, when he started learning the SA, he was not confused at all.¹¹¹

Regarding how SA should be taught, if the varieties are included as an obligatory part of the curriculum, NCCU students have diverged opinions. As Zhou managed to find language exchange partners and practice SA varieties, she argues that her partners often did not know how to explain certain usages and grammatical structures, which makes the learning inefficient and loose. She expects SA to be included in the curriculum for this reason and feels that it would make the language training more comprehensive.¹¹² Chen has a similar stance and regards SA varieties as an important part in her imagination of an ideal Arabic language curriculum. However, she does not agree that SA should be included from the start. She argues that, since MSA is “boring and difficult,” if the students have access to both varieties from the beginning, they would possibly give up on MSA and focus fully on SA, which would be a disadvantage.¹¹³

Wang, on the other hand, argues one should simply travel to one of the Arabic-speaking countries if they want to learn SA, not necessarily in the curriculum. This is based on her opinion that the MSA training at NCCU, which has always been the main focus of the program, was not even properly structured, not to mention adding SA varieties to the curriculum.¹¹⁴

4.1.4 Motivation and frustration

Most Taiwanese students experienced a drop of their motivation to further learn or maintain the language shortly after returning back to Taiwan from Arabic-speaking countries, while the peak

¹¹⁰ Author’s personal communication with interlocutor J.

¹¹¹ Interlocutor J “Zheng”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Amman via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

¹¹² Interlocutor H “Zhou”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 14, 2021.

¹¹³ Interlocutor M “Chen”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Line, May 21, 2021.

¹¹⁴ Interlocutor K “Wang”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

of their motivation usually happened while they lived abroad. Jiang describes that her motivation dropped dramatically once she traveled back to Taiwan.¹¹⁵ It was similar for Qian. When he return from his second trip to the Middle East, he felt the eager to maintain his speaking ability, but was soon demotivated realizing the lack of learning resources and opportunities to speak in Taiwan.¹¹⁶ Moreover, as most Taiwanese students mention, the Arabic department at NCCU did not manage to provide corresponding training for the students who returned. Wu further expresses that it is “important to be forced” to practice the language, no matter it is MSA or any SA varieties.¹¹⁷ Wang says that she had always tried to put as much effort as possible when she was studying in Oman, where the students were requested to deliver an oral presentation and to write a short essay each week. However, when she left the country and started at NCCU again, she felt “bored” immediately.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, although Lee states that she did not really lose much motivation as she had been pushing herself to still practice the language intensely, it had been mainly through reading Arabic news online. In other words, the language she managed to maintain was only MSA.¹¹⁹

Feng was a different case. She was largely demotivated when she arrived in Jordan and struggled so much that she wanted to end her year abroad and move back home in the second month. She was placed in a higher level at the language center, but soon realized that her proficiency was much worse than other classmates. Feng succeeded in the placement test only because she had been trained and gained good writing and reading skills, but her listening and speaking ability, even in MSA, were notably weak. This is possibly why she was not specifically demotivated after she traveled back home, as she already had the lowest point of motivation abroad. Also, although she also feels the lack of linguistic environment needed to keep her proficiency, her focus had always been on MSA, which was still provided at NCCU.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Interlocutor F “Jiang”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 13, 2021.

¹¹⁶ Interlocutor E “Qian”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 12, 2021.

¹¹⁷ Interlocutor I “Wu”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

¹¹⁸ Interlocutor K “Wang”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

¹¹⁹ Interlocutor G “Lee”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 14, 2021.

¹²⁰ Interlocutor L “Feng”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-New York via Zoom, May 20, 2021.

Self-disappointment

A couple of students criticize the curriculum harshly and consider the department fully responsible for the generally poor proficiency of the students, while a few Taiwanese students express dissatisfaction with themselves and feel that it is their lack of spontaneous actions which resulted in lower achievement than what they have expected or imagined. The rest of the students generally have a mixed attitude between of the two extremes.

Zhou shares her experience: when she traveled in Jordan, she met two other travelers from China. As they ate at a restaurant together, she was mocked by them because she did not know how to order food in Arabic, although she is an Arabic major.¹²¹ Lee expresses that she was very disappointed of herself after graduation, when she realized that she had lost her proficiency, mainly since the courses at NCCU did not help her maintain what she had learned abroad after returning to Taiwan. As an Arabic major, she feels that should have known the language better. As a result, she is completely demotivated to study the language now.¹²² Jiang, similarly, imagined that the Arabic program at NCCU would have prepared her to employ the Arabic language in an advanced level, and now she was done with the study and feels largely frustrated.¹²³

4.1.5 Discussions on the curriculum

Students at NCCU mostly delivered negative feedback on the curriculum design in general. Qian compares his experience learning French to the experience learning Arabic. As he has been learning Arabic for five years now, he would not agree that his Arabic proficiency reached the same level of his French proficiency when he had been learning the language for five years. He also mentions that he is not confident enough to say that he majored in Arabic because he studied at NCCU, and it is a result of the uncoordinated curriculum designs. The main flaw of the curriculum, in his opinion, is that the students are not immersed in the culture. From the start until his graduation, he had always felt distant to the language and found the language irrelevant

¹²¹ Interlocutor H “Zhou”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipai via Zoom, May 14, 2021.

¹²² Interlocutor G “Lee”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipai via Zoom, May 14, 2021.

¹²³ Interlocutor F “Jiang”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipai via Zoom, May 13, 2021.

in his life.¹²⁴ Similarly, Wei criticizes that the teachers did not realize how distant the language is to the students, and “they did not try hard enough to move it closer”.¹²⁵

Zheng, who is currently studying in Jordan for his master’s degree in teaching Arabic as a foreign language, states that the course designs at NCCU do not meet the suggestions based on the theories in the field of second language acquisition which he studied. He compares the curriculum of NCCU and his own teaching experiences, and explains that:

To learn a language is different from to acquire a language. ... A language is also something you need to feel. You need to be able to talk naturally and freely, not just to memorize rules. ... You cannot just introduce the rules, instead, you have to design carefully and allow the students to apply the rules through actual using them. So they get the skills, not just the knowledge.¹²⁶

He emphasizes that the observation applies to both the MSA and SA teaching at NCCU. Moreover, he indicates that it would be difficult to start the learning process on the streets in an Arabic-speaking country, and some basic knowledge from a carefully structured course beforehand would help a lot.¹²⁷ It is similar to what Wang comments on teachers’ attitudes towards SA learning at NCCU:

Everyone [teachers at NCCU] said that you would gradually learn it [SA] while you speak to the locals. I do not agree.¹²⁸

Zheng also mentions that the choice of textbooks at NCCU is highly problematic. The *Bayna Yadayk* textbooks, other than containing only MSA, are too religious and thus irrelevant to non-Muslim Arabic learners.¹²⁹ Lee expresses the same, and criticizes *Bayna Yadayk* for its “chaotic structure” and “useless vocabulary inputs,” as it did not allow her to obtain practical knowledge to speak the language.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Interlocutor E “Qian”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 12, 2021.

¹²⁵ Interlocutor O “Wei”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 25, 2021.

¹²⁶ Interlocutor J “Zheng”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Amman via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Interlocutor K “Wang”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

¹²⁹ Interlocutor J “Zheng”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Amman via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

¹³⁰ Interlocutor G “Lee”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 14, 2021.

4.1.6 Other factors that affected students' learning outcome

Rather than blaming solely on the curriculum design, the problem that the Taiwanese students who major in the Arabic language encounter in the Arabic-speaking world might also result from other factors. Firstly, it is the structural flaws of the higher education system. In Taiwan, freshmen generally take more than twenty credits per semester, which equals around forty ECTS. However, different from the European system, taking twenty credits means that the one spends at least twenty hours in classrooms weekly, as their learning time at home is not considered as a part of the credits. For Arabic students, apart from the language courses, they also need to take mandatory credits in English, Chinese, liberal arts, and physical education.¹³¹ This means that they do not have enough time to review what they have learned in class, thus the teaching offered on campus is a large part of their learning. This might have been another reason why the learning outcome of the Taiwanese students seems to be less efficient.

Secondly, Jiang reflected her experiences on cultural differences:

One element is the lack of oral training [at NCCU] of course... Also, in our culture, it is usually emphasized that everything should be done perfectly. You would only do something when you know you can do it right. As a result, when you try to express something... no matter it is the grammar or the pronunciation, you want them to be a hundred percent correct. But how would someone speak so perfectly in their beginning phase? Our mentality limited our actions.¹³²

It shows that cultural differences can be another element which affects how Taiwanese students employ the language, as multiple interlocutors mentioned East Asian students (Taiwanese, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.) are less likely to try to converse with the language in daily life, while European students seem to be much more spontaneous.

Lastly, the limited career options for Arabic major students either affected the students to only focus on MSA, or demotivated them from maintaining the language, both MSA and SA. As Jiang mentions, in Taiwan, to pursue a career with a Bachelor's degree of the Arabic language requires only MSA, since the Arabic skills needed are mostly writing and reading.¹³³ For the same reason, Zhu, who traveled to Oman for his study abroad and claims he "never learned any

¹³¹ National Chengchi University, "Kecheng zixun 課程資訊 [Course Information]."

¹³² Interlocutor F "Jiang", student at NCCU, author's interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 13, 2021.

¹³³ Ibid.

dialects”, would only focus on MSA, as he plans to work as a diplomat in the future, and the official qualification examinations are only given in MSA, not in any varieties of SA.¹³⁴ Zhou simply comments that, in general, Arabic is not a useful language in Taiwan.¹³⁵

4.2 UiO students’ perceptions

Before proceeding to the analysis, it is important to note that not all UiO students I interviewed received the integrated language training. Some of the interlocutors learned MSA and the Syrian SA in different classes, as the teacher at the time was strict about distinguishing of the two varieties. According to Jonas, when he started at UiO, the two teachers who taught different SA varieties did not have a mutual understanding of how the language should be instructed, causing the two groups of students receiving different teaching methods. The teacher he had was somewhat a “purist,” while the other teacher concentrated more on how communication skills were acquired by the students and less on grammatical trainings.¹³⁶

4.2.1 Confusion to learn two languages

One of the biggest concerns of the Arabic teacher at NCCU for the teaching method which includes (not necessarily integrates) MSA and SA at the same time is that, when the “two languages” are involved, it can cause confusion for the students. The Arabic teacher at UiO, in contrary, does not validate this issue, and seem to be confidently positive toward the simultaneous method, based on her experience. However, all six UiO students I interviewed express that there was certainly a confusion, but to different degrees, when they started learning the two varieties.

From those who received the language training with the “Arabic as one” method, one of the main complaints about the teaching method was that the boundaries of MSA and SA were not clarified in classes, as the students were encouraged to mix the varieties. Inger explains that she did not really understand if she was learning the two variants at the same time, or only MSA with a touch of Egyptian expressions. As she recalls, most of her classmates, including herself, often could not distinguish between MSA and SA usages. She further argues:

¹³⁴ Interlocutor N “Zhu”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Kaohsiung via Line, May 21, 2021.

¹³⁵ Interlocutor H “Zhou”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 14, 2021.

¹³⁶ Interlocutor Q “Jonas”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo, November 18, 2021.

They [the teachers] did not get the point in distinguishing the difference of the two, and I think that is quite important to do. ... They always bring out the examples in the US, American students went to the Middle East and only knew *fushā*. ... They are always quite proud to say they do exactly the opposite, but then they were not. They really were not. They are just like, we teach it [SA]. But they did not.¹³⁷

Kari expresses the same feeling and points out that the teachers were not clear when she started in the first year, the students “do not know which Arabic they are learning”. Furthermore, as she also speaks the Moroccan SA, she would always be afraid to mix words and phrases of three different varieties, although she would not be criticized doing so. She feels that the purposes of the training at UiO were “blurred,” and it is difficult for the students to wipe away the confusion.¹³⁸ This matches the reason why Inger argues that the students would possibly benefit much more from the program if MSA and SA courses were completely separated.

Anne’s experience confirms Inger’s idea on how MSA and SA should be taught. She compares her Arabic learning experience at UiO and the American University in Cairo and expresses that she would much prefer the teaching method of the latter, which clearly separates MSA and the Egyptian SA. When she later started the Bachelor’s program at UiO, she felt lost and was not sure about which variety she was learning in classes at all times. Moreover, Anne points out that, as she knows some Egyptian SA already, she would mostly talk in SA in class, and thus she did not really have many opportunities to use MSA because any of the varieties were welcomed, as long as she could express herself.¹³⁹

4.2.3 Which Arabic to speak?

The Norwegian students generally agree that the curriculum of UiO prepared them to a certain degree to encounter the linguistic reality in the Arabic-speaking world when they traveled to the region. However, it is not necessarily based on the integrated manner of speaking training, but just the fact that both MSA and SA were taught. Both Kari and Inger state that they could use the language they learned at the university when they first arrived in the countries of their choice.

¹³⁷ Interlocutor C “Inger”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Reykjavík via Zoom, November 21, 2020.

¹³⁸ Interlocutor D “Kari”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo via Zoom, November 21, 2020.

¹³⁹ Interlocutor P “Anne”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo, June 9, 2021.

However, Inger explains that she used more Moroccan SA, which she put efforts in learning in prior to the BA program at UiO, instead of Jordanian SA, which she learned at UiO.¹⁴⁰

As the teacher at UiO emphasizes that knowing either the Syrian dialect or the Egyptian dialect would be sufficient for the students to interact with native Arabic speakers from any countries, Marit generally agrees with this viewpoint. As she learned the Syrian SA at UiO, and later traveled to Egypt, she states that she would always use the Syrian dialect, and it had been fairly understood. However, she also expresses that it would not be the most comfortable setting for the locals to interact. Furthermore, as she would not fully understand the responses, often in the Egyptian SA, she would feel lost during the conversation.¹⁴¹

“People would laugh at you”

While it is not uncommon to see Arab scholars regard SA as a threat to MSA – which is the language of cultural heritage and religious importance, and calls for preservation and protection for the standard or classical language in educational institutions¹⁴² – the students at UiO often mention that it is often considered strange for them to speak MSA. Kari recalls her experience in Morocco, as she had seen foreigners only speaking MSA with the locals there, she considered it “weird,” and the locals felt the same.¹⁴³ Similarly, when Anne was studying in Egypt, some of her friends put plenty of efforts to practice MSA with the locals, mainly in restaurants, and as she states, “the waiters and people understood, but obviously it was strange.”¹⁴⁴ Marit also confirms that it was “well received” by the locals when she had to speak MSA, yet “it looks weird to use *fushā*”.¹⁴⁵

Not all native Arabic speakers would express the same, as Jonas describes, an Arab friend of his expresses a strong opinion that he should only learn MSA, and not any SA. However, he disagrees and would only use SA when speaking Arabic, because it is “what people speak on the

¹⁴⁰ Interlocutor C “Inger”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Reykjavik via Zoom, November 21, 2020.

¹⁴¹ Interlocutor R “Marit”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Cairo via Zoom, November 19, 2021.

¹⁴² ‘Ā’isha Muḥammad ‘Alī Al-Ni‘ma, “Al-‘Āmmiyya Wa Khaṭaruhā ‘alā al-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya [Spoken Arabic and Its Danger to the Arabic Language],” *Āfāq Tarbawiyya*, no. 1 (1992): 96–98.

¹⁴³ Interlocutor D, “Kari”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo via Zoom, November 21, 2020.

¹⁴⁴ Interlocutor P “Anne”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo, June 9, 2021.

¹⁴⁵ Interlocutor R “Marit”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Cairo via Zoom, November 19, 2021.

street”. As he states, the stay in Jordan was crucial for the speaking training. If one speaks MSA, it feels rather artificial, and “people would laugh at you, think it is weird.”¹⁴⁶

Two languages or one system?

From how the Norwegian students employ the language, and how they view the domains of varieties, it is clear that their perspectives were inherited through their initial training. When Kari, Jonas, and Marit started at UiO and had chosen the Syrian dialect, they were taught MSA and SA separately. In contrast, when Eirik started with the Syrian dialect, the teaching style was just changed into the integrated method. They now have different ways of thinking when it comes to regarding MSA and SA as a whole system or different languages/varieties with separated domains.

Marit describes her stance as “purist,” and explains that, in the last semester of the undergraduate program, she had the integrated teaching method. Nevertheless, she would fully speak MSA, even when she took the oral exam, as she regards the classroom setting as an educational environment, which belongs to the domain of MSA, and not SA, and she was not criticized or corrected. She seems to follow a strict manner to choose the variety to use in different occasions, completely according to Arabic diglossia. She expresses in a firm manner:

I am very purist. ... and I am aware that there are new language current trends coming. ... I am against that entire approach. So, for me, speaking in that manner is wrong. It is wrong because you do not speak *fushā*. ... People will understand you and you can argue that it is the main point of [a] language, [such as] communication and make people understand you. But I think it is wrong.¹⁴⁷

She adds that she understands students main gain more confidence by mixing varieties to express themselves, but it does not change her stance. She further emphasizes that the fact that MSA and SA have different domains is what she experienced.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, some Arab scholars have the same stance, as seen in some discussions around how SA affected education, that MSA should remain the only variety used in educational settings. SA entering classroom can cause

¹⁴⁶ Interlocutor Q “Jonas”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo, November 18, 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Interlocutor R “Marit”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Cairo via Zoom, November 19, 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

students' linguistic weakness, especially in courses focusing on the Arabic language. This belief regards SA as the “vulgar” language invading the holy language.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, Jonas mentions that if he was a teacher, he would always point out if his students were mixing the usages of MSA and SA so they would keep the language coherent. As he also states:

That is very important to me. ... I try to distinguish them. When I write Arabic I wanna write *fushḥā*, when I speak Arabic I wanna speak *‘āmmiyya*.¹⁵⁰

He also expresses that, if one studies a language in a higher education institution, the training should widely cover all aspects of the culture, especially those carrying academic values. He takes Spanish learning as an example, and explains that if one wishes to learn the language only to speak it, they would simply travel and learn how locals employ the language, instead of attending at university courses. However, he also points out that if he would have received another way of teaching, he would be much more “relaxed” about the distinguishment of the two varieties. He also points out that learning Arabic is a bigger challenge for the learners, because they learn “two languages” at the same time.¹⁵¹

On the other hand, although Anne first learned Arabic at the American University of Cairo, where it is emphasized that MSA is not a spoken language, her opinion shifted when she started at UiO. It is because she only wants to capture the language as fast as she can, and mixing MSA and SA, in her opinion, is a rather convenient way of learning.¹⁵²

4.2.2 Lack of solid training

It is common to see in Arabic academic sources that SA varieties are not subjected to grammatical rules.¹⁵³ According to Amīn, those who plan to travel or work in Arabic speaking countries would prefer to learn SA varieties, and for them, it is unneeded to pay attention to

¹⁴⁹ Ṭayyib ‘Imāra Fawziyya, “Al-Lahja al-‘Āmmiyya Wa Ta’tīrūhā ‘Alā al-Ta’līm [Colloquial Dialect and Its Impact on Education],” *Aqlam Alhind*, no. 2 (2017), <https://www.aqlamalhind.com/?p=725>.

¹⁵⁰ Interlocutor Q “Jonas”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo, November 18, 2021.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Interlocutor P “Anne”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo, June 9, 2021.

¹⁵³ Aḥmāda Al-‘Aūnī, “Hal Taṣluḥ al-‘Āmmiyya li al-Tadrīs? [Is Spoken Arabic Suitable for Teaching?],” *Al-Wa‘ī al-Islāmī* 53, no. 607 (2016): 60.

grammatical rules, as “Arabs do not care about them in daily conversation.”¹⁵⁴ However, according to UiO students, this is obviously not the case. They express that the training they received was not solid enough for them to build a firm foundation for one of the varieties.

We were just told [in Egypt] that there are not that many rules you can follow. ... That is just not how people speak.¹⁵⁵

While Inger states that if the curriculum only focuses on grammar, it would be problematic, she points out that the way the courses were designed caused issues for her to continue learning the language. Although she wishes to learn more of the Egyptian dialect, she feels that she does not know where and how to start, which results from the unsolid foundation of her grammatical knowledge and systematic understanding of the Egyptian SA. She has the impression from her previous learning experience in the classroom that the dialects can only be learned through speaking. But in order for her to achieve a higher level, rules of the language are important, and she feels that “no one is teaching them”.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, although learning a different SA variety, Jonas also expresses that he has most problems conjugating verbs in SA.¹⁵⁷

For MSA, it was the same for Inger. She explains that she they did have separated classes fully dedicated on grammar in MSA, but as it does not truly matter in the final grades, she did not put as much effort in grammar. Moreover, the fact that the *al-Kitāb* series of textbooks were being used throughout the entire program in some ways trained her to gain the ability to pass exams by focusing on some parts of the material, and at the end, learning Arabic became unchallenging at all, causing her to lose her motivation.¹⁵⁸

The training was good, but perhaps only enough

When I asked Jonas if UiO prepared him well to use the language abroad, Jonas hesitated but gave a positive answer. He explains that he has a good foundation enough to attend the program in Jordan.¹⁵⁹ This is the general attitude of UiO student. As Inger explains, she was encouraged to mix MSA and SA, and to just speak the language, and it definitely prepared her a lot. She

¹⁵⁴ Usāma Amīn, “Bayna al-Fuṣḥā wa al-‘Āmmiyya: Ūrūbā Turīd Ta‘allum al-‘Arabiyya [Between Modern Standard Arabic and Spoken Arabic: Europe Wants to Learn Arabic],” *Majalla al-Diblūmāsī*, no. 90 (2018): 33.

¹⁵⁵ Interlocutor C “Inger”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Reykjavik via Zoom, November 21, 2020.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Interlocutor Q “Jonas”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo, November 18, 2021.

¹⁵⁸ Interlocutor C “Inger”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Reykjavik via Zoom, November 21, 2020.

¹⁵⁹ Interlocutor Q “Jonas”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo, November 18, 2021.

further expresses that she did not imagine she would be able to speak Arabic at all, and the fact that her peers and she managed to speak the language in the second semester, showed that the learning process was pretty efficient. She was not afraid of speaking, or making mistakes colloquially, and as she observed, the Levantine group on the same year did not have the same chance.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, Marit mentions that her peers complained about not knowing practical usages in real life, as they learned how to say words such as “United Nations” in Arabic, but did not know how to order food in a restaurant.¹⁶¹

4.3 How does diglossia affect students’ learning outcome?

Diglossia has affected Arabic students’ learning outcome at NCCU and UiO on several aspects, and I placed them on a continuum with two ends: the first end are the affects which result from the beliefs that the students inherited from the teachers. Second, the perceptions that the students obtained after they traveled to Arabic-speaking countries or talked to native speakers, and witnessed the socio-linguistic realities. Below, I place each analysis section in an order of their places on the continuum, from the inherited beliefs to the empirical understandings of the students.

Domains of MSA and SA varieties

For some students, specific functions for each variety of the Arabic language are clearly defined. Especially for the Norwegian students who received the training from the previous teacher in the Syrian dialect group who separated MSA and SA in her teaching, as they still believe the two varieties have certain fixed domains that cannot be crossed, according to Arabic diglossia. Accordingly, those students have better proficiency in MSA than SA as they claim, perhaps as a result of that the high variety is often systematically taught in formal education.¹⁶²

Prioritizing MSA or SA

The students who prefer to maintain the proficiency in MSA over SA, also inherited the idea of MSA prestige from the teacher. As Wu reacts awkwardly with a short and simple answer that she is “not even good at MSA,” when being asked if she would want to learn more SA now,¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Interlocutor C “Inger”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Reykjavik via Zoom, November 21, 2020.

¹⁶¹ Interlocutor R “Marit”, student at UiO, author’s interview, Oslo-Cairo via Zoom, November 19, 2021.

¹⁶² Ferguson, “Diglossia,” 328–31.

¹⁶³ Interlocutor I “Wu”, student at NCCU, author’s interview, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

matches completely the message given by the Taiwanese teacher, questioning how can students learn SA if they do not have the time for MSA. Although all Taiwanese students agree, to different extents, that SA varieties have great importance for anyone who wishes to reach a certain proficiency level in Arabic, within their limited time for studying the language, MSA still would be the main focus. Essentially, the program at NCCU excluding SA based on diglossia is the factor that avoided students from having contacts with SA. As the students traveled abroad and received acceptance for only speaking MSA, the encounters also joined the decision of prioritizing MSA. At the same time, although the students at UiO would prefer to put more efforts into one variety over another, they would not reject the possibility to maintain any of them. Apart from the Arabic language requirements to pursue a career in relation of the region including only MSA for Taiwanese students, which is one of the common reasons for prioritizing the variety, it is also common to see the students, having a feeling of MSA being the foundation of SA varieties, although this understanding of the relationship between the two is not validated, while Norwegian students would express that it is *al-fuṣḥā* that has the connection.¹⁶⁴

As some preferred learning MSA over SA based on classical cultural richness of the variety, and some regard MSA as a “boring” language based on the interests of pop culture, the literary heritage of MSA is also emphasized. When asked which variety they would want to focus on if they have the chance to start over, or would recommend to someone starting to learn Arabic from scratch, the Norwegian students and a smaller part of the Taiwanese students agree on that it largely depends what the goals and expectations are for one to reach with the language. Either it is for communication, reaching classical cultural contents, to reach first hand media sources, or to learn more about the religion, there seems to be a certain proportion of the skillsets one would need – and it is never only one variety. Even as firm and strong as Marit regards Arabic as a language with two varieties and two separate domains, she does not agree that an Arabic program should focus completely on MSA, and exclude SA. Whether MSA has a

¹⁶⁴ It is stated in some studies that old Arabic dialects, Classical Arabic, and modern SA varieties have certain evolutionary relationship. However, MSA is not the same entity as Classical Arabic, and thus I regard the connection of deprivation between MSA and SA varieties as an unvalidated claim. Abdulhafeth Khrisat and Ziad Alharthy, “Arabic Dialects and Classical Arabic Language,” *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 2 (April 25, 2015): 259, <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.24.1048>.

superior status or not, the linguistic reality is that the two varieties, or languages, are used, and no variety should be excluded.¹⁶⁵

Daily interactions

Except for those who studied in Kuwait or Oman, where daily communication completely without employing Arabic is possible, almost all students regard SA's function as an important tool for daily interaction. In fact, according to some students, it is not only a language for achieving daily needs, but also a medium that allows deeper connections to the locals. On the other hand, in support of the statement, most students experienced themselves or witnessed others speaking MSA and felt "weird" and "laughed at", as it matches Ferguson's statement that an outsider speak a variety in the domain of another would become "an object of ridicule".¹⁶⁶

Lack of systematic training in SA

As both Taiwanese students and students at UiO express that they usually feel the instruction of SA is not well planned, and the native speakers often failed to explain the linguistic rules of SA expressions, it reflected that the acquisition methods are inadequate due to the lack of standardization in SA varieties, which is usually seen among low varieties of a defining diglossic language.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, as some Taiwanese students indicate, it would be difficult to start the learning process on the streets in an Arabic-speaking country, which is the approach to SA suggested by teachers at NCCU. Some basic knowledge from a carefully structured course beforehand would help a lot, as they observe.

4.3.1 Conclusion

The way diglossia has affected students' learning outcomes appears to be indirect from the beliefs that the teachers have passed on them, or direct from their contact with native speakers. There would always be a conflict, to a mere or an enormous level, of what they have been learning, and what they experience and develop to need in the lands where the Arabic language is spoken. What differs afterwards is how the students react to it, either their original view of the system is slightly altered then strengthened, which is more likely to happen to the Norwegian students, or the clash demotivates them and builds their insecurity to their learning outcomes,

¹⁶⁵ Interlocutor R "Marit", student at UiO, author's interview, Oslo-Cairo via Zoom, November 19, 2021.

¹⁶⁶ Ferguson, "Diglossia," 328–29.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 331–32.

which is a common case with the Taiwanese students. The implementation of different varieties in the program of UiO then can be considered as a preparation for the ideological conflict that is doomed to happen. By only explaining the diglossic situation theoretically but ignoring it in the practical training, the learning outcomes often are worse than expectation.

To conclude the chapter, I argue that, although the Arabic language and the speech community of the language are both relatively mentally and physically distant from Taiwanese learners, the Arabic program needs to prepare them in both MSA and SA, as long as they wish to use the language in real life in any sorts. In other words, the current training approach which builds a firewall between the two varieties and excludes SA from the program is inadequate, based on students' feedback and assessment of their learning outcomes. As for Norwegian learners, the instruction should offer clarity to higher degrees, in regards of the differentiation of the two varieties in classroom. This does not mean that the integrated communicative method should be discarded, as it indeed prepares the students for their linguistic application in the Arabic-speaking regions, or the separated approach of SA teaching should return, which would enhance the mental burden of dealing with two systems. How Arabic language programs deal with the diglossic situation of the Arabic-speaking world can come to moderate common ground, in order to minimize negative effects on students' learning outcomes, and to build students' confidence and motivation to excel the language.

5. Conclusion

Diglossia, as a dominant socio-linguistic phenomenon in Arabic-speaking societies, also affects the making of future speakers of the Arabic language. The curricula designs of the Arabic language programs reflected different aspects of the notion of Arabic diglossia, and have passed on the collective beliefs of certain members of the speech community to the learners. As Arabic teaching method has been created, employed, and academically criticized, from the Middle Age to the modern era of globalization, all of them revolve around the core discussion: finding out which varieties of Arabic to be taught. This research is not exception, and I have centralized it on the probes of students' learning outcomes, and attempted to find connections between the curricula designs and student's ability to use the language that are affected directly and indirectly by Arabic diglossia. To sharpen the analysis, I have focused on how the students testify the curricula that they have followed in the higher education institutions, after they have used the language in the field.

The fact that NCCU's program only teaches MSA "as the one language" shows how the high variety of a defining language of diglossia is usually acquired through formal education, and enjoys the definite superior status being the standard language. On the other hand, as UiO includes both high and low varieties in the program "as one language", it shows a rather practical understanding that both varieties coexist, and the importance of both cannot be ignored – which defines diglossia. To speak the language as one, knowledge in both varieties is needed. To teach both varieties, the program has to break through the "imaginary" or ideological boundary created by diglossia. The two programs display obedience to the existing phenomenon and resistance against the dominant ideology. As for the students, after they reached the lands where the Arabic is natively spoken, some challenge the phenomenon by altering the learning priorities, while some accept the empirical fact by speaking the language as how it has been taught at their university. They often settle with the skillsets they are allowed to obtain in the programs, and wonder if the institutions have only taken approaches for their convenience.

Despite of different social contexts and encounters in Arabic-speaking countries, in the project, almost all interlocutors agree that both MSA and SA varieties should be included in Arabic programs. The question remaining is how the different registers should coexist in the curriculum. The most possible intersection, or say, highest common factor, of all insights

provided by the students is a program that, first, takes MSA as the starting point of the learning journey. By delaying the entrance of SA, the different registers of the two varieties could be clarified, thus the confusion between could be avoided. Second, the program should teach SA as a standardized and well-codified language, and explain the grammatical rules and structural norms carefully. This does not mean that the educators should give up the communicative method, but rather indicates that the students, who have been trained in SA, are in need of clarity. Third, and lastly, rather than a classroom of Arabic learners following the same path and materials, it would be much more beneficial for the students to have the right to receive extra trainings in one or both of the varieties, preferably focusing on different topics. This is a result, again, of the diglossic phenomenon, which makes it rather difficult for the learners to reach an equal advanced level of proficiency in both MSA and SA. As a result, to reach the seemingly impossible goal, a large portion of the students would focus on one of the varieties at a time, and some of them would later shift their focus onto another. A program that is set and fixed for every learner at the same expected level, thus, would not meet the needs.

It would, of course, be too naïve to criticize and question why the institutions have not taken these approaches suggested by the students. There have been certainly administrative difficulties and other theoretical concerns according to the teachers I interviewed, also, a considerable amount of previous academic efforts has been made to offer better Arabic language courses worldwide. But one of the focuses of the research is to shed light on how students reflect on diglossia, based on their self-evaluations and expectations. After all, existing literature concerning Arabic teaching methods and diglossia has been mainly produced by native speakers who are eager to preserve the language or to twist the socio-linguistic hierarchy, or educators who feel the needs to decide what is good for their learners. As the teachers asked why would one only learn *al-fuṣḥā* if the world of *al-‘āmmiyya* is out there waiting to be explored, or why could one spend the precious limited time and effort to learn dialects – by conducting this research, I expected to make the students’ voices heard, with the hope of allowing the students to answer the questions themselves.

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Appendix

List of interviews

Interlocutor A, **Arabic teacher at NCCU**, Oslo-Taipei via Line, October 14, 2020.

Interlocutor B, “**Kari**”, student at UiO, Oslo via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

Interlocutor C “**Inger**”, student at UiO, Oslo via Zoom, October 26, 2020.

Interlocutor D, **Arabic teacher at UiO**, Oslo via Zoom, October 28, 2020.

Interlocutor E “**Qian**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 12, 2021.

Interlocutor F “**Jiang**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 13, 2021.

Interlocutor G “**Lee**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 14, 2021.

Interlocutor H “**Zhou**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 14, 2021.

Interlocutor I “**Wu**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

Interlocutor J “**Zheng**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Amman via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

Interlocutor K “**Wang**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 18, 2021.

Interlocutor L “**Feng**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-New York via Zoom, May 20, 2021.

Interlocutor M “**Chen**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Taipei via Line, May 21, 2021.

Interlocutor N “**Zhu**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Kaohsiung via Line, May 21, 2021.

Interlocutor O “**Wei**”, student at NCCU, Oslo-Taipei via Zoom, May 25, 2021.

Interlocutor P “**Anne**”, student at UiO, Oslo, June 9, 2021.

Interlocutor Q “**Jonas**”, student at UiO, Oslo, November 18, 2021.

Interlocutor R “**Marit**”, student at UiO, Oslo-Cairo via Zoom, November 19, 2021.

Interlocutor S “**Eirik**”, student at UiO, Oslo, November 22, 2021.