

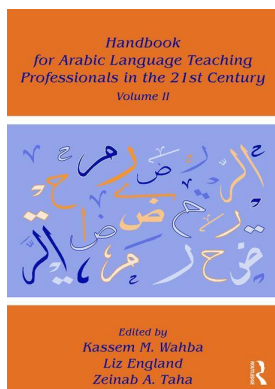
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### **Empirical Directions in the Future of Arabic Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Pedagogy**

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# Empirical Directions in the Future of Arabic Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Pedagogy

*Mohammad T. Alhawary*

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This chapter offers a brief overview of areas which have been investigated in Arabic second language acquisition research, discusses areas which have only recently received some attention, and then points to roads not taken in light of well-established and emerging models and trends in both second language acquisition research and teaching. Beyond the areas of research hoped for in Arabic as a foreign/second language, constant awareness will also be needed to address the disconnect between second language learning findings and actual teaching practices in the classroom.

## Introduction

To help develop more reliable learning and teaching expectations or standards, optimally effective teaching techniques, and better assessment tools for Arabic second/foreign language instruction, more research in Arabic second language acquisition is needed.<sup>1</sup> Although there is no consensus among researchers and practitioners as to whether second language acquisition (SLA) research (or applied linguistics in general) is the only source to inform second language pedagogy, it is generally agreed that SLA is a source of considerable significance (e.g., Cook, 1999; Ellis, 2010; Lightbown, 2000; Spada, 2015). However, in order for SLA research and second language pedagogy interface to be practically effective, SLA research needs to be relevant to the classroom as well as accessible to language teachers. This would help bridge the divide observed between SLA researchers and classroom teachers and allow more research findings to inform classroom practices than has been attested thus far. The existence of such a gap has been widely observed and discussed (e.g., Freeman, 1996; Markee, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Block, 2000; Rainey, 2000; Lo, 2005; Stewart, 2006; Borg, 2006), not just in the case of Arabic as a foreign language. The advantages of incorporating empirical SLA findings, provided its coverage is extensive both in terms of language aspects and language learning processes, are many, especially in light of new and ambitious trends of teaching mixed or multiple codes and registers at the same time.

The chapter is organized as follows: Section 1 provides a brief overview of areas which have been investigated in Arabic second language acquisition research and the yielded implications for second language teaching; Section 2 discusses areas which have only recently received some attention together with their pedagogical implications; Section 3 points to roads not taken in light of existence of well-established and new emerging models and trends in both applied linguistics and Arabic

second language acquisition and teaching; and Section 4 concludes the chapter with a discussion of how to bridge the gap between Arabic SLA research and classroom teaching.

## An Overview of Arabic SLA Research

In this section, I provide an overview of areas which have been investigated in Arabic second language acquisition research and which have *direct* relevance to Arabic second classroom teaching together with implications of the studies' findings to classroom teaching. In particular, the overview is provided under two subheadings: Arabic SLA research on (1) morphosyntax and (2) other areas. This reflects the amount of research coverage, with most research being conducted on Arabic L2 morphosyntax and a lot less on other areas, including phonology; vocabulary; and the processes related to listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Due to space constraints, other studies which examine certain learner's variables through questionnaire surveys (such as perception, beliefs, anxiety, motivation, attitude, etc.) and learning strategies are not included here.

### *Morphosyntax*

Much of Arabic SLA research has been conducted in the domain of morphosyntax. Such investigations included negation, question formation, nominal and verbal agreement, null subjects, simple and complex operators/resumptive pronouns (i.e., occurring in relative clause constructions), definiteness, and case and mood endings (for a detailed review, see Alhawary, 2009a; see also Azaz, 2016 for a recent study investigating definiteness). Among significant findings (for classroom teaching and learning) of studies on morphosyntax is development of Arabic verbal negation within a certain developmental sequence and interaction with its presentation in the instructional input. Given the presentation of present tense negation followed by past-tense negation, then future-tense negation, the following acquisition order emerged:

- (1) present-tense negation (with *laa*) → (2) past-tense negation (with *maa*) → (3) future-tense negation (with *lan*) → (4) past-tense negation (with *lam*).

The observation about the late emergence of past negation with *lam* is likely due to the optionality of the rule (i.e., being optional with past negation with *maa*) and the additional rule of using the verb following *lam* in the present/imperfective form, suggesting it may present a difficulty to learners (see Alhawary, 2009a; Al-Buainain, 1986).

Another significant finding is that the frequency and type of input play a significant role in L2 acquisition. For example, the acquisition of formal features such as mood endings (on the verb following the different negation particles) seems to interact with the type of instructional input in which such forms are presented, where such features are either not sufficiently recycled or not enforced (Alhawary, 2009a, pp. 173–181; see also Alhawary, 2013 for a discussion of maxims related to instructional input based on SLA research in general). On other occasions, where features are too subtle to detect in input (due to subtle differences between L1 and L2) but are essential for comprehension and communication, as is the case with definiteness features, then there is the need to raise the L2 learner's awareness about the definiteness features and to introduce them rather explicitly and from early on<sup>2</sup> (Azaz, 2016).

One other implication, significant for SLA in general (i.e., not just for Arabic SLA), is that the presence or absence of a feature in L1 also plays a role in L2 acquisition (e.g., Odlin, 2014; Alhawary, 2009a, 2009b; see also Alhawary, 2007). For example, in the event a feature is absent in the L2 learner's native language, such as Arabic gender agreement features being absent in an L1 such as English,

it is likely not to emerge early despite the frequency of the form in the instructional input. Such findings have significant implications for teaching and can be addressed by means of early presentation and intense recycling in the input, adopting a more tolerant attitude of errors by learners whose L1 does not exhibit the gender feature, and employing a long-term strategy of error correction of such forms (for more elaborate implications, see Alhawary, 2009a).

### ***Other areas: Phonology, Vocabulary, Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing***

Unlike Arabic morphosyntax, other areas, such as Arabic L2 phonology, vocabulary, and the various processes to do with listening, speaking, reading, and writing, received a lot less attention in Arabic SLA. In the area of Arabic L2 phonology, one notable exception is Alish (1987) who investigated the perception and production of Arabic pharyngealized fricatives (also known as emphatic sounds) by English-speaking learners. Although the three groups of participants (divided according to three proficiency levels) did not exhibit difference in performance with respect to production of emphatic consonants, their perception of such consonants did improve over time. The findings also reveal that pharyngealization is mostly “vocalic” to English L1 speakers, as they tend to associate the pharyngealized feature as part of vowels rather than consonants unlike L1 Arabic speakers. Alish (1987) suggests that the implication of the findings emphasizes the importance of exposure to the target language. In other words, more input is necessary for improved performance.<sup>3</sup> Another exception is Al Mahmoud’s (2013) study in which Arabic L2 learners’ perception of Arabic consonant contrasts in relation to the perceptual assimilation model (PAM) was investigated. The results of the study produced mixed evidence to the model’s predictions. Al Mahmoud claims that PAM overlooks the role of orthographic conventions in the target language, explaining why the voiceless-voiced contrast in /x/-/ħ/ and the uvular-pharyngeal contrast in /x/-/ħ/ were indistinguishable by American English speakers (i.e., due to orthographic similarities of the consonants). The suggested pedagogical implication of the study’s findings is perhaps allowing a more important role for orthography in the Arabic L2 curriculum. In addition to the above studies, I am aware of a number of other studies on Arabic L2 phonology underway, including doctoral dissertations, on the velars, gutturals (uvulars, pharyngeals, and glottals) and lexical stress, among other areas.

Not unlike Arabic L2 phonology, Arabic SLA research on vocabulary remains under-investigated. Two studies are relevant to classroom teaching. Redouane (2001, 2003) compared the performance of second-year L2 learners of Arabic (most of whom are L1 English speakers) with that of native Arabic speakers on production and comprehension tasks. One of the significant findings of the study is that learners at higher levels of vocabulary knowledge made significantly more use of word formation processes (to coin new meanings) than those at lower levels. This is taken to suggest that lexical knowledge in the target language influenced L2 learners’ use of word formation processes (Redouane, 2001, 2003). Redouane’s (2001, 2003) study also found that participants, who were exposed to formal instruction which included focus on grammar and derivation rules and patterns, were more likely to utilize word derivational processes than participants who were exposed to instruction based primarily on communicative language teaching. The latter were found to utilize compounding processes instead, suggesting that robust knowledge development of Arabic L2 vocabulary and lexicon relies on exposure to morphological rules. Another study conducted by Khoury (2008) produced somewhat mixed results. Khoury (2008) compared the performance of an experimental and a control group of English-speaking learners of Arabic (enrolled in a first-semester Arabic course), with the experimental group having received explicit instruction on roots and patterns. Khoury (2008) concluded that the study’s findings indicate that although morphological awareness has no facilitating effect on word retention, such awareness is beneficial for enhancing the learner’s ability in guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words and producing new ones. As for the implication of two studies’ findings, both Redouane (2001, 2003) and Khoury (2008) believe that word formation processes (i.e., involving root and pattern) should be introduced and taught explicitly at an early stage of acquisition.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, little SLA research in Arabic has been done on the ability to use the various processes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. With respect to listening, one research study was conducted on listening comprehension.<sup>5</sup> Elkhafaifi (2005a) examined the effectiveness of different types of advanced organizers (i.e., pre-listening activities) as well as repeated listening exposures. English-speakers were divided into three groups: one experimental group completed a vocabulary preview activity, another experimental group completed a question preview activity, and a third control group received a distractor (verb conjugation) activity prior to watching and listening to a videotaped lecture. The results were consistent with findings in the literature on listening and reading comprehension. The study's findings revealed that both experimental groups outperformed the control group in comprehending the listening passage and the experimental group that received the question preview treatment outperformed the one which received the vocabulary preview treatment. This result was according to predictions, since it is claimed that a vocabulary preview activity allows for bottom-down processing (by drawing the listener to focus on individual words) whereas a question preview activity allows for the more effective top-down processing (by leading the listener to focus on the message as a whole) employed by native L1 speakers and skilled readers (e.g., Taglieber, Johnson, and Yarbrough, 1988; Kelly, 1991; Berne, 1995; cf. Tsui and Fullilove, 1998). In addition, Elkhafaifi's (2005a) study revealed that the listening comprehension question scores in all three groups improved overall upon a repeated listening from time 1 to time 2—a finding which is also consistent with results in other research studies (e.g., Cervantes and Gainer, 1992; Berne, 1995; Dupuy, 1999). Elkhafaifi (2005a) suggests that the implications of the study include implementation of techniques involving pre-listening activities and multiple exposures to listening passages. More recently, Trentman (2011) investigated Arabic L2 learners' dialect listening comprehension ability to transfer: (1) between a familiar to an unfamiliar dialect (i.e., from Levantine dialects to Egyptian dialect or conversely) and (2) between a familiar to unfamiliar dialects (specifically, from Levantine and/or Egyptian to Iraqi, Saudi, and Tunisian dialects) with the added condition of dialect speakers accommodating towards MSA in the latter.<sup>6</sup> Participants listened to passages recorded in the stated dialects and answered ten comprehension questions on each variety. The study yielded two results for the two types of transfer, respectively: (1) familiar dialect listening ability was a significant predictor of unfamiliar dialect listening ability but MSA listening ability was not and (2) both familiar dialect listening ability and MSA listening ability were significant predictors of the comprehension of unfamiliar dialects, although MSA listening ability was slightly better. Despite presence of a number of confounding variables, Trentman (2011) claims that the implications of the findings emphasize the need to teach both MSA and an Arabic dialect in the classroom from early on.<sup>7</sup>

As for Arabic SLA research on speaking, a number of studies have been conducted though in relation to the production or processing of Arabic morphosyntactic features in order to examine speech processing prerequisite claims made by Pienemann's (1998) Processability theory. The main assumption of the theory is that speech production is constrained due to working memory being a limited capacity processor of information. Additional "memory buffers" are posited in which processing procedures or resources are developed for the L2 (by the L2 learner) in order to deposit grammatical information for temporary storage. Processing resources developed at one stage are necessary prerequisites for the following stage (Pienemann, 1998, pp. 60, 87). Hence, the claim that "stages cannot be skipped [even] through formal instruction" and such stages are developed necessarily in a set implicational sequence (Pienemann, 1998 p. 250). The potential of pedagogical classroom implications of such claims—both in terms of arranging an optimally teachable structural syllabus with a plausible psychological reality and in terms of production/processing of structures incrementally—looked great and appealing, which explains the great amount of interest it received in Arabic SLA. However, Arabic SLA data either produced mixed evidence or clearly falsified Processability claims on several Arabic structure counts (see Nielsen, 1997; Alhawary, 1999, 2009b; Mansouri, 2000; for a detailed review of such studies, see Alhawary, 2009a). Apart from the thread of studies on speech processing prerequisites for the processing/production of morphosyntactic forms, Arabic SLA has yet to investigate the speaking process in general or any of its related aspects.

Arabic L2 reading has received little attention in Arabic SLA research. A few studies have been conducted on Arabic word recognition and reading comprehension with some important implications. Khaldieh (1996) investigated word recognition at the word and sentence level by English-speaking learners of Arabic belonging to three proficiency levels. The study also employed a control group of native Arabic speakers. The results show that the phonological and graphic systems of Arabic pose potential problems (particularly with letters which either have similar shapes or represent sounds not available in L1) but that recognition of words improved with proficiency. Khaldieh (1996) suggests that both proper bottom-up and top-down processing involved in reading comprehension of Arabic text presuppose proper knowledge of Arabic phonological and orthographic systems with the implication for classroom instructors to (in addition to providing sufficient input) emphasize “critical” sounds which might cause confusion for identification and implement spelling and recognition strategies of letters and sounds from early on.<sup>8</sup> Khaldieh (2001) investigated the impact of lexical knowledge versus knowledge of case and mood endings on reading comprehension. Based on analysis of a recall protocol measure of a reading passage in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) by two groups of English-speaking learners of Arabic (a proficient and a less proficient group)<sup>9</sup> and their subsequent suppliance of case and mood endings as well as lexical meanings of underlined words, the main result showed reading comprehension was dependent on vocabulary knowledge rather than *i’raab* knowledge. Accordingly, Khaldieh (2001) states that such a finding implies intense emphasis on vocabulary learning and from early on over a delayed and gradual introduction of *i’raab*.<sup>10</sup> Hansen (2010) pursued the thread of word recognition (of unfamiliar graphemes and phonemes) from Khaldieh (1993) and investigated additionally the effect of suppliance and non-suppliance of internal short vowels on reading speed and reading comprehension and whether through knowledge of root and pattern L2 learners can compensate for the missing vowels. The study used three groups of L2 learners (who were L1 speakers of Danish, English, and German) at three different proficiency levels and a control group of Arabic native speakers. The main findings revealed that unfamiliar graphemes (i.e., the script) rather than unfamiliar phonemes inhibit word recognition (both in terms of speed and accuracy) and that vowelization helped participants in Levels 1–2 neither in reading speed nor in comprehension as they read unvoweled text faster than voweled text, though reading unvoweled text stalled beyond Level 2. The latter finding (for Level 1–2) is contrary to studies in Arabic and Hebrew L1 reading since vowelization is shown to help rather than inhibit reading speed and comprehension (e.g., Abu Rabia, 1999; Shimron, 1999). According to Hansen, a plausible explanation for the unexpected finding is that “for beginning and intermediate learners of Arabic, the additional graphical information that vowels represent adds a heavy cognitive burden on the already heavily charged decoding system” (2010, p. 578).<sup>11</sup> According to Hansen, the implications of the findings should alert us against briefly introducing the Arabic alphabet and sounds and moving on too quickly to teach top-down reading strategies (usually characteristic of communicative language teaching methodology) to the exclusion of providing automaticity training in reading. This can be achieved by exposing the Arabic L2 learner (at early stages) to “a multitude of easily read text material without new vocabulary and unfamiliar grammatical structures” so that learners can understand such texts easily and their “cognitive capacity can be directed to word recognition alone—instead of analytical processes” (Hansen, 2010, p. 579).

Finally, as for Arabic L2 writing, this area has yet to receive any attention from Arabic SLA research, aside from few studies on error analysis which investigated errors involving mostly morphosyntactic features and to a lesser extent lexical/vocabulary errors. Arabic SLA has yet to investigate writing as a process in general or any of its related aspects. To conclude this section, most of the research conducted in Arabic SLA relates to morphosyntax. In comparison, little attention has been paid to Arabic L2 phonology, L2 vocabulary, L2 listening, and L2 reading. Research on Arabic L2 writing and L2 speaking as processes which the Arabic L2 learner also needs to use and develop is almost

nonexistent. Although Arabic L2 Speaking has received a good amount of attention, this has been confined to investigating the production or processing of Arabic morphosyntactic features in order to examine speech processing prerequisite claims. The situation is hopeful, however, as I am aware of a number of studies being currently conducted, some of which include doctoral dissertations.

### Recent Areas Investigated: Interlanguage Pragmatics and Heritage Language Acquisition

On the positive statement concluding the previous section, other important areas, such as interlanguage pragmatics and heritage language acquisition, have recently received some attention, especially the latter. In interlanguage pragmatics two recent studies have emerged. Morkus (2009) investigated the development of refusals in Egyptian Arabic by two groups (intermediate and advanced) of American English-speaking learners of Arabic. The study included two control groups of Egyptian Arabic and American English native speakers. Among the significant findings with respect to L2 Interlanguage development, data analysis of participants' performance on role play tasks showed that the L2 groups used a higher percentage of direct strategies (especially in higher status situations) as well as a higher percentage of statements of regret and requests for information/clarification strategies and a lower percentage of the postponement and hedging strategies than the Egyptian native speakers. This trend is found to reflect the proficiency levels of the participants with those in the advanced group more able to engage in negotiation and use an overall lower percentage of direct strategies and a higher percentage of indirect strategies than their intermediate counterparts (Morkus, 2009).<sup>12</sup> The data also revealed evidence of L1 (pragmatic) transfer, though a higher degree of L1 transfer was observed in the performance of the participants in the advanced group than their intermediate counterpart. Morkus (2009) suggests that the attested deficiency in the L2 learner's "pragma-linguistic" and "socio-pragmatic" knowledge of (Egyptian) Arabic should be addressed by including both types of knowledge in language instruction either explicitly or through awareness raising activities including use of videos to teach pragmatic knowledge (à la Kramersch, 1993; and Rose, 1994, 1999). Al-Gahtani and Roever (2015) examined the development of requests in MSA by four groups (divided according to four proficiency levels) of male L2 learners of Arabic from 31 countries.<sup>13</sup> A control group of Saudi Arabic speakers was used. Data consisted of participants' performance in two role-play tasks which involved the participants making formal requests to university administrators in Saudi Arabic where the study took place. The main findings indicated that overall the participants initially started to use indirect requests and then they reverted to using direct requests as their proficiency increased and they approximate to target language norms. Al-Gahtani and Roever (2015) interprets this finding to confirm that, at earlier stages, learners' pragmalinguistic ability is not yet sufficiently constrained by sociopragmatic knowledge of the target language norms and to highlight the nonuniversality of developmental stages proposed by Kasper and Rose (2003), since Arabic shows preference for direct requests unlike other languages, such as English and Greek, which show preference for indirect requests.<sup>14</sup> Al-Gahtani and Roever (2015) suggest, by way of explaining the implications of the findings, that pedagogical intervention (for low intermediate learners) can be through use of video clips to provide exemplars showing native speakers' preference to direct request followed by practice via structured interactions by using discourse completion tasks and then in increasingly less structured situations, including open role-plays and real-world use (Al-Gahtani and Roever, 2015, p. 578).

Research in heritages language acquisition, a relatively new area in SLA, generated a series of studies on Arabic heritage learners. Participants of these studies resided in the United States and were heritage speakers of Egyptian, Palestinian, and Levantine dialects. A heritage language is acquired as an L1 but "has not been completely acquired because of the switch to another dominant language" and therefore may have undergone attrition, or because of the nature of the quantity and quality of

the input and interaction with such input in comparison with that of L1 acquisition (Polinsky, 2008, p. 149). Heritage language knowledge/competence is, therefore, often expectedly distinct from that of the L1 and L2. A series of heritage language acquisition studies yielded results confirming such intuitive observations (especially for classroom language teachers), including presence of gaps in their morphosyntactic and lexical knowledge (Albirini, Benmamoun, and Saadah, 2011; Albirini, Benmamoun and Chakrani, 2013), in their root and pattern morphological knowledge (Benmamoun et al., 2014), and in their sociolinguistic competence to socially and pragmatically deploy colloquial Arabic and Standard Arabic appropriately in personal narratives (Albirini and Chakrani, 2016). The authors speculate that such gaps are due to the (late) age of acquisition of certain forms in L1 (Albirini and Benmamoun, 2015) and are compensated for through L2 transfer (Albirini and Benmamoun, 2014b). In addition, Albirini (2014a) examined the cause of variability in the language proficiencies of Arabic heritage speakers, based on analysis of elicited oral narratives (assessed for fluency, grammatical accuracy, and syntactic complexity) and demographic data, and found “language use” (in terms of frequency, range, and contexts) to be the only significant predictor. The general implication of the preceding studies is that “a full understanding of heritage language acquisition requires an evaluation of the sociolinguistic aspects of language use,” since heritage speakers are influenced by contextual factors and by the lack of a community of practice (Albirini and Chakrani, 2016, p. 1). Albirini (2014b) further examined whether heritage speakers (being speakers of colloquial varieties) have the presumed advantage in their learning of MSA over their L2 counterparts in order to draw some pedagogical implications. The study was conducted on two groups of heritage learners (elementary and advanced), an advanced L2 group, and a control group of native Arabic speakers. The study focused on their performance on five oral negation tasks and found the performance of the advanced heritage group comparable to that of the advanced L2 and both outperformed the elementary heritage group.<sup>15</sup> Based on analysis of participants’ errors, the study showed that both the advanced heritage and L2 groups converged together on certain types of errors, that the elementary and advanced heritage groups converged (but diverged from the L2 group) in terms of transfer from the colloquial, and that the elementary heritage group was influenced by colloquial Arabic 60% whereas the advanced heritage group was influenced 25%. Albirini (2014b) believes that the lack of advantage of the advanced heritage participants over their L2 counterparts has resulted, because current formal classroom instruction does not seem to serve them adequately to develop their MSA skills. The pedagogical implications which he suggests to facilitate heritage language acquisition include using better diagnostics proficiency and needs tests, pairing heritage language learners with L2 learners on tasks and projects, and providing opportunities for “differentiated instruction” and resources (Albirini, 2014b, p. 461).<sup>16</sup>

### Roads Not Taken and Future Directions

Despite the increase in publications in Arabic SLA research, much remains to be investigated. However, though it is hoped for future Arabic SLA research to continue to cover as well as expand coverage of the remaining areas in Arabic morphosyntax, syntax, phonology, vocabulary, the various aspects related to the processes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, discourse and interlanguage pragmatics, and heritage language acquisition so that adequate coverage (in depth and breadth) is achieved, it is equally important, if not more at this juncture, for future studies to explore well-established and emerging models, trends, and issues related to Arabic second language teaching and learning. Most of the Arabic SLA research to date has been conducted within the formal generative framework and speech processing prerequisites/Processability cognitive model. It will be useful to investigate Arabic SLA from other non-rule based perspectives such as frequency and usage-based accounts, where learning is claimed to be bottom-up driven (e.g., Bybee and Hopper, 2001; Ellis,

2002, 2012; Agren and Van de Weijer, 2013; Rebuschat and Williams, 2012; Römer et al., 2014). Similarly, it will be of great benefit (to classroom teaching practices) if Arabic SLA engages in studies on other interlanguage processing accounts such as those related to information processing (especially how the cycle of acquisition from developing control to automatization processes relates to restructuring or fossilization given the type of input and instruction and how more complex processes are shaped), input processing, and input and interaction (e.g., Anderson, 1983/2015; DeKeyser, 2001, 2007; VanPatten, 2012; Gass, 2003) and output (Swain and Lapkin, 1995; Swain, 2005).

In addition, given the new emerging trend for teaching MSA side by side with one or more colloquial variety, it is important to empirically investigate the efficacy of this approach and whether or not it has sound pedagogical underpinnings. Although there is a consensus among Arabic language practitioners that attaining superior level proficiency in Arabic is contingent upon demonstrating superior level proficiency in both MSA and at least a dialect (e.g., ACTFL, 1989), there have been three approaches towards fulfilling this proficiency requirement: (1) relegating dialect exposure to study abroad environment, (2) delaying dialect exposure after the first one to two years (or more) of MSA exposure, and (3) introducing the teaching of dialect (side by side with MSA) from early on. Given current teaching practices of Arabic as a foreign language, the vast majority of the Arabic practitioners subscribe to either of the last two approaches. Proponents of the early dialect exposure believe that the approach best reflects the linguistic reality of Arabic and its diglossic nature whereas proponents of the delayed exposure approach believe that due to the heavy learning burden entailed from the early exposure approach, it may be best to delay dialect exposure until the learners have developed a working knowledge of the language in MSA (e.g., Younes, 2014; Alhawary, 2013). These claims can best be investigated longitudinally (and to a lesser extent cross-sectionally) while taking many factors into account, including nature of learner's output, instructional input, instructional time and exposure to language outside of the classroom, and enrollment retention.

Similar research must also be conducted on Arabic to examine the effectiveness of techniques and strategies used to develop language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in other languages rather than take them for granted to be effective in the Arabic classroom. If the aim is to inform classroom teaching, future SLA research needs to take into account the following, among other things:

- conducting studies in the classroom context rather than laboratory context
- conducting studies on the different types of feedback and error correction techniques
- controlling for the various crucial variables in order to avoid any possible confounding effects
- controlling for L1 as well as heritage language knowledge carefully, even though this is a limitation which has plagued the field of SLA in general
- controlling for L2 language knowledge when investigating language transfer (i.e., taking into account L2 transfer in L3 acquisition), since different effects have been observed in the literature on transfer recently
- future research in heritage language acquisition should incorporate longitudinal design and tease apart developmental variables from social ones (as suggested by Albirini and Benmamoun 2014b), quantify heritage language input received, provide more information about their heritage learner's demographics, and create rubrics to identify learners' levels of competence along a heritage language competence/ability continuum
- future research in study abroad environment should implement longitudinal design and provide data (both quantitative and qualitative) about the specific language gains under different conditions in order to develop more accurate expectations and address their further needs in the local foreign language environment
- future research in the study of Arabic L2 phonology, speaking, or choice of a variety (i.e., a specific dialect, or more than one dialect, or MSA) should concomitantly investigate the social

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contexts of Arabic L2 use and sociopsychological factors such as identity, attitude, and motivation (i.e., not just needs) which may be involved (see also Jenkins, 2004).

Finally, although Arabic questionnaire survey research intended for the purpose of analyzing data related to other learners' variables (such as perception, beliefs, anxiety, motivation, attitude, etc.) and learning strategies was not reviewed in this chapter, a general observation is that many such studies rely solely on self-report data from respondents which would limit the credibility of the research findings. Future questionnaire survey research in Arabic needs to take into account triangulating the data by using multiple data sources and avoiding use of leading questions and other pitfalls.

## Bridging the Gap Between SLA Research and Classroom Teaching Practices

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of roads taken and not taken in Arabic SLA research with an eye on tracing the pedagogical implications aimed at informing Arabic second language teaching and classroom teaching practices. In order to advance the field of Arabic second language pedagogy, we need to move away from mere abstract theorizing about language teaching and classroom teaching practices and instead adopt practical theorizing, taking into account implications of empirical findings of Arabic SLA research. In order for this to happen, as discussed earlier, Arabic SLA research needs to expand coverage to all aspects of the Arabic language and language learning areas as well pursue new models, issues, and trends emerging both in the field of applied linguistics, in general, and Arabic foreign/second language learning and teaching, in particular. The gap between SLA researchers and classroom teachers must also be reduced by employing a number of measures, including (see also Ellis, 1997; Block, 2000; Borg, 2006):

- offering teachers in-training courses in SLA so that they are able to interpret research study findings and understand their pedagogical implications
- offering summaries of research studies in which SLA jargon is reduced to minimum
- providing details and explanations of how pedagogical implications can be implemented
- conducting collaborative research between teachers and researchers
- training and encouraging teachers to conduct action research
- conducting research on teacher cognition education

The more alignment between Arabic SLA research and classroom teaching practices is brought about, the more likely for classroom teaching to become informed by empirical findings. As the last bulleted point suggests, this may even entail Arabic SLA researchers to necessarily conduct teacher cognition research or, at the very least, take into account the teacher's role as "a powerful shaping influence" rather than "a variable that needs to be controlled" (Borg, 2006, p. 285).

## Notes

- 1 A distinction is usually made between "second" and "foreign" language learning, where the former takes place in an L2 native environment and the latter in a nonnative environment. For the purpose of this chapter and for ease of reference, I do not observe this distinction here and use the term "second" to mean both throughout.
- 2 Although Azaz (2016) does not explicitly state that introduction of the semantic concept of definiteness should be at an "early" stage of Arabic L2 acquisition, the overall suggested implications seem to point that way.
- 3 Another important implication of Alish's (1987) findings is to utilize L1 English speakers' perception tendency by encouraging such learners to adopt a strategy of initially identifying the pharyngealized consonant

- by noticing the vowel quality (heavy/deep) occurring with the consonant then gradually noticing the pharyngealized feature of the consonant itself. This is a strategy which I found to work successfully when teaching Arabic sound system in beginning and subsequent language courses.
- 4 This implication is not incongruent with SLA vocabulary research findings in general where vocabulary learning is observed to be less efficient at an early acquisition stage than later, since the learner has not acquired a sufficient basic, working knowledge yet (e.g., Nation, 2001; Webb, 2007). Developing a robust vocabulary learning ability is contingent upon developing a working knowledge of the target language, part of which is morphological knowledge.
  - 5 In addition, Elkhafaifi conducted one study related to listening comprehension and learners' anxiety (2005b) and another related to learners' use of listening strategies (2007–2008). Both studies employ questionnaire survey methodology.
  - 6 Finding many MSA features in the passages which speakers of the three dialects produced in response to Trentman's request (in order to use the recorded responses in the study), Trentman assumed that the speakers were accommodating to MSA as they were responding to her, knowing that she is a nonnative speaker, based on general observations in the literature (e.g., Abu Melhim, 1991; Mitchell, 1986). Trentman (2011) also states that "linguistic differences and listener familiarity are good predictors of intelligibility, and the dialects are more similar to each other than to MSA. Therefore, it is reasonable to predict that familiarity with one dialect would be more useful in understanding other dialects than knowing MSA would be to understanding other dialects" (2011, p. 29). Although dialects share similarities between themselves, so do dialects with MSA and the issue whether "dialects are more similar to each other than to MSA" is an empirical question which remains to be proven (or disproven) empirically.
  - 7 Trentman acknowledges a number of limitations to do with the semantic content of the listening passages (and unfortunately, a transcript of the listening passages was not provided) and the lack of control for proficiency which may be "a potentially confounding variable" (2011, p. 45). Trentman also stated that other factors may explain the findings including: prevalence of teachers from Egypt and the Levant under whom the majority of participants studied and inclusion of case and mood endings in the MSA passage, which may have distracted the participants and affected their comprehension. There are other problems with the instrument of the study, including lack of control for age, for gender, for the type of Arabic instructional input received (i.e., the type of textbooks the participants used and the nature of MSA and dialectal exposure), and for L1 and L2 language knowledge. No information was provided about the L1 or L1s of the participants other than that all but three participants (who came from European universities) studied at US universities. In addition, there are two other likely confounding variables not acknowledged by Trentman. First, in both types of listening transfer tests, many participants who knew either Levantine or Egyptian also knew other dialects (Trentman, 2011, pp. 32–33, Tables 3–4) which may have biased their familiarity to dialects versus MSA variety. Second, and more importantly, many heritage learners were included in both transfer tests and they may have likely skewed the results, since they may have had exposure to other dialects through social and religious events and activities within their communities. We know now such learners constitute an important variable and heritage knowledge and competence is not the same as that of the L2 learner (for more on heritage language acquisition, see Section 2).
  - 8 A recent study by Showalter and Hayes-Harb (2015) examined whether the written form (i.e., Arabic graphemes) presented during a one-hour word learning task impacted the learning of L2 novel words and phonological forms (i.e., Arabic phonemes). The study focused on learning twelve Arabic nonsense words by English-speaking participants who had no prior exposure of Arabic and were not learners of Arabic. The nonsense words contained the two velar–uvular phonemic contrast of  $\text{ك}$  versus  $\text{ق}$  and were minimal pairs. The study had a number of methodological limitations including lack of differentiation in the stimulus whether in the case of the Latin script (where the symbols  $k$  and  $q$  representing one English phoneme were presented as symbols for the two distinct Arabic phonemes) or the Arabic script (where the only instruction provided to the participants was the directionality of Arabic writing being from right to left instead of left to right). The study expectedly produced inconclusive evidence and has no clear pedagogical implications, since additionally it was conducted within a laboratory setting rather than a classroom context. The authors acknowledged that L2 learning (of word meanings and phonological forms) within an instructional setting does not proceed in the same way the stimulus was provided in the study experiments but would instead include providing L2 learners with detailed explanations about writing the graphemes as well as opportunities to practice reading and writing the graphemes, among others (Showalter and Hayes-Harb, 2015, pp. 39–40). In addition, learners are not usually required to learn such a number of vocabulary items all of which comprise minimal pairs.
  - 9 Although one counters other studies to have employed a similar method of a proficient versus a less proficient group, such a grouping is not very useful for deriving pedagogical implications or for research replication purposes.

- 10 Khaldieh (2001) notes that future research of this line of investigation should employ Classical Arabic prose (in addition to that of MSA) in order to shed more light on the importance of *i'raab* to reading—perhaps in reference to types of style where formal features such as case and mood endings can carry more functional loads. However, the importance of lexical knowledge to reading comprehension is consistent with findings in the L1 and L2 reading literature in general (e.g., Stahl, 1983; Taglieber, Johnson, and Yarbough, 1988, respectively). This is also in line with findings in the L2 listening comprehension literature (see Elkhafaifi, 2005a).
- 11 Hansen (2010) does not mention explicitly the textbook used by the participants in Levels/groups 1–2. Another plausible explanation is that such participants—if using a textbook where full vowelization of texts is not provided as some textbooks provide full vowelization only of words when first introduced in a given lesson—may have not adjusted to the sudden requirement of the study condition and, therefore, the supplied vowels may have distracted and slowed the participants down. In addition to the limitations acknowledged in the study (e.g., not controlling for the L1 of the participants nor their knowledge of L2s, and the small token size of the comprehension questions), to avoid a possible outcome biased by textbook use, a more accurate research design of the study would include two sets of participants: one using a textbook which provides fully voweled texts and another using a textbook which does not provide fully voweled texts.
- 12 Many findings are consistent with the literature on refusals and speech acts in general in Interlanguage pragmatics (e.g., individual variation, L1 transfer, and use of direct rather than indirect strategies). However, although other studies revealed significant gender-related differences, Morkus (2009, 2014) did not control for gender in his study (cf. Al-Issa, 1998 investigating refusals in Jordanian EFL participants; for a similar finding from a study on apology strategies by Jordanian EFL participants, see Batianeh and Bataineh, 2006).
- 13 L1 was not controlled for in the study, although evidence in the literature suggests that L1 may play a role (e.g., Olshtain, 1983).
- 14 It may be possible that L1 transfer effects may have contributed to the trend exhibited by the four groups, as Al-Gahtani and Roever (2015) acknowledge.
- 15 Despite presence of some fillers (or distractors) in two of the tasks, that the study's focus on negation was likely easily detected by some or many of the participants which would make the data relevant to their metalinguistic awareness rather than their underlying knowledge of Arabic. Another limitation of the study, given the research questions, is lack of control of prior exposure to Arabic where, for example, the advanced L2 participants were enrolled in third and fourth year and some had had extended stays in an Arabic speaking country, ranging from a month to year and many of them did so for the purpose of learning Arabic. In addition, since there is no data about the heritage participants' perception of MSA in relation to the dialects they spoke, it is not clear how the data are interpreted to be in support of the predictions made by the cumulative enhancement model and the typological primacy model (see Flynn, Foley, and Vinnitskaya, 2004 and Rothman, 2011, respectively) as Albirini suggests (Albirini, 2014b, p. 458). Finally, the study does not report on any other possible L2s of the participants which may also play a role as suggested by current transfer models (for more on a third transfer model, the L2 status factor, see Falk and Bardel, 2011).
- 16 Another study on heritage speakers worthy of mention is Saadah (2011) which investigated the production of Arabic vowels by heritage speakers and English L2 learners of Arabic. Participants of the study belonged to two groups of heritage speakers (an experienced and an inexperienced group) and two groups of L2 learners (an advanced and a beginner group). The results of the study expectedly showed that more exposure to and experience in the target language result in more accurate and target-like production of vowels in both the heritage and L2 learners.

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