Heritage Language Learning Strategies

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Outlines

• Who are heritage speakers
• How they are (dis)similar to foreign language learners
• Issues in heritage Arabic students’ learning, opportunities, and challenges
• Learning goals and strategies
• Assessing students’ learning
• Suggestions for future research
Who/what is a heritage speaker?
Who are Heritage Speakers of Arabic (HSAs)?

- Heritage speakers of Arabic (HSAs) are children of immigrants from different Arabic speaking countries (Albirini, 2016).

- At least one parent speaks Arabic at home.
Exposure to Colloquial Arabic (CA)

- Exposed to their parents’ colloquial Arabic (CA) dialects in the home.
- Have limited opportunities to hear or use CA outside the home.
- Once they start using English (at or before school age), English becomes their stronger and more dominant language.
Exposure to Standard Arabic (SA)

- Exposed to Standard Arabic (SA) at some point in their education (e.g., Sunday schools) or through informal channels (e.g., television).

- Do not use SA in their everyday interactions.

- Most take college SA classes to improve their literacy skills in SA (Husseinali, 2006).
What exactly is a heritage speaker of Arabic?

- L1 Speaker
- Bilingual
- L2 Learner
- Trilingual
How (Dis)similar are Heritage Arabic Speakers to Learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language?
How Dis(similar) are they to FL Learners?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heritage speakers</th>
<th>FL learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phonology</td>
<td>Accent in pronunciation; Phonology of SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to native-speaker pronunciation;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonology of one dialect (sometimes also SA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Learned grammatical rules but cannot always apply them fluently in communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often use grammatical rules correctly, but do not know them explicitly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Limited vocabulary; mostly from SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive vocabulary related to home,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>community, and religion; accessibility and retrieval</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>issues</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How Dis(similar) are they to FL learners?

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<th>Heritage speakers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy skills</td>
<td>Limited literacy skills; able to develop them quickly due to background</td>
<td>Initially struggle with Arabic orthography, reading, and writing; build strong foundation for development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic competence</td>
<td>Competent in limited contexts related to family and community</td>
<td>Very limited competence beyond classroom rules</td>
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Issues in Heritage Arabic Students’ Learning: Opportunities & Challenges
Why Arabic heritage speakers are unique

• Arabic is a diglossic language (Albirini & Benmamoun, 2022)

• Learned CA at home, but most seek to learn SA at college (Husseinali, 2006)

• Their proficiencies in CA and SA vary considerably (Albirini, 2014)
Opportunities

• Come to Arabic classrooms with some knowledge of CA and SA

• Are familiar with the social context in which Arabic is used.

• Know different aspects of the culture
Challenges

- Atheoretical pedagogies and practices used for teaching heritage languages (Valdes, 2000; Kagan & Dillon, 2008; Albirini, 2015).

- Teaching practices related to heritage language learning and teaching are based on trail and error and the experiences of individual teachers.

- Lack of policy formulation and implementation
Challenges

• Lack of curriculum and materials

• Lack of verified techniques to adapt foreign language methodology to heritage language teaching, placement, and assessment.

• Low self-esteem in presence of native speakers of Arabic (Shiri, 2010)
Learning Goals and Strategies
Learning Goals

• Most heritage speakers come to Arabic classes to
  • improve their literacy skills (especially to be able to read books in Arabic)
  • communicate better with their parents and community.
  • better understand their parents’ home culture
Important Considerations

- Understand the knowledge and language skills that they bring into the classroom
  - Survey
  - Placement test

- Build on their existing knowledge and skills to further develop their language abilities (Albirini, 2015; Benmamoun & Albirdini, 2018)
Types of College Courses for HSAs

- Two scenarios:
  - Heritage speakers are in the same classes as FL learners
  - Heritage speakers are in their own classes

- Similar challenges (curricula, materials, varied proficiency levels, etc.)

- In heritage-only classes, students’ goals and interests are similar
Learning Strategies

• Individualized learning

• Students taking control of their own learning

• Learning strategies give flexibility to students and center on their interests and needs
Learning strategies: Definition

• ‘Strategies are special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information.’ (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990, p. 44).
Common Taxonomies of Learning Strategies

• Several taxonomies for general learning strategies (e.g., O’Malley, 1985; Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Chamot and O’Malley, 1990; Stern, 1992, etc.)

• Oxford (1990)
  • Direct strategies
  • Indirect strategies
Direct Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1990)

• Direct Strategies
  • Memory (e.g., creating linkages through texts, sounds, images)
  • Cognitive (e.g., practice; analyzing input; structuring output)
  • Compensation (e.g., guessing intelligently, overcoming limitations in communication)
Direct Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1990)

• Indirect Strategies
  • Metalinguistic (e.g., self-evaluation)
  • Affective (e.g., lowering anxiety; developing positive attitude)
  • Social (e.g., asking questions; collaborating with other; inquiry into culture)
Teachers’ Role

- Teachers direct students to different learning strategies to advance their proficiencies.
  - Project-based learning
  - Inquiry-based learning
  - Argument-based learning
  - Role play
  - Reflective learning
Issues to Consider in Learning Strategies

- Relevance
- Allowing choice
- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Creativity and innovation
- Diversified
Issues to Consider in Learning Strategies

- Integrated skills (reading books, news, writing)
- Engagement (e.g., games)
- Interactive
- Student agency and self-expression
Focus/Content: Meaningful to Students
Project-based Learning: Examples

• Work in groups of 3 or 4 to
  • Create a video/report about one aspect of the Arabic culture (e.g., communication etiquette)
  • Promote a community event (Eid celebration)
Continued

• Write a letter to an editor in a local newspaper about a topic relevant to the Arab American community.

• Summarize an Arabic movie

• Summarize an Arabic short story
Inquiry-based Learning: Examples

• Find out about a question or issue you would like to understand or know more about and report your findings, e.g.,

  • Unfamiliar cultural topic

  • Best tourist places/dishes/etc. in (an Arab country)
Continued

• Dos and don’ts in any Arab country

• Arab American students’ experiences in Cache Valley
Argument-based Learning: Examples

• In class:
  Classroom debate, e.g.,
  • home schooling vs. public schooling
  • buying a home with loan versus renting
Continued

• Outside class:
  • Revisit a historical piece of information
  • Respond to a viewpoint
  • Contest a piece of news
Role Playing

• Videotaped Skits

• Take on the role of someone you admire and explain their viewpoint about a main idea.

• Press conference (e.g., Before a soccer game)
Reflective learning

• Memorable trip you made to the Middle East. What makes it different from other experiences?

• Meaning of Eid/Christmas/Easter for you?

• How could you have been different if you were raised in the Arab World?

• Do you see yourself more of an Arab or an American or both? How?
Continued

• Challenges you face in learning Arabic

• Challenges you face in communicating in Arabic

• Are you closer to a native speaker of Arabic or foreign language learner of Arabic? Explain
Providing Guidance

• Students may need guidance or specific instructions in these activities

• A teacher’s role is provide such details
Example: Reflective Learning

Describe
• Experiences
• Feelings

Analyze
• Explanation
• Evaluation

Plan to Act
• Conclusion
• Action
Assessing Students’ Learning
Assessment

- Letting students choose the criteria for assessment
- Letting students do the assessment
- Assessment for development (not evaluation): Allowing students the chance to re-do their work and address gaps.
Assessment examples

• Minimum length

• Comprehensibility/clarity/readability/

• Grammatical mistakes
Assessment examples

• Organization
• Width of vocabulary
• Structural complexity
Recommendations for Future Research
Recommendation for future research

• More research focusing on heritage speakers’ L1 system

• What are their language learning needs (based on gaps in their L1 system)

• How to harness their previous knowledge in advancing their learning of SA
Recommendation for future research

• Need more studies on the effectiveness of different learning strategies

• Need more studies on the effectiveness of different instructional strategies
References


Thank You

Questions?