

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.

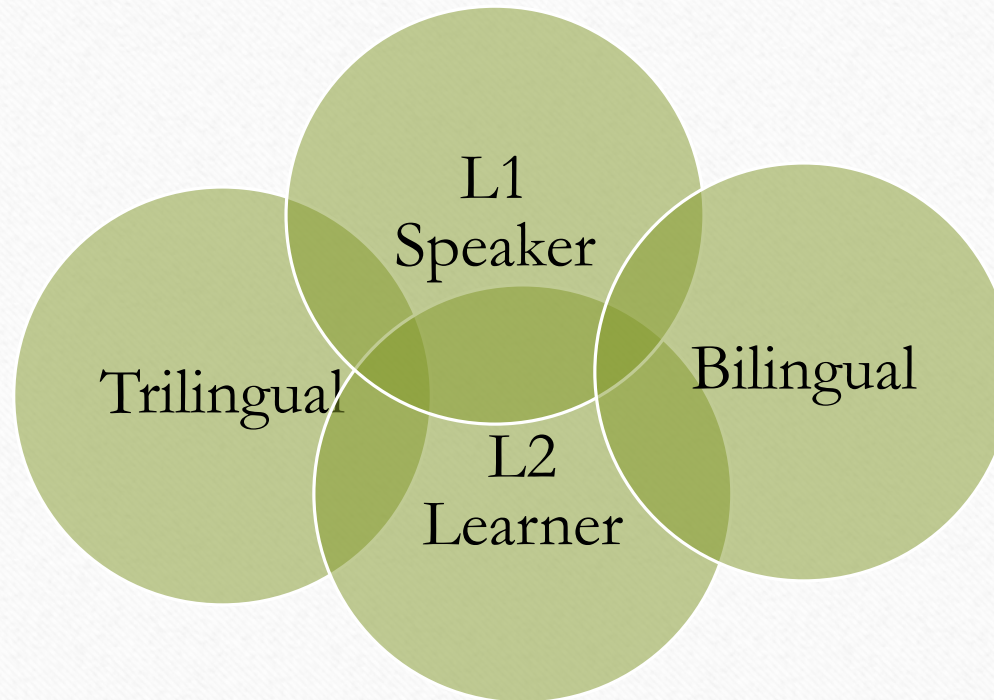
Exposure to Colloquial Arabic (CA)

- 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?



How (Dis)similar are Heritage Arabic Speakers to Learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language?

How Dis(similar) are they to FL Learners?

	Heritage speakers	FL learners
Phonology	Close to native-speaker pronunciation; Phonology of one dialect (sometimes also SA)	Accent in pronunciation; Phonology of SA
Grammar	Often use grammatical rules correctly, but do not know them explicitly	Learned grammatical rules but cannot always apply them fluently in communication
Vocabulary	Extensive vocabulary related to home, community, and religion; accessibility and retrieval issues	Limited vocabulary; mostly from SA

How Dis(similar) are they to FL learners?

	Heritage speakers	FL learners
Literacy skills	Limited literacy skills; able to develop them quickly due to background	Initially struggle with Arabic orthography, reading, and writing; build strong foundation for development
Sociolinguistic competence	Competent in limited contexts related to family and community	Very limited competence beyond classroom rules

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 trial 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 & Albirini, 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**

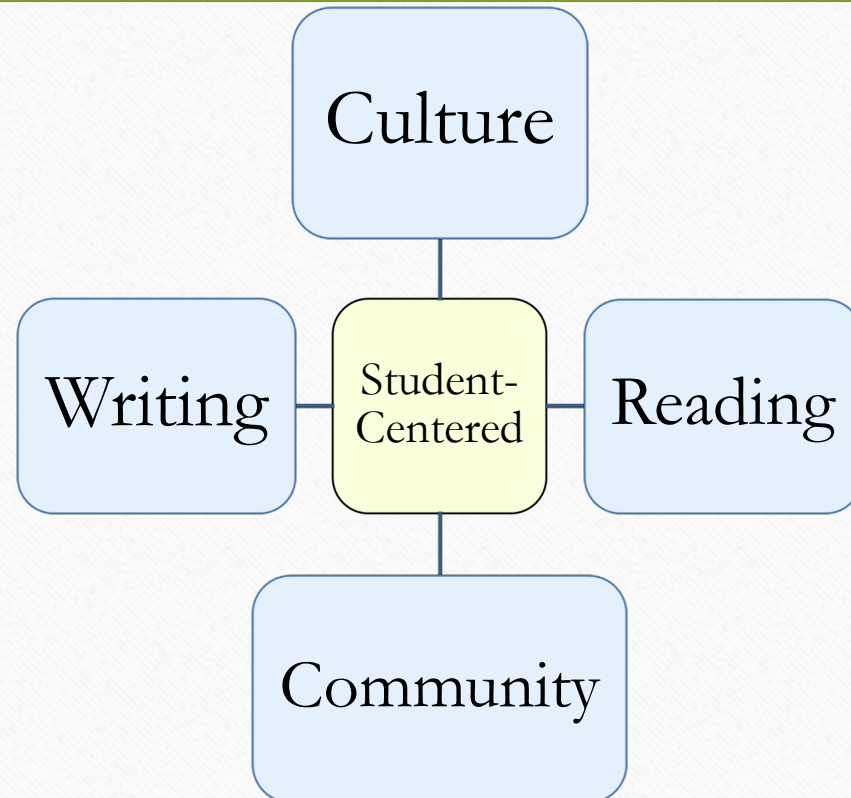
Issues to Consider in Learning Strategies

- 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

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Thank You
Questions?