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Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language in Its Diglossic Situation: Is Formal Spoken Arabic an Ideal Solution?

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Abstract

Due to the complex diglossic situation in Arabic, the question of what variety of the language to teach has always occupied a central position in work on teaching Arabic as a foreign language (AFL). Basic Standard Arabic may have been the most supported answer to the above question, but the field is not short of proposals for teaching dialectal varieties. Moreover, in quest of a way to help learners achieve full "Functionally Native Proficiency" (Ryding 1991, 216), Formal Spoken Arabic (FSA) was proposed as a bridge between a standard variety and a dialectal one. The present study argues against such a proposal at beginner levels on the following grounds: (1) FSA is different from the standard and dialectal varieties of Arabic and (2) FSA users can always shift to their dialectal varieties and employ features lying beyond AFL learners' scope of competence. The argument is supported by examining variation in the use of the Arabic relative clause induced by the tendency toward different relativisation strategies (i.e. the pronoun retention strategy or the gap strategy) in different Arabic varieties. Considering that the relative clause can be embedded into any construction to modify a head noun, variation in its use can affect learners' ability to make sense of the language input. This variation is demonstrated by examples selected from texts written in Classical Arabic, Modern Classical Arabic, and Iraqi Arabic. The study has implications for AFL course writers.

Keywords: AFL; Arabic language varieties; Arabic relative clause; diglossia; relativisation strategies.

1. Introduction

Perceptions of the diglossic[1] situation in Arabic – a classical/dialectal dichotomy – may be introduced in terms of Prototype Theory (Taylor [1989] 1995). Two diachronic perspectives can be distinguished, as follows. From one perspective, all the varieties of Arabic, including Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), form a category that radiates out from Classical Arabic (CA). The more similar to CA a variety is (i.e. MSA), the more typical (and, hence, correct) it is perceived (Holes 2004). The second perspective, however, considers the prototype to be a koine dialect – a unified dialect that Arabs used for inter-communication during the Islamic conquests era (Ferguson 1959). This perspective rests on the fact that the dialectal varieties of Arabic differ from CA at all linguistic levels, including phonology, morphology and syntax (Holes 2004). For example, in most dialectal varieties, the voiceless uvular (*qāf*) is realised by the velar /g/ or the inter-vocalic glottal stop /ʔ/. In addition, the dual and feminine plural categories in verbs and pronouns are reduced to one non-gender specific plural (Ryding 1991, 216). Although the standard sentence structure and word order can be preserved in the dialectal varieties of Arabic, there are differences that are due to the deletion of grammatical elements, such as the deletion of subordinating conjunctions in the use of verb strings and the deletion of the desinential inflection – final short vowels – on all parts of speech (*ibidem*).

The linguistic similarities among the dialectal varieties of Arabic do not make them mutually intelligible. This fact may be said to have led to the emergence of Formal Spoken Arabic (FSA) – "a new form of widely intelligible spoken Arabic... used for inter-dialectal conversation by educated native speakers, for semiformal discussions, and on other social occasions when the colloquial is deemed too informal, and the literary, too stilted" (Ryding, 1991, 212). Hence, a synchronic categorisation of the current diglossic situation in Arabic would involve placing FSA, which can be described as a koineised form of the spoken varieties of Arabic (in Ferguson's [1959] terminology), between the spoken varieties and MSA. This is because FSA, which is often described as a "middle language" (Ferguson 1960), draws on both MSA and the dialectal varie-

[1] The term *diglossia* was used by Ferguson (1959) to refer to a situation in which two or more distinct varieties of a language are used for distinct communicative purposes. Fishman (1965) and Gumperz (1966) used the term in a broader sense to include registers or functionally-differentiated language varieties.

ties of Arabic (Mitchell 1985, 1986). For example, FSA preserves the standard pronunciation of Arabic and relies on high frequency words and routine expressions. At the same time, it adopts morphological and syntactic features that characterise the dialectal varieties of Arabic, such as the above-mentioned ones (Ryding 1991, 214-216).

Proposals for the adoption of FSA norms in teaching Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL) (for example, Ferguson 1959; Mansour 1960; Ryding 1991) may be said to be rooted in the idea of "Core English" – the area of basic English norms (e.g. prefabricated speech, high-frequency and culture-free words, basic grammar) that EFL course writers draw upon (West 1953; Carter and McCarthy 1988; Willis 1990; Reda 2003). Ryding, however, noted that FSA

> is primarily a bridge enabling nonnative speakers to cross the ravine separating the literary language from the multifarious world of colloquial Arabic dialects. To achieve full "Functionally Native Proficiency" [...], a learner of Arabic as a foreign language must ultimately master at least the three Arabic language variants used by educated Arabs: MSA, FSA, and a regional vernacular. (Ryding 1991, 216)

Considering that the diglossic situation in Arabic is extreme, it needs to be said that mastering two varieties of Arabic through FSA – a variety that is meant for inter-communication among native Arabic speakers – is not as easy as mastering English through its Core norms. In addition, FSA is a spoken variety, which means that its norms are unlikely to be adopted as basic standard norms. In fact, AFL textbooks are very similar to EFL textbooks in the sense that they contain basic standard norms. Such textbooks are in use in the AFL classroom around the world (see, for example, Soliman, Towle, and Snowden 2016; Lewicka and Waszau 2017). Commenting on this fact in regard to teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the USA, Ryding (2006) noted that "We have privileged the secondary [i.e. the written or formal] discourses of literature and the academy over the primary discourses of familiarity [i.e. the spoken varieties]. I refer to this as 'reverse privileging', and I posit that it is the key issue facing teaching Arabic as a foreign language in America today" (*ibid.*, 16). However, one can argue that FSA cannot be seen as an ideal solution to AFL teaching and learning issues just because it is a middle language. Actually, being a middle language, FSA is neither familiar nor acceptable in everyday interactions, which suggests that AFL learners will not have enough input/output opportunities to learn the language variety. In addition, there are no hard and fast rules governing the use

of FSA, and, therefore, its users can shift to their dialectal varieties, which can be unintelligible to AFL learners, whenever they feel that it is appropriate for them to do so. On these grounds, it can be argued that FSA is not an ideal variety to expose AFL learners to at the beginner levels.

The argument against the employment of FSA at the beginner levels is supported below by the use of the relative clause in CA, MSA and Iraqi Arabic (IA). The relative clause is selected because it is essential for communication in the sense that it modifies the head of the noun phrase – a phrase that plays such important syntactic roles as the subject and object (Velupillai 2012; Alotaibi 2016). However, the use of the relative clause in the varieties of Arabic is affected by the tendency toward different relativisation strategies (i.e. the pronoun retention strategy or the gap strategy). FSA users can draw on the use of the relative clause in any dialectal variety, a possibility that can affect the ability of learners to make sense of the foreign language input. Relative clauses can be encountered in every stretch of language and, therefore, variation in their use is important to consider with AFL learners in mind.

The present paper is structured as follows. First, the relative clause is defined and relativisation strategies are introduced through work that examines these strategies in different varieties of Arabic. Then, the data collection method and findings are presented. The study ends with a discussion and suggestions for AFL course writers. The suggestions are based on the researchers' view that, due to the extremely complex diglossic situation in Arabic, AFL courses need to be tailored to individual learners' needs. However, regardless of these needs, the basics of Standard Arabic (rather than FSA) should be offered at the beginner levels. The basics can then be expanded to include the targeted written and/or spoken discourse(s) including FSA.

2. The relative clause and relativisation strategies

The focus of this study is on restrictive relative clauses. According to Givón (1993), these clauses are "used in grounding the referent noun to the knowledge-base that is already represented in the mind of the hearer" (*ibid.*, 108). In this way, restrictive relative clauses play an important role in effective communication in everyday life.

Two relativisation strategies are used in restrictive relative clauses: the pronoun retention strategy (or the use of resumptive pronouns (RPs)) and the gap strategy (the omission of RPs). The RP is co-referential with the head noun (Song 2001), as shown by the example below from FSA (note that there are no desinential inflections in the example sentences).

(1) الرجل الذي رأيته معك

al-raǧul	allaḏī	ra'aytu-**hu**	ma'ak
The-man	REL(3M.SG)	saw-**him**	with you

The man that I saw him with you.

In this example, *-hu* 'him' is a resumptive pronoun that is co-referential with the head of the noun phrase *al-raǧul* 'the man'. The fact that 'him' occupies the direct object position in the relative clause indicates that 'the man' is the direct object of the relative clause.

Different studies have stated that, as a general rule, using an RP in a relative clause gives the sentence an interpretation that is different from one carried out by the same relative clause with a gap. For example, Doron (2011) and Sells (1984, 1987) showed that using an RP imposes a more specific interpretation, whereas the gap suggests a more broad or general interpretation. The following examples from FSA make the point.

(2) سامي سيشتري السيارة التي يريد

sāmī	sa-yaštarī	l-sayyāra	allatī	yurīd	Ø
Sami	will-buy	the-car	REL(3F.SG)	he.needs	

Sami will buy the car that he needs.

(3) سامي سيشتري السيارة التي يريدها

Sāmī	sa-yaštarī	l-sayyāra	allatī	yurīdu-**hā**
Sami	will-buy	the-car	REL(3F.SG)	he.needs-**it**

Sami will buy the car that he needs **it**.

Sentence (2) carries two interpretations: (1) there is no particular car in Sami's mind, but he is looking for a car with specific characteristics and (2) Sami is looking for a particular car. However, sentence (3) has only one interpretation due to the insertion of the RP *hā* 'her', which adds the indication that Sami seeks a particular car.

Sells (1984, 1987) noted that the gap strategy is used for modifying indefinite noun phrases, thus leading to a non-specific reading, or what the author calls 'the concept', whereas the RP is used for modifying definite noun phrases giving rise to a specific reading (Sells 1987, 288). Most Arabic varieties are similar to MSA in their ability to relativise definite as well as indefinite noun phrases, as in examples (4) and (5)

from IA. The relative pronoun *illī* is used with definite noun phrases only, as in example (4). In example (5), however, the resumptive pronoun *-ah* is an attached pronoun that refers back to an indefinite noun (*walad* 'boy') (see Brustad 2000).

(4) دگ الباب الولد اللي أيده مكسورة

dag	al-bāb	al-walad	illī	īd-**ah**	maksūra
knocked	the-door	the-boy	REL	hand-**his**	broken

The boy whose hand is broken knocked on the door.

(5) دگ الباب ولد أيده مكسورة

dag	al-bāb	walad	īd-**ah**	maksūra
knocked	the-door	boy	hand-**his**	broken

A boy whose hand is broken knocked on the door.

It should be noted at this point that the use of the PR or gap strategy in Arabic relative clauses is also determined by the rich verb gender and number inflection (Alotaibi and Borsley 2013, 10). MSA uses different kinds of relative markers, some of which are inflected for gender and number. However, relativisation markers in Arabic dialects are not inflected for these categories (Holes 2004, 284). All varieties use the invariable relative pronoun *illī* (refer back to example 4), or its variants (e.g. *hallī* or *yallī* in Syrian Arabic or sometimes the short form *ill*) for relativisation (Altoma 1969; Holes 1990, 2004; Brustad 2000).

With reference to examples from Egyptian Arabic, Eid (1983) showed that the insertion of pronouns in a subject relative clause imposes a disfavoured reading, which helps to disambiguate the meaning of the sentence. A case in point is example (6), which is used in Eid (1983, 289) to demonstrate that such a sentence can have two different interpretations, as shown by the translations.

(6) علي كلم الولد اللي (هو) شتمه امبارح

ʿalī	kallam	il-walad	illī	Ø (huwa)	šatam-hu	imbāriḥ
Ali	talked	the-boy	REL	Ø (he)	insulted-him	yesterday

Ali talked to the boy that insulted him (Ali) yesterday. (Favoured)
Ali talked to the boy that he (Ali) insulted him (the boy) yesterday. (Less favoured)

In this example, as Eid (1983) explains, the verb of the relative clause agrees with the head *il-walad* 'the-boy' as well as with the subject of the main clause 'Ali'. This makes it difficult to decide who the subject of the verb *šatam* 'insult' is. Thus, inserting *huwa* 'he' in the relative clause imposes the second reading whereby the pronoun is co-referential with the subject of the main clause. Eid (1983), Suaieh (1980), Hannouna

(2010) and Jassim (2011), among others, state that when the RP is used in the subject position of an Arabic relative clause, it is stressed for the purpose of emphasis.

The above examples demonstrate that different relativisation strategies in Arabic relative clauses serve different semantic and grammatical functions. However, as shown in the section to follow, the use of pronoun retention and gap strategies varies across the varieties of Arabic.

3. Data collection method

The observation that the varieties of Arabic have different tendencies toward the use of relativisation strategies is based on the examination of a corpus of 2559 relative clauses. The clauses are collected from 14 texts written in three varieties of Arabic: CA, MSA and IA. Relative clauses in the corpus are collected manually due to the unavailability of a software that can detect indefinite relative clauses (i.e. relative clauses that do not contain relative markers). *Table 1* below provides a classification of the texts used for collecting data for this study according to the variety they are written in.

Table 1. – Data sources[2].

Variety	Title
CA	1. حي بن يقظان 2. مقامات الحريري 3. تاريخ الطبري 4. تاريخ ابن الأثير 5. تاريخ ابن خلدون
MSA	1. الطريق الى تل المطران 2. تغريدة البجعة 3. المنبوذ 4. تاريخ العرب وحضاراتهم في الأندلس 5. السيف والسياسة في الاسلام 6. تاريخ العرب المعاصر
IA	1. الرجع البعيد 2. النخلة والجيران 3. رباعيات أبو گاطع

[2] Full bibliographic information of the texts is provided in the Appendix.

In-text reference to the tabulated books is made using the number assigned to it within the variety it falls under. For example, reference to an example from حي بن يقظان is made by the following abbreviation: [CA, 1]. This is followed by the page number, as in [CA, 1: 95].

4. Findings

The results are presented in this section according to the grammatical position of the relativised noun phrase. The results show that the use of relativisation strategies varies across CA, MSA and IA. The variation is substantial such that it necessitates drawing AFL learners' attention to the possibility of encountering relative clauses with or without RPs, and to the fact that the presence or absence of the RPs may not be consistent with the use of the relative clause in the variety they are learning.

4.1. *SU relative clauses*

The data collected from CA, MSA, and IA showed that RPs do not appear in SU relative clauses, except for emphasis, as shown by examples (7), (8) and (9) below.

(7) إن الأجسام التي تقبل الإضاءة...
inna l-aǧsām allatī taqbal Ø al-iḍā'a ....
Indeed the-bodies REL(3F.SG) accept Ø the-light...
Indeed, the bodies which receive the light... [CA, 2: 10]

(8) لا نريد حلماً يكبلنا
lā nurīd ḥilman yukabbil-nā
not we.want dream tie up-us
We do not want a dream that ties us up. [MSA, 2: 249]

(9) شفت اليوم واحد چان يشتغل وياي بالبنك
šifit l-yūm wāḥid ʧān yištuġul wa-yāy bi-l-bank
saw-I the-day one was work with-me in-the- bank
I saw today one who was working with me in the bank. [IA, 1: 80]

Only 11 instances of SU relative clauses that include RPs could be found in CA texts. 1 instance was also found in MSA texts. Consider examples (10) and (11) below where the RP occurs as part of nominal sentences. No such instances could be found in the examples from IA texts used in this study.

(10) وجد نصفها الذي هو في الجانب الواحد
wağada niṣfa-hā allaḍī **huwa** fī l-ǧānib al-wāḥid
found(he) half-her REL(3MS.G) **he** in the-side the-one
He found her half which is on one side. [CA, 1: 34]

(11) والمواطن التي هي ديار العرب
wa-l-mawāṭin allatī **hiya** diyār al-'arab
and the-places REL(3F.SG) **she** home the-Arab
The places that belong to Arabs. [MSA, 4: 105]

In different instances, the RPs appear as attached pronouns in SU relative clauses. In this case, they cannot be omitted because they are attached to passive prepositional verbs, as shown by example (12) below.

(12) كان في مسجد يُقال له مسجد صالح
kān fī masǧid yuqāl la-**hu** masǧid ṣāliḥ
was in mosque say(PASS) to-**it** mosque Salih
He was in a mosque which is called Salih's mosque. [CA, 3: 80]

In example (12), the RP *-hu* 'him' is attached to the preposition *la-* 'to' forming the prepositional verb *yuqāl la-hu* 'said to-it/him'. The use of an RP in this case is mandatory. Instances of this could only be found in CA (68 instances). The verb *yuqāl la-hu* يُقال له could not be found in MSA or IA texts; it is substituted by the passive *yusammā* يُسمى 'called' where no attached RPs are needed. Accordingly, AFL learners may encounter difficulties in identifying the functions of the RP in a prepositional verb if they are not previously introduced to them. In example (12), the RP in *yuqāl la-hu* can be misidentified as the object of the preposition (rather than the subject).

4.2. *DO relative clauses*

The pronoun retention strategy and the gap strategy are both used in DO relative clauses. In these instances, the RPs could be attached to a verb, as in examples (13) and (14) from CA and IA.

(13) بالإسناد الذي ذكرته قبل
bi-l-isnād allaḍī ḏakartu-**hu** qabl
In-the-reference REL(3M.SG) mentioned-I-**it** before
In the reference which I mentioned before.... [CA, 3: 106]

(14) هاي يمكن فلسفة ما أعرفها
hāy yimkin falsafa mā a'ruf-**hā**
This may be philosophy not I-know-**it**
This may be a philosophy which I do not know. [IA, 1: 60]

RPs can also be attached to prepositions if a prepositional verb is used in a relative clause, as in example (15) whereby the RP *-hi* is attached to the preposition *bi-*.

(15) إني أرى الرجل الذي جئتم به ليس معه ثان

innī	arā	l-raǧul	allaḍī	ǧi'tum	bi-**hi**
I	see	the-man	REL(3M.SG)	came-2.PL	in-**him**
laysa		ma'a-hu	ṯān		
has no		with-him	second		

I see that the man you brought has no one with him. [CA, 3: 119]

Only 27 DO relative clauses without RPs could be found in the corpus, of which 25 instances are in CA and 2 in MSA. No instances could be found in IA. This shows that the absence of RPs in DO relative clauses is acceptable in standard Arabic varieties. This is not the case in dialectal varieties. Examples (16) and (17) demonstrate the absence of the RPs in CA and MSA respectively.

(16) فهلكوا في المجاعة التي صادفوا

fa-halakū	fī	l-maǧā'a	allatī	ṣādafū
So-died-PL	in-the	famine	REL(3F.SG)	found-PL.MAS

So they died in the famine which they suffered from. [CA, 3: 1000]

(17) تصرفني متى أردتَ وإلى المكانِ الذي ترغب

taṣrif-nī	matā	aradta wa-	ilā	l-makān
you (dismiss-me)	when	want-you	and	to the-place
allaḍī	tarġab-	Ø		
REL(3M.SG)	want-you-	Ø		

You dismiss me whenever you want and to the place that you want. [MSA, 3: 152]

Accordingly, for DO relative clauses, AFL learners need to learn when the gap strategy could be used instead of the pronoun retention strategy. This is because the misuse of the gap strategy in DO relative clauses could give rise to an ambiguous sentence like example (18).

(18) الرجل الذي رأى [الملك] في حلمهِ جالسٌ في مجلسٍ رفيع

al-raǧul	allaḍī	ra'ā	[l-malik]	fī	ḥulumi-hi
the-man	REL(3M.SG)	saw	[the-king]	in	dream-his
ǧālisun	fī maǧlis	rafī'			
sitting	in place	high			

The man that the king saw in his dream was sitting in a high place. [CA, 3: 271]

The ambiguity in example sentence (18) is the result of the non-attachment of the resumptive pronoun *-hu* 'him' to the verb *ra'ā* 'saw'. This makes the sentence susceptible to the following two interpretations: 'the king saw the man in his dream' and 'the man saw the king in his dream'. This is not expected to occur in IA as the tendency to use the pronoun retention strategy in DO relative clauses is 100% (for the grammar of IA, see Erwin 2004).

4.3. *OBL relative clauses*

Similar to DO relative clauses, both relativisation strategies are used in OBL relative clauses. When the pronoun retention strategy is used, the RPs appear as attached to prepositions, as shown in example (19) whereby the RP *-hu* is attached to the preposition *ma'a*.

(19) هلك الملك الذي كان معه الريان بن الوليد

halaka	l-malik		allaḍī	kān	ma'a-**hu**
died	the-king		REL(3M.SG)	was	with-**him**
l-rayān	b.	al-walīd			
Al-Rayan	son	Al-Waleed			

The king who was with Al-Rayan son of Al-Waleed died. [CA, 3: 130]

Only 12 instances (3%) of OBL relative clauses that appear without RPs could be found in the corpus. The majority of these instances (7 clauses) were found in MSA. Only 3 instances were found in IA and 2 in CA. This result shows that the use of the gap strategy in OBL relative clauses is more common in MSA and IA than in CA.

When the gap strategy is used in OBL relative clauses, the whole prepositional phrase is omitted, not only the RP, as shown by examples (20), (21) and (22). The preposition can be deleted in OBL relative clauses because it is not semantically attached to the verb the way it is in SU or DO relative clauses.

(20) في الوقت الذي قامت بالتعتيم على رواة القسمِ الثاني...

fī l-waqt	allaḍī	qāmat	Ø-Ø	bi-l-ta'tīm	'alā
in the time	REL(3M.SG)	did	Ø-Ø	in-the-hiding	on
ruwāt	al-qism	al-ṯānī...			
narrators	the-part	the-second...			

The time at which they have hidden the narrators of the second part... [MSA, 5: 168]

(21) يوم اليجيك ولد
yawm l-yiǧīk Ø-Ø walad
day REL-come-to you Ø-Ø boy
(I hope) the day when you have a boy comes. [IA, 1: 100]

(22) فناجز هم ساعة تلقاهم
fa-nāǧaz-hum sāʿa Ø-Ø talaqqā-hum.
Then-he.fought-them hour Ø-Ø met-them
Then (he) fought them at the time he met them. [CA, 3: 1103]

It should be noted, however, that deleting the prepositional phrase is not grammatically correct in all types of OBL relative clauses. It was found that OBL relative clauses in which the gap strategy is used have time expressions as head nouns. Examples of these time expressions include *waqt* 'time', *yawm* 'day' and *sāʿa* – refer back to examples (20), (21), and (22).

A wrong application of the gap strategy on the part of AFL learners might result in incomplete sentences or sentences with different meanings, as in examples (23) and (24) respectively.

(23) هلك الملك الذي كان الريان بن الوليد
halaka l-malik allaḏī kān al-rayān b. al-walīd
died the-king REL(3M.SG) was Al-Rayan son Al-Waleed
The king who was Al-Rayan son of Al-Waleed died. [CA, 3: 130]

(24) ثمن الطعام الذي اشتروه به
ṯaman al-ṭaʿām allaḏī ištaraw-hu bi-hi
price the food REL(3M.SG) bought.they-it in-it
The price with which they bought the food. [CA, 3: 118]

Example (24) shows that deleting the prepositional phrase will make the relative clause a DO relative clause (modifying *al- ṭaʿām* 'the food') rather than an OBL relative clause that modifies *ṯaman al-ṭaʿām* 'price of the food'.

The above examples demonstrate the different patterns of use of relativisation strategies in three varieties of Arabic. Such differences, which can affect AFL learners' interpretation and use of the relative clause in the variety they are in the process of learning, need to be pointed out to these learners considering that the relative clause can be encountered in every stretch of language.

5. Discussion and suggestions

This study aimed to show that a middle language like FSA is not an ideal solution for teaching Arabic as a foreign language at beginner levels. The main reason for this is that such a variety is different from both the standard and dialectal varieties and that native users can always shift to their dialectal variety employing features unknown to the FSA learner. The study demonstrated the difficulties that AFL students may encounter in learning a middle language by analysing the tendency toward different relativisation strategies in three different varieties of Arabic.

The complexity of the diglossic situation in Arabic is often addressed in work on AFL by proposing courses of Arabic that are tailored to the needs of individual foreign learners (e.g. Modern Standard Arabic, Classical Arabic, Media Arabic, Business Arabic, etc.). While such courses give learners the opportunity to learn the specific Arabic norms they need, they still cannot equip them with the competencies they need to communicate in the language in its both formal and informal contexts. The authors' opinion, however, is that AFL can only be taught as tailored to the specific needs of the learners due to the significant differences that exist among its varieties. AFL learners can be trained to function in formal and informal situations only if they start with a general Arabic course that exposes them to basic standard Arabic norms and then proceed to courses that meet their needs. Opportunities for them to deal with two formal and informal norms of the foreign language can always be created through supplementary materials. Examples of such opportunities are given below.

1. Including as supplementary course materials parts of movies or episodes of television series that are dubbed in the standard as well as the dialectal variety that the learners need to master. Dubbed movies or episodes can provide good language learning opportunities if matching the duration of the corresponding utterances in the original audio produces the effect of making dubbed speech slower and, therefore, clearer. An in-class discussion in which learners reflect on their learning experience can enhance the effectiveness of this experience.
2. Including listening activities in which the same topic is discussed in the targeted standard and dialectal varieties of Arabic. A follow up discussion of differences in vocabulary and grammar can be effective and interesting.
3. Including reading and writing activities in which learners first write example sentences or short paragraphs in standard Arabic and

then attempt to read them aloud using the norms of the targeted dialectal variety of Arabic. This activity can start by giving learners a list of words to use in the writing part of the activity. The reading part will require teacher's assistance.

4. Adding research activities requiring learners to select Arabic sentences from social media and then do an error analysis showing whether the errors are acceptable norms in the dialectal variety they are learning.

The above are only few suggestions to draw course writers' attention to the need to broaden the scope of AFL in a way that can help its learners gradually gain the ability to use and comprehend Arabic in the formal and informal situations they need to function in.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the significant differences that exist among the standard and dialectal varieties of Arabic in order to support the claim that a middle language is not an ideal solution for starting to learn a language in a state of complex diglossia like Arabic. The linguistic differences highlighted are not simply due to the modification or deletion of grammatical elements, but may also be rooted in strategies of use that can affect the understanding of the language input on the part of AFL learners. The study provided specific examples (i.e. relativisation strategies) for pointing out the need for course writers to consider developing AFL materials that familiarise learners with the standard and dialectal Arabic norms they need to learn. This can make it possible for learners to use and understand the specific Arabic discourse they need to learn and, at the same time, communicate with Arabic speakers in formal and informal situations. FSA is likely to be acquired naturally once the standard Arabic norms and the targeted Arabic variety/discourse are learnt.

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APPENDIX

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