Decolonising Arabic language teaching: a critique of the *al-Kitab* series

Since the early 2000s Arabic has become an increasingly popular language at academic level across Europe and North America, with high numbers of students enrolling on a variety of programmes offering Modern Standard Arabic – as well as local varieties of Arabic, commonly known as ‘ammiyyah – as the target language. (Dickins and Watson, 2006, 108; Ryding, 2006, 13) The increasingly high demand for this language has resulted in unprecedented progress in the variety of learning materials available for both teachers and learners. Such developments have largely taken place in the United States, where most textbooks such as the *al-Kitab* series are designed and printed. This paper employs decolonisation and post-colonial theory to look at the ideological implications of the political agendas implicit in popular and widely adopted textbooks and their proposed content for teaching Arabic as a foreign language. Relevant examples from the *al-Kitab* series – one of the most widely adopted textbooks at university level in the UK – show the role of Arabic language teaching materials in perpetuating patterns of European and North American cultural hegemony, making the case for rethinking Arabic language teaching at academic level.

1. Introduction

As Mariam Aboelezz argues in *The Arabic language and political ideology*, drawing on Yasir Sulaiman's work, any language serves two main functions in society: an instrumental function and a symbolic one. The former refers to language as an effective means of communication, while the latter concerns "the capacity of language to act both as a symbol and an index through the associations it invokes within the speech community". (Aboelezz, 2018, 1) In addition, suggesting that language can frequently serve as a proxy for ideology, therefore linking the instrumental and symbolic functions of language, Aboelezz and Sulaiman speak of language as a means "to express extra-linguistic views and anxieties, as well as to hint at the political orientations of a group or individual". (Suleiman, 2013, 16)

In this sense the concept of language ideology as defined by Michael Silverstein, and of political language ideology, in Aboelezz's definition, – both originally conceived and employed to deconstruct the ideology of standardised languages – inform this analysis. The former refers to language ideology ideas and beliefs about language which rationalise and justify its structure and use (Silverstein, 1979, 193); the latter concerns when language becomes politicised and is used as a proxy to maintain or challenge power relations, group identity and (a particular) social order in society. (Aboelezz, 2018, 1). Arabic is no exception, and the teaching of this language throughout history has been associated with multiple agendas or purposes: the preservation of Islamic identity, the establishment of a pan-Arab supranational koine, colonisation, modernisation and national independence. Based on these different purposes and the choices that they engender, the capital value of this language changes and can be manipulated, organised and presented through content and materials to serve specific world views.

The aim in this article is to expand these definitions to explore the politicised nature of Arabic language teaching materials within the framework of decolonisation. The complex relationship between language and politics in the field of Arabic language teaching can shed light on some of the deep-seated political dogmas in the Western approach to the Arabic language broadly speaking both as a medium as well as a symbol. In this vein, this paper addresses the underlying political vision of Arabic-language textbooks widely employed in anglophone higher education contexts, namely the UK and North America. This paper draws on an increasingly widespread approach to research/teaching to propose a decolonisation of Arabic language teaching, employing a broad definition of decolonisation as liberation from a colonial approach to knowledge, but also as avoiding and resisting the perpetuation of colonial or neo-colonial practices, as well as recognising and surpassing the living legacy of the colonial mindset particularly with regards to the Arab-Muslim universe. This also draws inspiration from Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), to explore how and why the Arabic language is studied and the political significance of Arabic-language teaching materials originally designed and produced in the United States, and subsequently distributed and adopted in the rest of the world.

1.2 Decolonisation of the Curriculum

Triggered by the calls for the removal of Cecile Rhodes's statue from Cape Town University campus (commonly known as Rhodes Must Fall), the movements for the decolonisation of the universities which started in 2015 in South Africa, have now spread to most parts of the English-speaking world and beyond. Apart from symbolic actions such as the felling of a coloniser's statue, the decolonisation of universities and their curricula has become a crucial

and controversial point of discussion in the United Kingdom, particularly within the field of Middle Eastern studies. A growing number of universities have decolonising collectives or networks, and the 2020 annual conference of the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies BRISMES explicitly invited applicants to address the implications of this movement for the field of Middle East Studies as well as "to reflect on the concept of decoloniality and practice of decolonization of knowledge and pedagogy in relation to the study and teaching of the Middle East". (BRISMES, 2020) Such calls for the decolonisation of universities, their curricula and their symbols emerged with the objective of working to address and make visible the legacies of colonialism, empire, racism in academic and knowledge production more broadly. This article brings Arabic-language teaching into this debate by addressing what decolonisation entails, by illustrating the neo-colonial and neo-orientalist nature of Arabic-language teaching materials and making the case for rethinking how Arabic language curricula are envisaged and prepared.

As Heller and McElhinny point out, positionality forms part of the wider approach to thinking about standpoint and represents a key aspect of the process of decolonisation. (Heller and McElhinny, 2017, 7) This involves reflecting on and exploring where the core ideas of our discipline come from and what kinds of conflicts they might flag. In other words, this involves questioning the relationship between the location and the identity of the writer, what and where they write (SOAS, 2017). In the same way as gender studies cannot be the exclusive realm of heterosexual White men, or the analysis of current global affairs that is funded and produced only in the United States and Europe is no longer hegemonic (let alone credible), I argue that a process of questioning the positionality and hegemonic role of US-produced Arabic language textbooks reveals an underlying political agenda that reinforces existing power relations. This relegates Arabic to perform a role that serves the interests of a specific profile of students, one that has an interest in language because it has value, and it has value because it is tied to how

all kinds of resources are produced, circulated, consumed, including how they are identified as resources at all.

In the past twenty years, Arabic language textbooks designed in the United States have played a significant role in shaping the profile of Arabic language graduates as well as in many ways the future of our field, or at least the challenges ahead. While this article's preamble on the symbolic role of language can be applied to a variety of contexts, its application to Arabic in particular seems appropriate and necessary. The reason for situating the innovation of the Arabic language curriculum within the framework of decolonisation, then, goes back to the colonial past and neo-colonial present that has traversed the Arab world, as well as to the political implications linked to knowledge of the Middle East and the Arab World produced in the West. This experience of colonialism – having involved most parts of the Arabic-speaking world – was built on assumptions that informed and justified colonial expansion in the 19th and 20th century and continues to inform neo-colonial practices. Such assumptions gave rise to a form of cultural and political hegemony that has shaped the past and present of the field of Middle Eastern studies. (Said, 1978) Therefore, decolonising the content and methodologies of the disciplines that make up what has, generally speaking, crystallised as Middle Eastern studies, necessarily involves questioning these assumptions in order to change the future of the field. Arabic language teaching is no exception.

After all, Arabic language programmes at university level represent a key part of degrees in Middle Eastern studies. Teaching Arabic plays a crucial role in introducing students often for the first time to a language and a variety of cultures whose importance to develop empathy as well as a good understanding of the nuances of a different culture can hardly be overstated. So central is the role of this language in what is known as the Middle East, that for anyone curious about this part of the world receiving at least an introduction to this language is essential. This responsibility is particularly relevant today, as the unended military campaigns of the United

States of America and its allies against Arabs and Muslims more generally have contributed to crystallise the hegemonic role of a Eurocentric/American view of Arabic speaking countries, on the one hand, and their subordinate role on a global scale, on the other. Such a balance of power engenders a widespread perception of Arabs and Arabic speakers in the minds of the general population. Arabic language teachers have a choice, and a responsibility, to choose to either reinforce or counter this perception, balancing this against the desires and ambitions that motivate students to learn Arabic.

This is particularly true as we are reminded of the work of Palestinian-American thinker Edward W. Said. As Said explained in *Orientalism*, Middle Eastern studies in the West has hardly been a field that produces value-free knowledge. In fact, Said argues, both at the time of the British and French Empires as well as in post WWII area studies in the United States, the study of the Middle East – and therefore of the Arabic language too – has frequently been policy oriented and imbued with colonial culture and attitudes. (Keskin, 2018, 1) As Heller and McElhinny have shown, quoting Bruce Cummings, the development of the field of Middle Eastern studies in the United States emerged in the Cold War period as a direct consequence of CIA involvement in driving academic research to serve specific US geopolitical interests. (2017, 178) While Arabic and Middle Eastern studies during the Cold War were merely considered part of the efforts to study various areas of the world where "communists were perceived to be a threat", (Heller and McElhinny, 2017, 178) after 1991 and particularly after the 9/11 attacks its role and its capital value has evolved dramatically. As Keskin explains, in the post 9/11 era the tendency to establish closer relationships between universities and state institutions has increased as US academics have established closer links with government agencies, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations and institutions in order to receive funding for their research. (2018, 2) After all, this process of commodification of knowledge

to serve national security interests had already begun in the 1980s, with the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant global ideology. (Keskin, 2018, 11) In this sense, Arabic language textbooks and courses have not represented a change to a tradition of state-department-driven area studies.

2.1 The *al-Kitab* "revolution"

In their paper "Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism: Arabic Representations and the Study of Arabic" Manuela Giolfo and Francesco Sinatora argue how contemporary textbooks have represented an innovation for Arabic pedagogy that surpassed the traditionally Eurocentric approaches to Arabic language teaching, in that they attempt to foster the integrated approach, i.e. a style of teaching that "does not consider fuṣḥā and the vernaculars as mutually exclusive." (2018, 96) This confirms how over the last several decades the study of Arabic has grown exponentially and dramatically – as Devin J. Stewart argues – offering a wider variety of pedagogical materials and making the situation for learners of Arabic much easier. (2016) However, again as Stewart, as well as Giolfo and Sinatora explain, Arabic pedagogy has retained a focus on politics and the language of newspapers reflecting a Western interest in Arabic dictated for the most part by political and economic agendas. This is perpetuated also by books whose aim and ambition are to surpass a traditional and outdated style of teaching in favour of teaching the spoken and written variety (i.e. 'ammiyyah and fuṣḥā) as one and integrated. Perhaps the most popular and widely used of this new current in Arabic language teaching textbooks, the *al-Kitab* series was first published in 1996, followed by a second edition in the early 2000s and a third edition in 2011. This series came out at a crucial time for Middle Eastern studies, when key US government agencies and institutions – such as the National Endowments for the Humanities, which funded the *al-Kitab* series (Brustad et al,

2011, xxix) – were being restructured to support area studies, including Middle Eastern studies, as fields that in turn served the dominant market-oriented, neo-orientalist American vision. (Keskin, 2018, 12)

As Ryding, Badawi and Ben Amor have revealed, the apparent progress in the designing of materials, has not resulted in higher levels of proficiency for Arabic students, due mostly to the nature of the content proposed. (Ryding, 2006; Badawi, 2011; Ben Amor, 2017, 97-99) The reading materials presented in such books usually bring together pieces from various sources, mostly from outdated media articles. In terms of grammar, English is the main language employed in this series, which has resulted in foreign language terminology – as again Badawi reminds us – becoming a barrier between the (Arabic) language and the learners. Such practice turns those books into talking *about* the language rather than talking *in* it and creates a barrier between the learners and their target, something that seems to only characterise Arabic amongst other commonly taught languages (Badawi, ix). As Ben Amor argues, as he makes the case for literary texts to be employed extensively in Arabic language teaching programmes, the diminished linguistic and cultural proficiency for the students is a product of the political pressure that area studies have exerted on Arabic language provision. (2017, 99) The content of these textbooks and the developments that they have supposedly brought about is even more controversial if we consider the impact they have on the practical knowledge of the language and potential employability of Arabic-language graduates. As the following examples will show, the narrow focus of the reading texts proposed consistently introduces a great deal of vocabulary from the domain of public life and current affairs. This not only limits the capacity of young learners to use the language effectively regardless of their political orientations and personal ambitions, but it also results in a limited number of career choices. This is not incidental, and as the content will illustrate, it achieves the purpose of perpetuating a

predominantly American vision of Arabic and the Arabic-speaking world, as the domain of news networks, government agencies, think tanks and NGOs. (Keskin, 2018, 2)

2.2 Vocabulary lists

The nature of the vocabulary proposed to students who are still often in the process of approaching the language at very basic level is the first aspect that can begin to illustrate a certain underlying agenda of the *al-Kitab* series. Their focus is wide but inarticulate, as the terms at the beginning of each unit do not belong to a common and consistent domain. Particularly in the very first units, the vocabulary draws frequently from the language of politics, governmental agencies, international organisations, current affairs, alongside other more mundane topics. The textbook is designed for total beginners, yet in the space of the very first two units in the first volume the *al-Kitab* series learners are exposed to the Arabic equivalent for terms such as:

Arabic	English
الأمم المتحدة	the United Nations
جنسية	nationality
مترجم	translator
متخصص	expert
الشرق الأوسط	the Middle East
منطقة	region

موظف	employee
جيش	army
ضابط	officer
حقوق	law
دين	religion
العلوم السياسية	political science

By the last of the thirteen units that make up the first book of the series in its 3rd edition, which again is meant for total beginners with no prior knowledge of the language, such terms have been added.

Arabic	English
التجارة	commerce
إدارة الأعمال	business administration
الخارجية	foreign affairs
وزارة	ministry
الاقتصاد	economy
حكومة	government

دولة	nation-state
دولي	international
رئيس	president
رئيس الوزراء	prime minister
التحق	to join or enter (school, army, political party).
عُيّنت	I was appointed
السياسة المقارنة	Comparative politics

This vocabulary is introduced through lists which inaugurate each unit alongside their as English equivalent[1]. Students are expected to engage in ask-your-colleague activities to practice this vocabulary through questions given in English, which the students have to then reformulate in Arabic. Speaking activities include a great variety of situations among which we find questions such as “Do you want to work for the United Nations?”, “Are you majoring in Middle Eastern studies?”, “Are you busy with your job?”, “Do you have a relative in the army?”, “Do you like politics?”. As they progress into the first eight units, in addition to such speaking activities, at the beginning of each unit students are expected to complete a series of fill-in-the-gaps exercises to practice this vocabulary in the context of sentences among which we find the following:

[1] In the 3rd edition vocabulary lists also provide the colloquial (Egyptian and Levantine) equivalent of terms.

Arabic	English
ما رأيك في السياسية الاقتصادية للحكومة العراقية الجديدة؟	What do you think about the economic policies of the new Iraqi government?
ماذا تعمل والد مها؟ يعمل مترجم في الأمم المتحدة	What does Maha's father do? He works as a translator for the United Nations
والدها من القاهرة، وهو يعمل في قسم الترجمة في الأمم المتحدة	Her father is from Cairo, he works in the translation department at the United Nations
في الحقيقة، أحمد ابن عم والد مها، وهو متخصص في العلوم السياسية	Actually, Ahmad is Maha's father's cousin. He is a political science specialist.
في الولايات المتحدة هناك وظيفة الرئيس وهناك الوزراء، ولكن ليس هناك وظيفة رئيس الوزراء كما في دول مثل بريطانيا وفرنسا	In the United States there is a president and ministers, however there isn't a prime minister like in countries (nation-states) such as Britain and France
حصلت على البكالوريوس في العلوم السياسية منذ سنتين، أدرس الآن للحصول على الماجستير في الدراسات الدولية في SAIS في جامعة جون هوبكنز	I obtained a BA in political science two years ago. Now I'm studying for my master's in international studies at SAIS, John Hopkins University
بعد التخرّج أريد العمل في الحكومة أو في واحدة من الشركات الأمريكية من منطقة الخليج	After I graduate I want to work for the government or for an American company in the Gulf

جورج واشنطن كان الرئيس الأول للولايات المتحدة	George Washington was the first president of the United States
زميلتي التحقت بالجيش منذ ٣ سنوات وأصبحت ضابطة، وهي سعيدة بحياتها لأن عندها وظيفة ممتازة ومرتّب ممتاز	My colleague joined the army four years ago and became an officer, she's very happy with her life because she has a great job and a great salary
الصيف الماضي عملت متدربة في قسم العلاقات الدولية في وزارة الخارجية في واشنطن، وكانت هذه تجربة ممتازة لأنني تعرفت على موظفين كثيرين في الحكومة.	Last summer I worked as an intern in the IR section of the State Department. This was an amazing experience because I got to know a lot of government employees
انقطعت العلاقات الديبلوماسية بين إيران والولايات المتحدة لسنوات طويلة	Diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States were cut off for a long time
الدكتورة سعاد متخصصة في السياسة المقارنة وتدرس السياسة العربية–الأوروبية. وهي تتكلم باللغتين الإنكليزية والفرنسية إضافة إلى اللغة العربية. قبل سنتين حصلت على منحة فولبرايت للدراسة في الولايات المتحدة وبعد عودتها عينت رئيسة لقسم العلوم السياسية في الجامعة	Dr Su'ad is a specialist in comparative politics. She studies Arab-European politics. She speaks English and French, as well as Arabic. Two years ago she obtained a Fulbright scholarship to study in the United States and after coming back she was appointed as head of the department of political science at university.

At a closer look, the choice of vocabulary, the themes and the organisation of such textbooks reveals how they are designed to direct the students towards specific career paths, effectively limiting the choices for Arabic graduates to a few: political analyst, news editor, foreign correspondent, NGOs and governmental agencies. This reveals an underlying view of Arabic which effectively deprives students of the opportunity to receive an introduction to more rudimentary aspects of this language. This choice of content and broader approach to Arabic language teaching still seem to suffer from what Karin Ryding defines as reverse privileging. Originally proposed by Heidi Byrnes, reverse privileging is useful to classify and differentiate between different discourse types that teaching materials employ. According to Ryding, the content of Arabic language teaching materials, unlike that of most commonly taught languages, privileges "secondary discourses of public life involving the professions, the academy, and civil society" over "primary discourses of familiarity". In other words, whereas most language programmes at academic level build the foundations of interactional skills of their students by focussing on familiar or at least highly predictable settings, Arabic does the opposite, leading to high drop-out rates among Arabic language students at university level. (Ryding, 2006, 16)

2.3 Reading texts

Unlike vocabulary lists, which remain the same to a very large degree, the reading texts proposed in the *al-Kitab* series vary depending on the edition. Texts from the 2nd edition, published in 2004, present a greater focus on the language of politics and current affairs if compared with the third and latest edition. Most texts in the first fifteen units (the 2nd edition consists of twenty units) are excerpted from Arabic newspapers such as the Saudi Okaz, with a focus on aspects of current affairs such as the Saudi health minister meeting with the Chinese ambassador, the Egyptian president's visit to Ankara, PhD positions being advertised in a Saudi

university, two French army officers gone missing in Kuwait, a female student obtaining a master's degree in Islamic jurisprudence, the Filipino president's visit to Abu Dhabi. Other texts include obituaries, job advertisements, a tv guide, and excerpt from the biography of the King Fuad of Egypt. Students are required to scan these texts to guess the meaning of specific terms and to identify specific grammatical structures, developing only a superficial understanding of their content. In contrast, texts students can relate to and understand are few and short. Local social and cultural aspects such as popular Arab musicians, secondary and higher education, familial relations and the Arabic dictionary are presented in English. In addition, the few literary texts (songs and short stories) the *al-Kitab* series proposes are never the main reading on which the grammar and lexical skills of the students are built, giving significantly more prominence to media articles. Such choices reinforce an orientalising and mainstream depiction of Arab cultures in European and North American terms. (Ben Amor, 2017, 97) On the other hand in the 3rd edition, which appeared in 2011, reading texts – which are again mostly authentic and meant for native speakers – include a list of Middle East studies centres in Arabic and English that students are asked to match, a list of faculties and departments at the universities of Beirut and Aleppo, the weather in New York City, a list of randomly grouped names with their respective hobbies, obituaries. Some of these texts' focus on American and generally Western places is truly striking for a textbook meant to introduce students to Arabic. The setting of events is New York City, where the protagonist of the first few units as well as most of her friends and relatives live. The United States, with its most representative city and its most representative political institution (the UN), remain at the centre of this textbook in the first five units. The protagonists of the few reading texts live in New York or Los Angeles, except for one who is a lecturer in political science at the University of Damascus. Again, texts students can relate to and understand are few and short and cultural aspects that a wider range of students can more easily relate to and engage with, such as food

or music, are presented in English. In the remaining seven units, as the location of the protagonists moves from the United States to Egypt, elements of American culture remain ingrained in the various exercises and activities illustrated above.

2.4 Grammar

In a manner similar to that of reading texts and vocabulary lists, the way grammar is presented and explained to students in the *al-Kitab* series singles out Arabic among other commonly taught languages. As Badawi points out in his foreword to the 2006 *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21st Century* using foreign grammar terminology and illustrating key and basic aspects of another language through the medium of English is a peculiarity of Arabic (2006, xii). In both the 2nd and the 3rd edition, from the very first units long explanations in English illustrate essential elements of Arabic grammar such as the definite article, plural nouns, plural agreement rules, the *idaafa*, object pronouns, the masdar and, later on, basic connectors such as أنّ. All these indispensable tools, crucial to build the learners' confidence in achieving communicative competence and fluency in reading, are consistently presented through the medium of English. Such explanations usually begin by pointing to a supposedly similar aspect of English grammar, not only creating "a barrier between the learners and their target" (Badawi, 2006, xii), but consistently forcing Arabic structures into a foreign linguistic framework. This results in a situation where students cannot approach Arabic for the first time without prior knowledge of English and, more relevantly, of English grammar, because in addition to the explanations, relevant examples employed to provide students with a basic understanding of the structure in question are mostly in English.

2.5 Passive vs. active skills

Such content that the series presents to students – bizarre as it may seem – is consistent with the career paths towards which this series pushes them. The choice of vocabulary in the very first units is designed to make Arabic "marketable" to students and to direct them towards specific fields in which their Arabic skills can be "sold", not to develop linguistic and cultural proficiency in the language. Significantly, this is achieved by focusing on passive rather than active skills, through exercises designed to enhance the students' passive understanding of the language in specific sectors, rather than their capacity to articulate their thoughts. Each unit revolves around a listening exercise – a story, or *qissa* in Arabic – where one of the protagonists illustrates an aspect of their life through a monologue. The content of these monologues is varied, the protagonists address aspects of their personal lives such as life in New York, having few friends, family and sentimental relationships, the feeling of estrangement and nostalgia for their homeland. The vocabulary of these monologues however returns in the abovementioned speaking and fill-in-the-gaps exercises to address topics such as career ambitions, political relations between different countries. By way of illustration, in the 11th unit of both the 2nd and 3rd edition some of the vocabulary proposed revolves around aspects of personal life and love relationships, yet its meaning and usages are expanded to address international relations between different countries. While in the listening monologue the protagonists Khalid speaks of a love relationship with an Egyptian girl that was cut off (انقطعت العلاقة), the speaking exercises in the same unit prompt students to ask each other questions (provided in English) such as "are the relations between Iran and the US better than last year? Do you think the relations between the US and any other country will be cut off?".

The whole series has virtually no dialogues in Modern Standard Arabic, therefore students do not receive an exposure to the language in context and the content proposed does not seem to

consider Modern Standard Arabic a language for interaction.[2] The sophisticated, outdated vocabulary the series introduces through these monologues, as well as the barren language register it privileges, seems consistent with careers that have become particularly sought after in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. (Keskin, 2018, 2)

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, despite its seemingly neutral and communicative attitude, situating the *al-Kitab* series within the framework of decoloniality reveals that it remains largely consistent with a career-oriented and Americentric system of beliefs and values. The content this series presents to beginner students shapes the users' perception of Arabic and of the domain to which it pertains. Its manner of perceiving the Arabic language and its value are deeply influenced by a market-oriented view of language learning and consistent with the "shopping list" orientation, to borrow El Said Badawi's definition, towards which Arabic language teaching is heading. This suggests that the vocabulary proposed is designed to either respond to the career ambitions a specific student-profile, one that conceives Arabic and the Arab World as a career, or to specifically direct students – regardless of their class, race and gender – towards those same career paths. A process of decolonisation in this sense is imperative in a society marked by a variety of structural inequalities. If we are to provide students with equal opportunities to flourish and succeed, then such a narrow view of what one can or wishes to achieve by learning Arabic cannot be appropriate. The decolonising argument proposed in this paper highlights how the narrow and ultimately exclusive content of Arabic language textbooks, their explicit insistence on specific career paths toward which to guide the students represent crucial

[2] This disregard for Modern Standard Arabic as a *langue vivante* fits the underlying assumption that pervades this series. With regards to this, it is interesting to find some of these ideas in a recent article by Kristen Brustad, one of the authors of the *al-Kitab* series, according to whom Modern Standard Arabic as it crystallised in the 20th century is "an aberration" (2017, 46). See bibliography for more details.

challenges Arabic language teaching faces today. This is truer in universities with a varied student population – as is the case in most UK universities – and the decolonising process that Arabic language teaching must undergo passes through a process of aligning our field with common international standards (such as the one proposed by Soliman (2018) and Mohamed (2021)). This will inevitably involve surpassing the commodification of Arabic that the success of the *al-Kitab* series has crystallised, as well as the narrow and US-centred view of this language as a marketable skill for a career in restricted sectors which are often inaccessible for students from minority and lower-income groups. (James, 2020)

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