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TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME

Essays in honour of Kaj Öhrnberg

EDITED BY

SYLVIA AKAR, JAAKKO HÄMEEN-ANTTILA
& INKA NOKSO-KOIVISTO



Helsinki 2013

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Edited by Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila & Inka Nokso-Koivisto
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FOREWORD

Who was it that first suggested we should celebrate the 70th anniversary of our teacher and friend Kaj Öhrnberg, Phil.Lic., with a volume of studies in the fields he is interested in? Whoever it was, the idea was adopted by all and sundry as soon as it was expressed, and willingly at that. The editorial committee organized itself immediately and all those who heard about the plan were enthusiastic.

This is indicative of Kaj Öhrnberg's person. Over the years, he has been teaching and helping people around him. You need a bibliographical reference? Ask Kaj, he'll provide you with one and volunteer half a dozen others that just occurred to him might be relevant. Want someone to read your manuscript? Send it to Kaj, he'll be certain to read it carefully, comment on it and, at the same time, he'll routinely mark your misspellings and check your references. Need some help with Russian sources, Caucasian place names, history of Oriental studies? It is to Kaj we have always turned for help, advice, and sometimes even consolation when things were going awry. Under normal circumstances, many of the articles printed in this volume would first have been sent by their authors to Kaj for comment and corrections.

It is not only the people in his immediate surroundings that Kaj Öhrnberg has always helped. Our first circular concerning the *Festschrift* drew enthusiastic responses from Spain, Russia, Scandinavia, and other countries whose scholars he has been in contact with. Everybody was willing to, waiting to, and wanting to contribute. Contributions started flowing in almost immediately.

There were willing contributors galore, yet some we had to turn down. Early on we had decided that the *Festschrift* should be thematic and the themes discussed should reflect the scholarly interests of the honoree. His intellectual interests cover a lot more than just the topics he has been writing about – his love of Chinese cultural history, Spanish red wines, and Russian literature is well known to his friends – but we decided to limit the *Festschrift* to Arabistics and a few other topics he has himself been working with. Without this limitation, there would have been many others to join in and contribute.

For someone not privileged to know Kaj Öhrnberg personally, this collection of articles may perhaps provide a faint image of the person it celebrates. There are some more personal articles at the beginning of the volume. The rest have been selected because we think Kaj Öhrnberg might be interested in their topics. The wide scope of the articles reflects his equally wide interests. There are arti-

cles in English, German, French, and Spanish and there could as well have been several other languages, all of which Kaj Öhrnberg effortlessly reads.

But having said this, there remains one problem ahead. Always willing to help, Kaj Öhrnberg never pushes himself into the front line and he never particularly enjoys the limelight. How can we lure him into some occasion where his friends might come together to celebrate him and present him with the first copies of this Festschrift? We are still working on that ...

June 2013 in Helsinki

Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila & Inka Nokso-Koivisto

TEACHING ARABIC AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: FROM GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD TO THE AUDIO-LINGUAL APPROACH

Sylvia Akar
University of Helsinki

To my dear friend Kaj, an old school Arabist of the best kind!

Arabic is the official language of the 22 countries which form the Arab League. It is the native language of over 422 million people residing in this geographical region, which stretches from Southwest Asia to Northwest Africa. Arabic is also the liturgical language of over 1.5 billion Muslims around the world.¹

The teaching of Arabic started in Finland at the Academia Aboensia – or the University of Turku, the predecessor of the University of Helsinki² – at the beginning of the eighteenth century under the professorship of Holy Languages. It is natural, therefore, that the language and texts studied consisted of Arabic translations of the Bible and other “suitable” texts.³ This was not only typical of Finland but a common feature all over Europe. The interest in teaching and learning Arabic was not “the richness of Arabic literature and Islamic culture”, but its usefulness in understanding the holy language of Hebrew.⁴

The development of the teaching of Arabic was slow. Arabic was taught as a dead language, and the knowledge of even the teachers of the language was not always good enough. At best, skills were limited to reading classical texts. A remarkable exception was Georg August Wallin (1811–1852), who was interested in learning living languages and whose interest in spoken Arabic was exceptional, even internationally. In his thesis, *De praecipua inter hodiernam Arabum linguam*

1 <www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/world-arabic-language-day/>

2 The University of Helsinki, founded in 1640 as one of the universities of the Kingdom of Sweden, was called the Royal Academy of Turku. In 1809, when Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russia, it was renamed the Imperial Academy of Turku. In 1828, it was transferred to Helsinki and renamed the Imperial Alexander University in Finland. After Finland gained its independence, the name was changed again in 1919, this time to the University of Helsinki.

3 Karttunen 2011: 38.

4 Karttunen 2011: 111.

et antiquam differentia (1839), he discussed the differences between classical and spoken Arabic and presented a classification of the main dialect groups of Arabic.⁵ Wallin conducted groundbreaking research into Bedouin languages, the results of which are dealt with in Heikki Palva's article in the current volume.

In 1974, the Department of Asian and African Studies was established in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki. Arabic was taught until 1980 under the chair of Oriental Literature. In the 1980s, the Arabic language was a study track associated with the Semitic languages. In 2000, the name of the subject became Arabic Language and Islamic Studies.

The first Arabic textbook in Finnish was written by Professor Jussi Aro in 1980.⁶ It was called *Arabiaa ilman kyyneliä: nykyarabian oppikirja* ("Arabic without tears: A Textbook of modern Arabic"), but it is not a textbook in the modern sense. Its 200 pages provide an overview of spoken Syrian, Palestinian, Lebanese, and Egyptian Arabic, as well as short descriptions of Hijazi, Iraqi, and Moroccan Arabic with language samples of most of these areas. For its time, it was – and it still is – a remarkable source of data on Arabic dialects. Pedagogically, however, it cannot be recommended if the student's aim is to learn to actively speak one of these languages.⁷

Heikki Palva became professor of Arabic in 1982. A linguist of diverse talent, his research interests mainly deal with Arabic dialectology. His successor, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, is a specialist in classical language and literature, and during his professorship the attention of Arabic studies and research has been on the classical language and, increasingly, on Islamic studies.

Indeed, the overall focus of Arabic studies has been the classical literary language. With the exception of Palva's tenure, the main – or only – aim in the history of the instruction of Arabic has been the ability to read texts, ensuring that students are able to use the language as a research tool in Islamic studies. This approach is not unique to Finland; all over the world, prior to the 1970s, the teaching of Arabic concentrated on the learning and analysis of grammatical structures. Teaching methods almost exclusively included reading, analyzing, and translating texts, which tended to be in classical Arabic rather than the modern language.

5 Öhrnberg 2007: 15; Karttunen 2011: 192. The thesis and its Swedish translation have been published in Kaj Öhrnberg, Patricia Berg & Kira Pihlflyckt (eds) 2010.

6 Since then, two other text books of Arabic have appeared in Finnish: Helena Hallenberg & Irmeli Perho's *Arabiaa vasta-alkajille: seesam aukene*, Helsinki: Yliopistopaino (1984) and Faruk Abu-Chacra's *Arabiaa aikuisille*, Helsinki: FinnLectura (2007).

7 In Aro's view, literary Arabic was stagnant. Accordingly, he seems to have neglected the modern developments of the language: "Standard Arabic is a stick-in-the-mud traditional language form. It still strives to conform to the same grammar as was used in the language of pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'an in the 7th century AD" (Aro 1980: 1).

DIGLOSSIA, TRIGLOSSIA, QUADRIGLOSSIA OR CONTINUUM?

The linguistic situation in the Arab world is strongly characterized by diglossia. The notion of diglossia was introduced by Jean Psichari, a French philologist and writer of Greek origin (1854–1928). The French term *diglossie* was first introduced to describe the linguistic situation in Arabic-speaking countries by the Arabist William Marçais in 1930. The sociolinguist Charles A. Ferguson introduced the English equivalent *diglossia* in 1959.⁸

In his ground breaking work Ferguson describes diglossia as a

specialization of function for H (high variety) and L (low variety). In one set of situations only H is appropriate and in another only L, with the two varieties overlapping only very slightly. [...] The importance of using the right variety in the right situation can hardly be overestimated. [...] [I]t is typical behaviour to have someone read aloud from a newspaper written in H and then proceed to discuss the content in L. [...] [T]he speakers regard H as superior to L in a number of respects. [...] There is usually a belief that H is somehow more beautiful, more logical, better able to express important thoughts. [...] L is learned by children in what may be regarded as the “normal” way of learning one’s mother tongue. [...] [T]he actual learning of H is chiefly accomplished by the means of formal education. [...] [T]here is a strong tradition of grammatical study of the H. [...] By contrast, descriptive and normative studies of L form are either non-existent or relatively recent and slight in quantity. Often they have been carried out first or chiefly by scholars OUTSIDE the speech community and are written in other languages. [...] [D]iglossia differs from the more widespread standard-with-dialects in that no segment of the speech community in diglossia regularly uses H as a medium of ordinary conversation.⁹

The traditional view has been that Arabic is divided into two distinct language forms: classical or literary Arabic and spoken Arabic or dialects. Since the time of Ferguson, however, scholars’ eyes have been opened to the richness of the varieties of the language, and a more detailed classification has been formulated. Some writers speak about the triglossia of Arabic, including the Classical Arabic used in religion, the literary Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) used in media, and various other regional spoken Arabic languages. Others refer to quadriglossia, adding the category of Educated Spoken Arabic,¹⁰ and yet others divide the different language forms into five levels, according to their degree of formality:

⁸ Ferguson 1964: 429. For a discussion about the origin of the term, see Langerová 2012.

⁹ Ferguson 1964: 429–435.

¹⁰ See Ennaji 2005.

Classical Arabic, *fuṣḥā al-turāth*

Modern Standard Arabic, *fuṣḥā al-‘aṣr*

Formal Spoken Arabic or Educated Spoken Arabic, *‘āmmiyyat al-muthaqqafīn*

Semi-Literate Spoken Arabic, *‘āmmiyyat al-mutanawwiṣīn*

Illiterate Spoken Arabic, *‘āmmiyyat al-ummiyyīn*¹¹

These stratifications have been criticized for their arbitrary and impressionistic character. According to Meiseles,¹² such approaches cannot provide us with a supportable solution (*une solution tenable*); there is nothing to stop us, if we go further and further into the analysis, from defining a limitless number of categories (*un nombre inconnu de registres*) – or, according to TARRIER,¹³ an endless dividing of Arabic (*un découpage infini de l’arabe*).¹⁴

A more fruitful approach for the study of linguistic variation among Arabic speakers is to look at it as a linguistic continuum. In this regard, the work of el-Hassan (1977; 1978) has had a profound effect on the sociolinguistic studies of Arabic. He was able to show that approaches based on the concept of diglossia or other such stratifications could not do justice to the linguistic realities of Arabic.¹⁵ The registers of Arabic do not have clear, permanent boundaries between each other. Rather, they are fluid and overlap to a great extent.¹⁶

The first researcher who problematized this question was Mitchell (1976; 1978; 1980; 1986), but Meiseles (1980) and Palva (1969; 1982) have also made significant contributions to the study of language variation.

NEW APPROACHES TO TEACHING ARABIC

The definition of diglossia and other stratified approaches to classify Arabic have had an impact on the teaching of Arabic in non-Arab countries. Prominence and prestige are assigned to literary Arabic, and the lower registers are considered

11 Badawi 1985: 17.

12 Meiseles 1980: 122.

13 TARRIER 1991: 8.

14 It is worth noting that Meiseles himself (1980: 123) proposes a division of contemporary Arabic into four varieties: 1) Literary or Standard Arabic, 2) Sub-standard Arabic, 3) Educated Spoken Arabic, and 4) Basic or plain vernaculars.

15 “L’introduction par El-Hassan du concept de continuum linguistique dans le domaine des études arabes a constitué une sorte de révolution, à la fois parce qu’elle paraît constituer une rupture théorique très nette avec les problématiques « discontinuistes » précédentes, mais aussi parce qu’elle s’accompagne de l’importation des concepts et outils de la « linguistique variationniste » née dans la mouvance des travaux du sociolinguiste américain William Labov (cf. Labov, 1963, 1966 et 1970, par exemple).” Kouloughli 2008.

16 Meiseles 1980: 122.

less worthy of academic attention. The position of MSA is still strong in Arabic teaching and it is difficult for any vernacular to replace it. But there is a growing interest in finding a solution to bring the instruction of Arabic into closer alignment with the linguistic reality in the Arab world.¹⁷

The so-called grammar-translation method of teaching Arabic began to give way in the 1970s as the audio-lingual approach gained ground in the United States. Peter F. Abboud and Ernest N. McCarus first published *Elementary Modern Standard Arabic, I: Pronunciation and Writing* in 1968; the revised edition came out in 1975. Volume II was published in 1968 and revised in 1976. These books placed more emphasis on modern language, the language of contemporary books and media. They also paid more attention to listening and speaking skills, but concentrated on the literary language. They signalled a shift in the philosophy of teaching, as well as in the language choices presented to students. For students today, these books may seem irredeemably old-fashioned, but in their time they represented the first attempts to bring new features from the audio-lingual approach to the teaching of Arabic at the university level.

Another development in the 1970s was the growing interest of some teachers to encourage students' oral skills. In her article *The Community Language Learning Approach to Arabic: Theory and practice* (1978), Karin Ryding emphasized the role of conversation in the process of language learning. One of the main points in Community Language Learning (CLL) is the shift of focus from the teacher to the learner. The responsibility of learning thus lies with the student, and the teacher's role is to support and facilitate the learning process. As CLL also paid attention to holistic education rather than exclusively intellectual learning, it was not grammar-based but proficiency-based, and it took into consideration students' anxieties and feelings.¹⁸

In the 1970s, increased interest in spoken Arabic led to the emergence of new books that aimed at learning dialects. Some of the first of these were Ernest Abdel-Massih's *A Course in Moroccan Arabic* (1970) and *An Introduction to Egyptian Arabic* (1975),¹⁹ Hamdi Qafisheh's *A Short Reference Grammar of Gulf Arabic* (1977), and Margaret Omar's *From Eastern to Western Arabic* (1974).²⁰

Margaret Omar's work deserves special mention here; it is quite a remarkable book, even from the perspective of the present day. It is intended "for Americans who have good command of an Eastern dialect, and who now wish to learn a

17 As a matter of fact, Standard Arabic shows quite a large degree of variation, too. For analysis of the variation, see van Mol 2003.

18 Ryding 1978: 10–14.

19 Abdel-Massih's *Introduction to Egyptian Arabic* was reprinted by Mpublishing as late as 2011.

20 Mahmud al-Batal (1995: 118) erroneously claims that Omar's book deals with Saudi dialects.

dialect of Western Arabic". The book uses the Levantine dialect of Arabic as a base, with reference to other Eastern dialects (when appropriate) and in comparison with the Moroccan dialect.²¹

The teaching methods and textbooks of Arabic have followed sociolinguistic research, albeit with some delay. The *Al-Kitaab fii Ta'allum al-'Arabiyya: A Textbook for beginning Arabic* series of Georgetown University has become the flagship of its Arabic language programme. The authors – Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud al-Batal, and Abbas al-Tonsi – have continually worked on the series and made huge changes on each of the three editions. The *Al-Kitaab* language program uses a communicative, proficiency-oriented approach with fully integrated audiovisual media to teach modern Arabic as a living language.²²

The third edition of the book takes the spoken variant of the language as its starting point. All texts are first heard in spoken Arabic (the students and the teacher can choose between Egyptian and Syrian variants), and only after this are the same texts intended to be read in literary Arabic. This method attempts to imitate the natural method of Arab children learning their native language.

In 1995, Munther A. Younes published his *Elementary Arabic: An Integrated approach*, in which he "integrates an Arabic colloquial with Modern Standard Arabic in a way which reflects the use of Arabic by native speakers".²³ The lessons start with a listening exercise in Levantine Arabic, and students are encouraged to guess the meaning of expressions they do not know. In Younes's words, "The focus is on developing the skill of listening for comprehension." The reading passages are intended to develop the "skill of silent reading comprehension", not to be translated into the students' mother tongue. Writing skills are considered less urgent in the first year of studies, while grammatical accuracy is considered less important than intelligibility.²⁴

In the Nordic countries, Helle Lykke Nielsen at the University of Southern Denmark is one of the pioneers of communicative Arabic teaching. The focus of language training at that university is "unambiguously communicative", and the "knowledge and skills taught throughout the programme apply to practical life with professional contexts".²⁵

21 Omar 1974: vi.

22 The first edition of part one was published by Georgetown University Press in 1995. The second edition in 2004 came with DVDs and the third edition in 2011 with a companion website.

23 Younes 1995: Introduction.

24 Younes 1995: Introduction.

25 Nielsen 2012: 89.

MOTIVATION IN LANGUAGE STUDIES

The question of which form of Arabic is taught is closely related to the question of maintaining the motivation of students to learn languages. Although not all students wish to learn the language to be able to communicate with Arabic speakers – some are more theoretically inclined and may have a purely linguistic and academic interest in the language, while some want to learn the language to be able to read classical texts – the motivation of most learners is affected by a lack of positive feedback, such as successful communication in the language they are learning. When learning a language that nobody speaks, as is the case with literary Arabic, students can get easily frustrated; this is even more likely if the emphasis of the teaching method is on grammatical accuracy.

According to Robert C. Gardner, the term “motivation” in the context of learning a second language refers to “the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity”.²⁶

The differentiation between integrative and instrumental motivation was made by Robert C. Gardner and Wallace E. Lambert (1959; 1972), who have done pioneering work in exploring the nature of motivation specifically in relation to language study. Gardner highlights two different types of motivation:

- 1) **Instrumental motivation:** the desire to learn a language because it would fulfil certain utilitarian goals, such as getting a job, passing an examination, or enhancing the learner’s social status.
- 2) **Integrative motivation:** the desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people from another culture that speak that language. Integrative motivation usually includes the desire to identify with and become integrated into the target language culture, at least to some extent.²⁷

Gardner and Lambert showed that success in a foreign or second language is likely to be lower if the underlying motivational orientation is instrumental rather than integrative.²⁸

Studying the success of Canadian students in learning French, Gardner noticed a great correlation between results in language learning and the students’ willingness to become a part of French culture. The learning process of languages

²⁶ Gardner 1985: 10.

²⁷ For the development and meta-analysis of the research associated with the concept of integrative motivation in second language acquisition, see Masgoret & Gardner 2003; Gardner 2009.

²⁸ Research since then has cast doubt on the application of this claim to foreign language learners in general. In any case, it has been indicated that it may be impossible in practice to distinguish between the two. See Ur 2005.

differs from other fields in that it includes a great deal of “unofficial” learning; at its best, learning a language means learning a whole new culture and behavioural environment. On the other hand, one might argue that the causality works the other way as well: good experiences with growing language skills promote a positive attitude towards language speakers and their culture.

John Schumann is a strong advocate of the role of integrative motivation. According to his theory, Schumann’s Acculturation Model, the student can learn a foreign language only to the extent that he or she becomes acculturated in the community of the native speakers of the language. Schumann later moderated his position, proposing that the desire to become acculturated functions indirectly so that it drives the student’s desire to be in contact with the speakers’ community and thus advances his or her contacts to the target language.²⁹

Motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors influencing the rate and success of second or foreign language learning. Furthermore, the motivation to learn a foreign language presents a particularly complex and unique situation, even within motivational psychology, due to the multifaceted nature and roles of language itself. Language is simultaneously a communication-coding system that can be taught as a school subject; an integral part of the individual’s identity; and the most important channel of social organization embedded in the culture of the community where it is used. Therefore, the motivational basis of language acquisition is not directly comparable to that of the mastery of other subject matters. Knowing a foreign language also involves the development of some sort of “foreign language identity” and the incorporation of elements from the other culture.³⁰

WHICH VERNACULAR OR SOMETHING ELSE?

One of the arguments most often heard for not teaching a spoken variety of Arabic is “the impossibility of dealing with the full range of Arabic dialects and the difficulty of choosing one dialect to teach”.³¹

One solution suggested by some teachers is to teach Formal or Educated Spoken Arabic to all students, along with Modern Standard Arabic. Aside from numerous textbooks on the different spoken varieties of Arabic, there is, to my knowledge, only one textbook on Formal Spoken Arabic. Karin Ryding and David Mehall’s *Formal Spoken Arabic* (2005) is based on the findings that “Media

29 Schumann 1986: 379–392.

30 Dörnyei 1998: 118.

31 Palmer 2007: 115.

Arabic, Educated Arabic, and Educated Spoken Arabic [...] have commonalities [...] that have important implications for teaching Arabic as a foreign language”.³² The authors claim that teaching students formal spoken Arabic is a “response to the problem of diglossia”.³³

Karin Ryding states that Formal or Educated Spoken Arabic “travel[s] better than individual colloquials, and allow[s] learners flexibility in interacting with Arabs from all parts of the world”.³⁴ She sees Educated Spoken Arabic as an element that can bridge gaps between colloquial and literary forms of Arabic.³⁵

Munther Younes is another pioneer of an integrated program of Arabic. He advocates a learning program that develops the four language skills simultaneously. Speaking activities are conducted in a colloquial variant throughout the course, while reading and writing are conducted in *fushā* or Modern Standard Arabic.³⁶ This educated form of spoken Arabic is not just Standard Arabic without inflections (*fushā bidūn ʾrāb*), but a language which is based on a colloquial matrix underpinned by key vernacular structures. It relies on universally understood spoken lexical items.³⁷ This form of language is respectively called the middle language, *al-lughā al-wuṣṭā*; the language of the cultured, *lughat al-muthaqqafīn*; or the cultured language, *al-lughā al-muthaqqafa*.³⁸ It is supposed to be a spontaneous, dialect-neutral form of the spoken language.

However, this middle language does not provide an answer to the problem of teaching spoken varieties of Arabic. Although Educated Spoken Arabic is much more spontaneous than literary Arabic, it is no one’s native language and proficiency in it limits learners to speak only with highly educated people. In my experience, many students of Arabic wish to be able to speak with ordinary people in the Arab world and understand spontaneous discussions in various contexts. Knowing only Standard Arabic and Educated Spoken Arabic leaves the learner of Arabic in a situation where he or she is not able to respond when code-switching is needed. In Karin Ryding’s words, “To achieve proficiency, a learner of Arabic must ultimately master at least the three Arabic language variants used by educated Arabs: Modern Standard Arabic, Formal Spoken Arabic, and a regional vernacular.”³⁹

32 Ryding 2005: xvii.

33 Mehall 2005: xix.

34 Ryding 2009: 49.

35 Ryding 2009: 50.

36 Younes 2009: 60.

37 Ryding 2009: 50–51.

38 Ryding 1991: 213.

39 Ryding 1991: 216.

It is clear that the division of literary and colloquial Arabic has both weakened the effectiveness of Arabic language teaching and undermined the appeal of Arabic as a learnable and useful foreign language.⁴⁰

Some Arabists think that it is enough for university students of Arabic to be able to read texts and understand oral standard Arabic (for example, news and religious speeches, which are usually read in Standard Arabic). Some think that students should learn a spoken variety of Arabic, but that it can be left to the students' own initiative.

As long as we agree that the language of "scholarship, modern literature, a vast body of classical literature, formal instruction, and formal transactions should be the goal of instruction", Literary Arabic is naturally the main language form that will be taught and learned at the university level.⁴¹ However, many recent studies on the modern use of Standard Arabic show that it does not reflect all literary practices or formal speech situations in the Arab world. Although the news are still read in Standard Arabic, more and more political discussions are appearing on Arabic TV channels, some completely in spoken Arabic, some using frequent code-switching.

In particular, Egyptian writers have historically used spoken Egyptian in their novels and especially in their plays. A new development in the use of the colloquial in written form includes blogs and other Internet social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Gail Ramsay has recently written an analysis of language in Egyptian blogs, in which she distinguishes between standard, educated spoken, and mixed varieties. She argues that bloggers make deliberate choices regarding code.⁴²

Knowing only standard Arabic and trying to converse in it in an academic context gives a distorted image of the reality of the language in the Arab world. A curriculum that aims at giving students only reading abilities does not meet the needs of most students, but it is also not in line with the language proficiency requirements of other modern languages. Students should have a holistic picture of the language situation of Arabic speaking communities, and they should be able to switch codes and understand when that is appropriate. It is also important to dispel the illusion that standard Arabic and colloquial forms are different languages, as the modern view sees spoken Arabic and standard Arabic as variants of the same language.

40 Ryding 1991: 214.

41 Alish 2009: 55.

42 Ramsay 2012.

CONCLUSIONS: BEATING A DEAD CAMEL?

A general consensus seems to be that the most important goal of Arabic studies at the university level is to learn to read and write Arabic. With the reduced teaching hours we have in Helsinki at the basic level of Arabic and with staff so few in number, it is a huge job for both teachers and students to achieve acceptable proficiency, even in reading skills.

However, a transition from the grammar-translation method of teaching Arabic to an approach which utilizes audio-lingual skills and focuses on the ability of students to skip-read, read and listen for comprehension, and understand speech which includes foreign words is also, in my view, a better way to introduce students to the world of grammar.

Being able to speak spontaneously with Arabic-speaking people and being able to understand conversations, movies, soap operas, theatre, songs, talk shows, written messages, and blogs using colloquialisms – all these are essential to the motivation of most students of Arabic. Regarding Arabic as one language with many variants and registers brings a richer perspective of the language than the old stratified interpretation based on the notion of di/tri/quadriglossia.

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