University of Michigan
Near Eastern Studies

Dr. Raji Rammuny, Spencer Scoville; Liana Reading
Near Eastern Studies, LSA

Faculty and Student Perspectives on Language Learning Strategies in the Arabic Classroom

Abstract

For Arabic classrooms at U-M, this study compares:

◆ student perceptions of their own language learning strategies and strategies emphasized by faculty with

◆ faculty perceptions of the strategies they emphasize

Additionally, comparisons in reported strategy use are made between:

◆students identifying as "heritage" learners (i.e., raised in home where Arabic was spoken)

◆and non-heritage speakers.

Methods

Our project makes use of Oxford's "Strategic Inventory of Language Learning" (1990: 14-22). We have combined the standard 33-item version of this survey with a second section asking students and faculty to report their perceptions of the degree to which each of these language learning strategies are emphasized in their Arabic courses.

In Fall 2011, all students in introductory Arabic courses at the U-M were sent an online survey. There were 99 responses, a return rate of XX%. One-third of the sample (33 students) identified themselves as heritage speakers.

All instructors teaching Arabic at U-M were sent an online survey. There were 13 responses, a return rate of XX%.

The Mann-Whitney U Test was used for tests of statistical significance.

Acknowledgments

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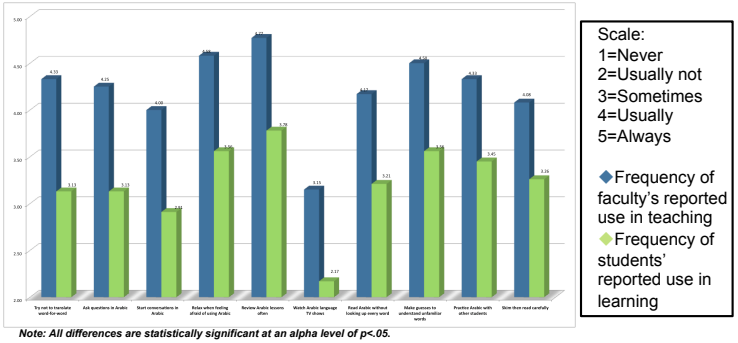
Key Findings

(1) Top Faculty and Student Strategies

FOR FACULTY	FOR STUDENTS
① Review Arabic lessons often *(M=4.77)*	① Learn about culture of Arabic speakers *(M=4.31)*
② Notice mistakes to do better *(M=4.58)*	② Pay attention when someone is speaking Arabic (M=4.22)
③ Relax when feeling afraid of using Arabic *(M=4.58)*	③ Find patterns in Arabic (M=4.20)
④ Encourage speaking even when afraid of mistakes *(M=4.58)*	④ Try to find out how to be a better learner of Arabic (M=4.14)
⑤ Practice sounds of Arabic *(M=4.54)*	⑤ Think about my progress in learning Arabic (M=4.14)

Scale is 1-5, with 1=Never and 5=Always.

(2) Largest Mean Differences Between Faculty and Student Strategy Use



Note: All differences are statistically significant at an alpha level of p<.05.

For all of these strategies, students perceived faculty using them at a lower rate, compared to faculty reports. However, there are statistically significant differences in four strategies (p<.05):
(In parentheses: Mean faculty use and student perception of faculty use)

- ◆ Relax when feeling afraid of using Arabic *(4.58 vs. 3.59)*
- ◆ Do not translate word-for-word (*4.33 vs. 3.43*)
- ◆ Make guesses to understand unfamiliar words *(4.50 vs. 3.75)*
- ◆ Read without looking up every word *(4.17 vs. 3.62)*

(3) Differences in Strategy Use by Heritage Status

For students, statistically significant differences (p<.05) in language learning strategies are:

◆ Heritage speakers report higher rates of:
- **ORAL PRACTICE**:
  - Starting conversations (M=3.45 vs. 2.63)
  - Looking for people to talk to in Arabic (M=3.52 vs. 2.84)
  - Asking questions in Arabic (M=3.50 vs. 2.94)
- **READING FOR PLEASURE**: (M=2.42 vs.1.65)

◆Non-heritage speakers report higher rates of:
- **FLASHCARD USE** (M=3.74 vs. 3.12)
- **THINKING ABOUT LEARNING PROGRESS** (M=4.3 vs. 3.82)

Implications for Teaching

1. Faculty need to make explicit the teaching strategies they use, as well as the language learning approaches that will be most effective for students.

2. Through initial assessments, faculty should better understand students' learning strategies, as well as differences between heritage and non-heritage speakers' approaches.