Alternatives to Literature Courses for Native-Speaking or Highly Proficient Heritage Students
The Case of Arabic in a Community College

Habiba Boumlik & Lamees Fadl
LaGuardia Community College

Arabic

- One of the six official languages of the United Nations

- The fifth most widely spoken language in the world

- Seventh among all foreign languages spoken by American school-aged children.

- Sharp increase in demand for Arabic after 9/11

- MLA survey 2006, the number of students taking Arabic in college rose by 126.5% from 2000 to 2006 with the highest rate of growth in community colleges (Sehlaoui, 281)

- Eighth most studied foreign language according to a 2009 MLA survey.

Hypothesis

- Literature courses for native and advanced heritage speakers.

- Low enrollment is symptomatic of a dysfunction in course offering trends that fails to meet students' needs and interests.

- Alternative?

- Language for Specific Purposes, (LSP) or Content Based Instruction (CBI) courses: enhance academic achievement by preparing community college students to transfer to senior colleges; prepare them to use their cultural and language skills in their future careers.

Native/Heritage Speakers

- Ethnic Origin

- Religious Heritage Learners

Rationale for Language for Specific Purposes or Content Based Instruction Courses

- Brinton and Snow (1997: vii) CBI: "the integration of content learning with language teaching aims."

- Advantages:
  - It takes into account the interests and needs of the learners.
  - It builds on the students' previous learning experiences.

CBI courses instructional prototypes

- Theme-based CBI courses: language-driven, language-accountable, call for an integration of the language skills into the study of a theme/subject and taught

- Sheltered: course is taught by content not language instructor.

- Adjunct instruction: coordination between 2 instructors, one teaching the language component and the other the content course.

LSP

- Teaching of a language where the content is tailored to students' interests and needs.

- Materials for LSP encompass science and technology, business and economics, and social sciences and the humanities

- Centrality of the learner's needs.

Research Context

- Research Questions:
  - What makes a language course relevant to native and advanced heritage speakers?
  - What type of courses might best meet new immigrants or heritage students' needs?
  - What skills in an advanced language course can be applied beyond college?

Students

- The majority of students are from the Middle East (Egypt, Yemen and Israel/Palestine) and from two countries of North Africa: Algeria and Morocco.

- Placement test evaluating reading comprehension and writing skills.

- The placement test corroborates the finding that grammatical knowledge is more prominent among early sequential bilinguals who were exposed to the heritage language first and then to English in opposition to simultaneous bilinguals.

Data

- Mixed methods approach: qualitative and quantitative

- Data was obtained from the Modern Language Department, the Modern Language Lab, and the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

- Data relates to class enrolment, placement tests, and students' country of origin.

Qualitative Data

- Informal interactions with students

- 1) during office hours when discussing Independent Study alternatives to course cancellations;

- 2) from interactions with students who took placement tests for the advanced Arabic literature course;

- 3) during three major events organized annually by the department: Modern Language Fair, International Mother Language Day and Language Career Fair;

- 4) through classroom observations and discussions;

- 5) through my interaction with my advisees (Modern Languages and International Studies).

Results

- 22 Students
- 10 Males   12 Females
- Students are interested in these courses
- Arab Cinema 11
- Arab Media 1
- Culture and Society in the Arab world 6
- Identity and Arab Diaspora 0
- Arabic for international Business 3

Results

- The extent to which the students agree to the following: Arabic Studies are very useful

  - Strongly agree: 17 students

  - Agree: 5 students

- Only native speakers can take advance Arabic courses:

  - 7 agree, 14 disagree

- Any Student can major in Arabic as long as he/she studies well:

  - all the students agree

- I intend to major in a field where I could use my language skills:

  - 2 students disagree

Results of the Interviews

- Alternatives to Literature Courses for advanced native speakers. Students' suggestions :

- 1 student: Arabic History and Culture

- 8 students: Advanced Grammar/Academic writing

- 1 student: Creative Writing