Heritage Arabic eBook

Produced by
Alexander Elinson and Stephanie Love

The Graduate Center, CUNY
365 Fifth Avenue, Room 4415 New
York, New York, 10016

🌐 cilc.commons.gc.cuny.edu   📞 (212) 817 2082   ✉ cilc@gc.cuny.edu

🐦 @CILC_CUNY   📷 @cilc_lrc   f facebook.com/CILCCUNY

center for integrated language communities

THE GRADUATE CENTER
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Title: **What Matters for Arab Americans Today?**

Domain: This Project Based Learning (PBL) activity uses a teaching method in which students work over an extended period of time to examine, reflect upon and respond to real-world questions, problems and challenges that pertain to their own lives and experiences. The end goal is for students to produce a public product that can be presented outside the classroom. The Buck Institute for Education provides information and ideas on the essentials of PBL, as well as free webinars on project design and other helpful tips for using PBL in the classroom.

Modes of Communication: Interpersonal, Interpretative, and Presentational

Proficiency/Performance Range: Intermediate to Advanced
* While this activity as it is written is intended for Intermediate to Advanced level learners, you can adapt it to the proficiency level of the students by modifying the function and text type.
We highly recommend assessing the proficiency level of the students at the start of the course to ensure learning goals reflect feasible proficiency development expectations.

Objectives:
    (1) Intermediate writers will be able to create paragraph-length text in Arabic with a draft process and with assistance of support materials. Advanced writers will be able to create extended discourse in Arabic with a draft process and with assistance of support materials.
    (2) Students will be able to identify and analyze the similarities and differences between spoken dialects and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA).
    (3) Students will be able to formulate questions about issues that they see as important to their communities.
    (4) Students will be able to use the Arabic language to discuss the social, political, linguistic, religious and cultural issues unique to heritage students in the US.
    (5) Students will be able to use the target language to conduct online research and use of social media.

Note on language choice
In this activity and many others, we have structured a certain amount of language choice and fluidity into the activity. During these stages, students may choose MSA, dialect, or even English for particular parts of the activity. While the extent to which students are permitted to use English is up to the instructor's discretion, we have marked certain steps of the activity as suitable to be conducted in a mixed variety of Arabic and English, which is more likely to reflect the actual linguistic practice of the heritage students and their communities. By barring English and/or some varieties of Arabic in the heritage classroom, instructors may be limiting students to particular varieties of language that don't reflect the linguistic practices used in their homes and communities. The heritage Arabic language classroom serves a number of pedagogical purposes, which certainly including goals of attaining proficiency in reading and writing in MSA. Equally important in the classroom is providing activities that can help students obtain the linguistic and

socio-cultural skills required to communicate effectively *within their own communities* as emerging bilinguals. The classroom can serve to model a linguistic space where all language varieties are valued and hierarchies between varieties are made apparent.

Description of activity
The project outlined below is structured to proceed through an entire semester and to parallel other in-class and homework activities. However, you can adapt its duration and depth to fit course objectives and curriculum. For instance, this project could be condensed into a few weeks of intensive activity.

During this project, students will explore the following questions:
   a) What are the main issues, concerns, and challenges that you as an Arab-American face in your daily lives?
   b) How can your Arabic class be mobilized to address some of these issues through community-oriented projects?

After an initial exploration, students will create digital media that can help them and their peers identify and discuss issues prompted by the questions above. This digital media could be a blog, an online resource, an activist social media account, or any other form that may help students address the key concerns they face in their communities. The idea is for students to use their developing Arabic literacy to engage with issues that are important to them. The final product of the project will be informational and can be shared with their communities

Topics might include: over-testing in schools, obtaining a Bachelor's degree, Islamophobia and/or anti-Arab sentiment in the US, finding housing in your city or region, immigration issues, events in the Middle East, finding a job after graduation, etc.

Main linguistic and sociolinguistic functions and tasks:
   • formulating and answering questions
   • summarizing arguments
   • describing conversations
   • negotiating meaning in a bilingual context
   • editing and publishing short, informational, bilingual text
   • comparing contexts and uses of dialect and MSA.

This project is divided into three stages:

Stage 1
Have students conduct the following information gathering activity:
   1. Identifying the issues they encounter in their communities (e.g. school community, social community, religious community, etc.) that most interest them.
   2. Creating and conducting, in Arabic, an interview or survey outside the classroom with friends, classmates, work colleagues, family members, etc. to identify issues that interest their peers.

3. Comparing and contrasting their own interests with those of their peers. In this step, students will ask: how do my interests and concerns for my community compare to the interests and concerns of my peers? Are they similar or different?
4. Posting the results of these interviews, conversations and/or surveys online and also bringing them to class to discuss with their classmates.

Stage 2
From the issues generated in stage 1, have students form small groups and together select one issue to research by using online resources and conducting expert interviews.

Stage 3
In small groups, have students create a final project: an Arabic language or bilingual resource that provides their communities with tools to address the identified issues. The final product will be disseminated.

Advance preparation

1. Since a large portion of this project takes place online, you should ensure that there is a reliable internet connection in the classroom. Having a strong internet connection allows students to access their work without having to print it before each class. If the internet connection is inadequate, it may be necessary to have students print out their work and bring it to class each week.
2. Create a platform for students to post their contributions. We recommend the creation of a closed Facebook group or blog. Facebook is an excellent forum where students can quickly post their work on a common page and share their ideas with one another. Facebook may work best for lower proficiency learners since posts consisting of single words or sentence level text are acceptable in this medium. A blog might be preferable for learners with higher proficiency levels to allow them their own space to write. This choice should be made before the course begins.
3. You should familiarize yourself with SurveyMonkey or Google Form survey tools. This way, you can encourage students to use online technologies which allow them to send their surveys to their peers.
4. Have students brainstorm some issues that might be of importance to them. Issues can range from the travel ban, to student loans, to post-graduation employment, to policing. We recommend brainstorming issues that directly impact local communities.

Week-by-week schedule (time frame of activity can be modified according to needs)

Week One (Stage 1): Creating a Poll
AT HOME
Request that the class join the common class site (Heritage Arabic Facebook Group, blog, etc.) created for students to upload their work and share their ideas with one another.
IN CLASS
1. In small groups, have students brainstorm possible questions to create, and later conduct an online poll to identify the key concerns and issues of Arab Americans in their

local/national communities. You may offer the students short, local newspaper articles and/or provide several open-ended statements (in Arabic or English, depending on proficiency level) to help facilitate a discussion about the set of concerns that is specific to themselves and their communities.

> For example:
>> a) My current goal is…
>> b) Things that get in the way of this goal are…
>> c) My primary concern with the currently political climate is…
>> d) Members of my community insist that I…

Students can review online polls on SurveyMonkey for advice on composing an effective poll question.

2. Have students write these survey questions in MSA and then translate them into the regional dialects they are familiar with. Encourage students to translate into all the varieties present in the group, not just the dominant dialect.
3. Have each small group write one example question on the board in MSA, with any number of regional variations below it.
4. As a class, have students discuss each question for content and form, noting the linguistic differences between MSA and the regional variety. To ensure comprehension, ask students impromptu questions in Arabic about what they have formulated.
5. Have students work on expressing each question in MSA on the board. Instructors should take this opportunity to discuss how MSA is not "more correct" than dialect; it is just a different register ubiquitously used in writing and formal situations (please see Critical Dialect Awareness for a detailed discussion of our philosophy on the relationship between regional dialects and MSA).

Week Two (Stage 1): Creating a Poll
AT HOME

1. Using the question from the previous week as a model, have students create a short poll/survey about key issues concerning Arab Americans today. This poll/survey can be conducted in any combination of MSA, dialect, and English that corresponds with the students' proficiency level(s). As this is a written survey, the instructor should guide students toward the use of formal Arabic because it is the culturally accepted register for writing.

> Some sample questions might include:
>
> (1) When you vote in national elections, what is the primary concern that determines who you vote for?
>> (a) immigration
>> (b) climate change
>> (c) schools and education
>> (d) other (please indicate) _____
>
> (2) What do you think undergraduate students most struggle with?
>> (a) student loans
>> (b) graduating on time
>> (c) balancing work and school
>> (d) other (please indicate) _____

2. Have students post the poll (or link) to the Facebook page/blog.

IN CLASS

1. Have students test their poll questions orally on three classmates who were not in their group. During this activity, students should pay attention to the following: Do their peers understand the question asked? Are the responses from their peers interesting? How could the questions be made clearer or more focused?
2. Have students peer review the poll in small groups by exchanging poll questions. Then, have the students offer suggestions while paying attention to linguistic accuracy as well as clarity of the poll questions.

Week Three (Stage 1): Administering the Poll
AT HOME

1. Have students administer the poll/survey to at least three peers who are not enrolled in the current class (i.e. colleagues from a different class, friends, family members of around the same age, etc.). The poll can be disseminated through social media, over the phone, in person, etc.
2. Students will select the responses they found most interesting and post them to the Facebook page/blog using either MSA or regional dialects.

IN CLASS

1. As a class, students will discuss three of these postings. Guide the discussion in Arabic, focusing on whether students received similar or different responses from one another. For students with lower proficiency levels, this discussion may require instructional scaffolding. This can be done through the use of repetitive questions (i.e. "Who found that (blank) is important?"), writing relevant vocabulary on the board, and referring back to it as needed to help with student comprehension.
2. In small groups, students will discuss their own findings. Lower proficiency students should do this by formulating questions following the model provided during the whole class activity above. Students are encouraged to respond in Arabic (either in their regional dialects or MSA) even if they only use basic words and cannot combine them into sentences.

Week Four (Stage 2): Further research based on poll
AT HOME

1. Students will choose one issue that emerged from the poll responses to further explore during the remainder of the course.
2. Students will find at least two websites (see External Links for some ideas) where the issue they have selected is discussed. Students of all levels should try to find websites in Arabic; however, depending on the proficiency level of the students, you may want to stipulate that a certain percentage of the material could be in any language (English, French, Arabic, etc.).
3. On the Facebook page/blog, students will write a short statement (it could be a list of keywords they understand from the website or 2-3 sentences in Arabic depending on their proficiency/performance level) about the general content of each website. Students do not have to understand everything about the page, although they are expected to understand how it addresses the issues that they have chosen to investigate.

IN CLASS

>In small groups, students will share a few details about their issues of interest and the content of the website(s) they found.

Weeks Five and Six (Stage 2): History of this issue
AT HOME
1. Have students write a brief paragraph to post on the Facebook page/blog in MSA regarding the history of the issue in the US.
   Possible question prompts:
   - Is this a new issue for the Arab American community?
   - When did this issue start to become a concern?
   - What event(s) caused this issue to arise?
2. Students will print their paragraph and bring it to class for peer review.

IN CLASS
1. Students will peer review each other's work for spelling, grammar, and content.

Week Seven (Stage 2): Interview an expert
AT HOME
1. Have students interview a local "expert" from their university or community on this issue. This expert could be someone who works in the field (police, education, cultural institution) and/or someone who interacts with institutions involved in the issue.
2. Have students transcribe 1-2 minutes of the interview, which should include the most important comments made by this "expert." Interview transcription will include a short biography of this person.
3. Have students choose a section to translate (this could be 7-10 sentences or more depending on students' proficiency/performance level). If the interview is conducted in dialect, students translate the interview into MSA. If a student decides to conduct the interview in MSA, he/she translates the text into their regional dialect.
4. Students will print transcripts of their interviews and bring them to class.

IN CLASS
1. In small groups, have students share the contents of the interview with their classmates.
2. Then, have students peer review the translation.

Week Eight (Stage 3): Brainstorm final project and consider how to disseminate it
1. Combine groups of similarly themed issues. Students will start to brainstorm a potential final project that produces a resource for their peers. This could be a pamphlet, a blog, an informational workshop, etc., subject to instructor approval. In deciding what to produce, students should keep in mind different places where the project might be disseminated (such as a local library, a community center, a university bulletin board, local cafes, etc.)

AT HOME
1. Students will meet outside of class in small groups to draft the project. Students will then prepare a short, informal presentation for class of their on-going work, with the goal of receiving peer feedback.

IN CLASS
1. Students will share potential project ideas with the whole class. The class will provide feedback and ask clarifying questions.

Week Nine (Stage 3): Work on projects. Post progress to Facebook page/blog in MSA
AT HOME
1. Students will continue to meet outside of class in small groups to advance the project.
2. Students will post progress to Facebook Page/blog in MSA.

IN CLASS
1. Have students share the progress of their projects with the whole class to receive feedback.

Week Ten (Stage 3): Work on projects. Post progress to Facebook page/blog in MSA
AT HOME
1. Students will continue to meet outside of class in small groups to advance the project.
2. Students will post progress to Facebook Page/blog in MSA.

IN CLASS
1. Have students share the progress of their projects with the entire class to receive feedback.

Week Eleven (Stage 3): Students peer-review final projects

Week Twelve (Stage 3): Students present final projects in class in small groups and finalize projects
1. While it may be that not all students will hear each presentation, the small setting will allow for more practice in active listening and participation, and for more students to present simultaneously within a limited amount of time. All students will be provided with a questionnaire about the project to fill out and submit to the instructor.
2. Students will finalize their projects (webpage, blog, etc.) and make them available to relevant members of their communities (e.g. in public schools, libraries, through social networks, etc.).