

Towards a New Methodology for Teaching English to Arab Learners(TEAL)*

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Abstract: *This paper is based on a series of assumptions and principles, which if and when endorsed would lead to a better understanding of the role of FL education in the Arab World and hence to adopting explicit strategies to boost it to the desired extent and level without losing sight of the main objective of the overall educational system in our countries .*

In view of the assumptions incorporated in the paper , it is argued that Arab educationalists and linguists should develop a special TEAL methodology that is based on a well-formulated and sound language policy. Such a policy has to define the roles of L1 and L2 in everyday life as well as in the educational system and in public and private establishments and institutions. It is further argued that any sound TEAL programs should take into consideration some important educational, linguistic and practical factors and that it should profitably invest in the skill of READING and be differentiated from TEFL/TESOL particularly with regard to the cultural content .

1. Introductory Notes

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it argues that there is unanimous agreement amongst Arab educationalists, applied linguists and TEFL specialists and practitioners that the English proficiency level of the overwhelming majority of our school graduates leaves much to be desired in spite of the fact that we generally employ the most recent and “fashionable” methods in TEFL . Secondly, the paper suggests, albeit briefly, some guidelines for formulation a special methodology for the teaching of English to Arab learners (TEAL) which should be distinct from both TEFL and TESOL.

The paper is organized in the following manner:

Section 2: puts together some assumptions and principles which should guide policy makers in Arab countries in formulating and implementing educational policies for foreign language education.

Section 3: highlights some of the major issues that relate to postulating a special methodology for the teaching of English to Arab Learners (i.e. TEAL).

Sections 4-7 : discuss in some details some aspects of the suggested methodology, namely (1) the right age to introduce English at school ; (2) the skills to be emphasized; (iii) utilizing L1 in teaching ; and (iv) the cultural aspect.

It is, however, expedient at the outset to point out that the ideas and suggestions incorporated in this paper emanate from experience, academic convictions as well as from both ideological and practical considerations . It is also necessary to point out that based on one's own experience, theoretical orientation, and ideology some may find certain aspects of the proposals put forward in the course of this paper unacceptable. However, it is not the writer's aim in this paper to state things in terms of "black and white" or "right and wrong". The idea is to raise questions, pose problems and suggest alternative concepts, and - above all - to keep the ball rolling.

To get down to the subject matter of the main thesis in this paper, I begin with a series of assumptions and guiding principles , which are most probably acceptable to the overwhelming majority of Arab educationalists and linguists. These assumptions and principles relate to the overall role of foreign language education in the Arab World on both national and individual levels.

2. Basic Assumptions and Guiding Principles

2.1. The Arabs and the World

The relationship between the Arab World and the rest of the world at large is best expressed by the following quotation from the monumental work of a group of Arab educationalists prepared under the auspices of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (Alecso). This work, which was published by in 1979, is titled: *A Strategy for the Development of Arabic Education*:

The Arab nation cannot afford to be isolated from the international community and from contemporary culture. Contrary to this, throughout its

history it has had to make contacts with other peoples and cultures and it should continue to do so in order to know the world at large and to assimilate the scientific and technological revolution... and take an active role in attaining international peace that is based on justice, right and equality (Al-Sharif, et. al. , 1979: 33)

Another self-evident quotation from the same source reads as follows:

Since the first Hijra century and throughout the Arabic-Islamic history, translation and the learning of foreign languages have been motivated by various considerations This was reflected in the unlimited support and guardianship which the Caliphs accorded to scientists, scholars and learned individuals, and which eventually led to the establishment of Beit al-Hikmah in Baghdad (ibid: 49)

However, parallel to this line of thinking, the authors forcefully argue that this call for 'openness' should never be at the expense of the native language and culture . Indeed, in their discussion of 'Arabicization' and the necessity of using Arabic as a medium of instruction in all educational stages in Arab countries as well as a tool for thinking and change, which - they maintain- is an educational task which all Arab educationalists endorse, they assert that

The concept of 'Arabicization' should be understood to mean Arabizing 'culture' and thus 'Arabizing - as it were- the Arab personality (being) (ibid: 22)

2.2 Why English ?

For a multitude of educational, scientific and economic considerations, English has been and should continue to be the first foreign language that all Arab countries should invest in and capitalize on. First and foremost English is the most widely used language in the field of mass media, internet and other means of communication and thus we will not be able to communicate with the world in the manner that we want unless we have facility with this language. To quote Graddol (1994:213) on this matter,

A pattern of global media has emerged in which there are relatively few players , with the market dominated by US , British , Australian and Japanese corporations . This allows a few huge corporations to distribute

their material – news, entertainment and sports – throughout the world .
The main players in this market are again English speaking.

A second important consideration has to do with the fact that nowadays English is also seen as the key to individual and national socio-economic advancement. Below are some indicative responses obtained through a British Council questionnaire distributed in 1995 to 2000 academicians in different parts of the world (British Council , 1995 :4) :

1. Seventy three percent of the respondents believe that English is a major contributor to social and economic advancement in most countries.

2. Ninety five percent of the respondents contend that English is essential for progress as it will provide the main means of access to high-tech communication and information over the next twenty-five years.

2.3. Arab Learners' Attitudes and Motivation

All empirical studies on the relationship between FL learning and attitudes/motivation in general and the attitudes of Arab learners towards English in particular point to the following two facts:

1. In foreign language learning there is a positive relationship between learners' attitudes and motivation , on the one hand, and their achievement in the foreign language they study, on the other.

2. Arab learners' attitudes towards English “ as a language” are positive and they are instrumentally motivated to acquire it. The empirical studies listed in Appendix 1 below unmistakably point to this fact.

2.4. English as an International Language

Nowadays English should no longer be viewed as the language of Great Britain, U.S.A. or Australia, or even the language of a great literature.

Today, there are, according to David Crystal (1997), about 450 million users of English as an L1. At the same time, there are as many as 350 million users of English as a second language in countries such as India or Nigeria where English has some kind of internal official function.

The estimates of the numbers of individuals using English as a foreign language vary from as few as 100 million to as high as a billion. Even if the exact figures for English speakers around the world are not known, one thing is certain: for the last few decades English has been sweeping the globe like a tidal wave and will most probably continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

David Crystal predicts that within ten years there will be more speakers of English as a second language than English as a native-language and that in 50 years time there could be 50% more speakers of English as a second language than a first language.

I close this briefing on the present use of English in the world with the following quotation from Crystal (1997:130):

And one final important figure: it has been estimated that about 80% of uses of English do not involve native-speakers at all but involve two or more non-native speakers using English as a lingua franca. It is also predicted that by 2010 there will be 50% more speakers of English as a foreign language than native-speakers. (ibid).

The view that English is nowadays best regarded as an international language has serious consequences for teaching it as a foreign (TEFL). For example, it has a strong bearing on the following aspects of TEFL national programs:

1. Which language variety should we teach to our children?
2. If in everyday life we will be talking to Japanese, Chinese, Indians, Italians, etc. do 'standard norms of pronunciation¹ and usage' really matter in these circumstances?

To be more specific, this new concept of English as a global/international language means to policy makers in the context of foreign education two things. On the one hand, English should be a vehicle for transmitting NATIONAL CULTURE and THINKING to the world at large. This implies that students should be trained to talk/write about their culture in English and hence a substantial component of an EFL program should be devoted to L1 culture. On the other hand, English should be a means of exposure to foreign culture at large (e.g. Chinese, Indian, Latin American, Western, African, etc.). It is no longer acceptable that L2 culture (in the context of TEFL) means British or American culture or even literature.

2.5. Linguistic and Cultural Domination

Another crucial aspect of FL education that Arab educationalists and applied linguists should be aware of relates to what has come to be known as “linguistic domination”, a phenomenon associated with the phenomenal spread of English. Indeed, English has been referred to as the “killer language”. Some linguists have gone even as far as talking about this unprecedented spread of English as “linguistic imperialism” ((Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994). The following quotations are self-evident:

1. At the rate things are going – the coming century will see either the death or the doom of 90% of mankind’s languages. What are we linguists doing to prepare for this or to prevent this catastrophic destruction of the linguistic world ? (Krauss , 1992 :7) .

2. The English language has more direct responsibility for language loss in its native speaking countries . Canada , the USA and Australia each have a large number of indigenous languages within their borders which have already been lost or are on the verge of disappearance . In Australia , for example , more than 200 languages are thought to have been lost in recent years . (Graddol , 1994 : 199)

3. In one hundred years’ time , will we still speak Swedish, albeit with numerous loanwords from British and American English ? Can Swedish be expected to survive , to proceed along the same course as major languages like French and German? Or , will Swedes of the 2080s be bilingual , with Swedish and English as native tongues ? Or will we , few as we are , have become engulfed by the “ English empire” and keep Swedish in the family chest , a quaint relic to be dusted off , polished up and displayed on festive occasions ? The questions remain unanswered (Findahl , 1994 : 228)

4. It is , in my view , likely that English will become the primary language of the citizens of the EC. Whether or not it is ever officially declared such , it will be even more widely used as a vehicle for intra-European communication across all social groups. (Berns, 1995:9)

This situation has prompted many European countries to take serious measures and to postulate concrete legislations to curb or minimize the dangers of this tidal wave . The following quotation neatly sums up this position in European countries , which are closer to UK and USA

historically, culturally, economically and politically than Arab countries are :

Although the origins of English lie in Europe, this remains one of the world regions where it meets most resistance . (Graddol, 1994: 192)

Linguistic domination may be less dangerous than “ cultural domination” - the other side of the same coin- , which is commonly associated with foreign language education. We shall return to elaborate on this issue below.

3. Teaching English to Arab Learners (TEAL)

In this age of “globalization” and “information and technological revolution”, it becomes obvious that access to foreign languages and cultures is no longer restricted to class instruction, books or periodicals. The Internet, satellite T.V stations as well cellular telephones constitute a richer and probably a more appealing source of information and enjoyment than traditional and stressful classroom instruction and are probably more conducive to FL acquisition and – undoubtedly - the assimilation of foreign cultures.

In view of this fact and of the assumptions and principles that I have enumerated above, it becomes imperative that an explicit and well-defined policy should be formulated to cater for the challenges associated with “globalization” and “the information and technological revolution”, in particular with regard to the role of foreign language education in the educational system and in our societies at large . Similarly, the question of foreign culture and its place in our FL programs should be approached with utmost care and caution in our curricula, syllabuses, textbooks and A.V. material as well as through the mass media.

Below is a suggested model for the development of a special methodology for Teaching English to Arab Learners (TEAL). This tentative model encompasses various educational and linguistic parameters, and seeks , in particular, to answer the following essential questions:

1. What is the right age for introducing English at school?
2. What methodology is most appropriate for Arab learner

3. What skills should be emphasized in our curricula?
4. How should we handle the cultural aspect of FL education?

However, before proceeding to discuss the above issues, it is expedient to look –albeit briefly- at some of the common practices surrounding TEFL in the Arab World,

3.1. Current TEFL Practices

A careful analysis of the TEFL methods that have been used in the Arab countries over the last few decades demonstrates that these countries have been faithfully following linguistic and educational trends and innovations prevailing in the West, particularly in USA and UK. Indeed, most Arab countries have had experiences with the grammar-translation method, the oral-direct method, and more recently, the communicative approach.

It is unfortunate, however, that – apart from shy proposals here and there - there have been no serious efforts to assess the feasibility of the methodologies that we have been using in TEFL over the last few decades. For instance, the “Communicative Approach”, which has been declared as the main official approach employed in T.E.F.L. in most Arab countries, has since its inception come under attack on different counts. Amongst the major points of criticism are:

1. Some applied linguists T.E.F.L. specialists (cf. Ellis, 1996) question the ‘universal relevance’ of the communicative approach to language teaching in view of the cultural conflicts arising from “the introduction of a predominantly Western language teaching approach...” (p.213). The central argument is that for the communicative approach to be made suitable for non-Western countries “it needs to be both culturally attuned and culturally accepted” (ibid).
2. Two of the major tenets of communicative language teaching are: group work and the role of the teacher as a “facilitator”, not as a “master”. One would certainly like to ask whether these two conditions can be adequately met in our crowded classes and whether they can be accepted by our teachers, or - for that matter - by our students and their parents where long established teaching traditions are hostile to such techniques and innovations. Added to this is the fact that the implementation of the communicative approach requires enthusiastic

and energetic teachers who are first and foremost both competent and fluent in English, a condition that cannot be easily met in most Arab communities .

3. Regardless of the linguistic/communicative orientations of the English courses used and the training workshops for teachers of English in our countries, what actually goes on in the classroom is quite different. Both teachers and students want something different. To begin with, teachers themselves resort to grammar and translation even though they are thoroughly trained in and familiar with the communicative methodology because they themselves had learnt English this way. Added to this is the fact that students also insist on grammar and translation for different reasons. First, they wrongly assume that they cannot learn a foreign language without grammar. Secondly, they are influenced by the methods of teaching Arabic. Thirdly, they want eventually to pass public exams, many of which contain explicit grammar components . It is worth noting in this context that most public exams in the Arab World, which the writer is familiar with, contain no oral-aural components. Nor they contain explicit "functional components". But they do contain 'traditional grammar' questions This strong tradition of grammar teaching is deeply rooted in the Arabic linguistic tradition and cannot be easily overcome.

Going back to the main thesis of this argument we can safely assume that what our teachers do at school is that they faithfully employ their own teaching methodology, which is - by and large - the grammar translation method.

If current universal methods of TEFL (e.g. the communicative approach) are meant to be universal in the sense that they are assumed to work with learners of English all over the world regardless of their linguistic or cultural backgrounds and regardless of the practical circumstances surrounding the learning/ teaching process in their respective countries, then it is only logical to assume that a teaching method addressed to Arab learners would be more viable since Arab learners do have many things in common.

3.2 TEAL: Basic Tenets

In view of all the facts and problems discussed in the context of this paper I would like to venture into stating some guiding principles for the proposed TEAL methodology:

1. TEAL should stem from an explicit national 'language policy' that defines in a PRECISE and MEASURABLE manner the roles of both Arabic and English in the educational system as well in the society at large. The domain of this language policy should not be restricted to the educational system but should be applicable to the mass media and all socio-economic activities. Unfortunately, no such language policies exist in any Arab country.
2. English should not be introduced in the educational system before the student gains a reasonable mastery of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA).
3. TEAL should spell out in an explicit and precise manner a set of GENERAL GOALS and SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE for each level/stage of FL instruction. Such goals and objectives should be REALISTIC and not far-fetched as is the case in most Arab countries. Furthermore, such objective should arise from a careful analysis of the individual needs of our students as well as the requirements of socio-economic development.
4. TEAL should take all practical circumstances surrounding the learning-teaching process into consideration, chief amongst which are the following: human resources, teacher qualification, classroom size, A-V facilities, public exams, availability of the Internet, et.,
5. TEAL should strike a balance between L1 and L2 culture. We shall return to elaborate on this issue in Section 7 below.
6. TEAL should highlight in an explicit manner FL learning strategies and endeavour to systematically train the learner "how to learn" in an independent manner while at school as well as after he leaves school.
7. TEAL should invest in the two skills of READING and WRITING for more than one consideration. We return to discuss this issue in Section 5 below.
8. Wherever and whenever possible, TEAL curricula should link in a systematic and coherent manner 'locally produced teaching materials' with materials available on online EFL sources and web sites, particularly listening material, for – like authentic reading texts- authentic listening texts constitute an excellent input for language acquisition.

9. In the secondary stage, TEAL should make provision to create some sort of harmony between the English language syllabus, on the one hand, and the student's academic specialization, on the other (i.e. ESP).

10. Translation should be gradually introduced in the secondary (see Section 6 below)

11. TEAL should judiciously and gradually (i.e. in the secondary stage) make use of grammar as a teaching technique (see Section 6 below)

12. TEAL should take into account the fact that modern English texts , are becoming increasingly visual² , and that new technologies are playing an important part in bringing visual forms of communication into contact with more traditional print . Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:3) go as far as suggesting that “‘Visual literacy’ will begin to be a matter of survival, especially in the workplace.”

13. TEAL should benefit from research findings in the field of L2 acquisition and from empirical studies carried out in different Arab countries in the Arab World over the last three decades in the field of applied linguistics and TEFL, particularly those that deal with (i) contrastive analysis, (ii) error analysis , and (iii) interlanguage studies . It should also benefit from the recommendations and implication of such studies in a principled manner. For example , morphological errors and syntactic deviations of the type instanced in the following examples

- (1) *Did he spoke* English ?
- (2) Do you know *where does he live* ?
- (3) This is the book *which I bought it yesterday*

which our students produce daily , should cease to bother us . Most probably “our students will continue to produce them regardless of the time and effort we spend in correcting these deviations whether in a principled way or randomly .” (Mukattash , 1983: 170)

14. TEAL set up a hierarchy of priorities in its pedagogical orientation and should not lose sight of the major issues in pursuit of details . For instance, ‘fluency’ should come higher than ‘accuracy’ on the scale of priorities. Furthermore, ‘communication’ should have precedence over ‘error correction’ and ‘mechanical pronunciation drills’ for in the final

analysis our students will speak English with a certain 'Arabic accent', be it Egyptian, Jordanian, or Bahraini.

15. Any reform in EFL teaching methodology should go hand in hand with similar reform in the methods of teaching Arabic as a first language, and possibly in the entire educational system.

4. Right Age for Introducing English at School

Educators in the Arab World have been in disagreement over the right age for the introduction of English in school. There are those who argue that English should be introduced in the first grade, even in KG1. On the other hand, there are educators who strongly oppose introducing foreign languages before grade 4 or – even- grade 7. Opponents of an early start of EFL have fears that learning a foreign language may hinder the learner's acquisition of Standard Arabic, which is – by and large – a second language for almost all Arab learners.

An excellent survey of the arguments of the two parties has recently appeared in the *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies* (cf. Al-Mutawa, 2002). Appendix 2 below is a list extracted from Al-Mutawa's paper (ibid) of the studies that deal with this issue.

The conclusions which Al-Mutawa draws from her survey are the following:

1. There is no compelling empirical evidence to substantiate and thus lend credibility to either side of the controversy with regard to the ideal age for starting foreign language education in the Arab world.
2. EFL should not be considered the sole factor responsible for pupils' weakness in the mother tongue, since vernaculars continually compete with classical Arabic .
3. Sufficient attention should be paid to the Arabic language curriculum and to those who teach it in order to dispel the fear that EFL may have a negative impact on Arabic..
4. It may prove educationally appropriate to postpone the age of starting EFL teaching until the child has mastered his/her mother tongue - Arabic (ibid : 231-234)

It has to be pointed out in this context that most Arab countries do not start teaching English before grade 5, except for private schools which

begin teaching one or two foreign languages in KG. However, over the last few years some Arab countries have decided to introduce English in all public schools in Grade 1. This is true of Egypt, Jordan and Bahrain.

The position to which I subscribe looks at the issue from an entirely different angle. I am of the belief that there is no danger whatsoever in postponing the introduction of English until Grade 6. In fact there is much to be gained, particularly with regard to the set of values and ideals which we should instill in our learners. I elaborate on this issue somewhere else (Mukattash, forthcoming). The common complaint that Arab school graduates do not have a reasonable level of proficiency in English cannot and should not be solely a function of the time they spent studying English at school or the age at which they began learning the language. We all know that the unsatisfactory level of our students is due to a multitude of educational and practical factors.

5. Skills to be Emphasized

As pointed out above, TEAL should explicitly and systematically emphasize the two skills of reading and reading for a variety of academic, psychological and practical considerations, First, the skills of reading and writing are the two major keys to the world of the Internet as well as to higher education. Secondly, most business communications are executed through the skills of reading and reading . Thirdly, authentic texts in the target language constitute one of the two main inputs for language acquisition. The following quotation from Krashen (1982: 167) is self-evident:

Both conversation and pleasure reading [emphasis is mine] have the potential of meeting the requirements for optimal input for acquisition very well. We have reached the conclusion that an interesting conversation in a second language, and reading something for pleasure, are excellent language lessons. This comes as no surprise to the millions of people who have acquired language using these "methods", and have acquired them very well.

Fourthly, in view of the fact that classes are over-crowded in most Arab countries , the skill or reading can be made use of in a more efficient manner than the oral-aural skills.

Other reasons why we should invest in the skill of reading have to do with the following facts that relate to the skill of reading:

1. The skill of reading develops in the learner the ability of analysis, synthesis and critical thinking.
2. The skill of reading is the best guarantee that maximal numbers of learners can acquire English in a reasonable manner .
3. It is the best guarantee for on-going learning.
4. Printed materials transmitted through the medium of English are reasonably cheap and easily accessible.

6. Utilizing L1 and Grammar in Teaching

As pointed out above, translation should be gradually introduced in our EFL curricula in the secondary stage. Indeed, translation can be profitably utilized as a means of consolidating and revising TL structures, functions and vocabulary items covered earlier in the unit. Translation can also be used as a teaching technique particularly in those areas where there is marked discrepancy between L1 and L2 system (cf. Mukattash, forthcoming). In addition, translation can also be used in explicating L1 structures that are likely to be confused with each other as in (4) and (5) below as well as in disambiguating certain occurrences of ambiguous English sentences and in recovering deleted elements FL texts as in (6) and (7) respectively:

(4) He stopped *to drink*.

(5) He stopped *drinking*

(6) Fatima found the book which she lost *in the library*

(7) This is the book □ you recommended. (Δ = deleted element)

Admittedly, many linguists object to using L1 in FL teaching on the grounds that it negatively interferes with L2 acquisition. In response to this, it can be argued that using L1 in EFL does facilitate both teaching and learning and systematize comprehension of TL structures and items and hence leads to 'meaningful learning'. The suggestion that L1 should be utilized in TEFL is harmonious with current recognition of the cognitive aspect of L2 learning. To quote Chastain (1971: 135):

Meaningful learning takes place when the learners comprehend the material, can relate it to their present knowledge system in a non-arbitrary,

non-verbatim manner; and consciously intend to integrate the material being learned into their own cognitive structure.

It should be further emphasized that NL system is an integral and essential component of the learner's cognitive structure; thus, it is only logical to assume that the learner will relate TL structures in one way or another to NL system. In other words, the native language cannot be avoided in foreign-language learning, and thus instead of leaving the learner to struggle over how to relate NL structures to FL structures, it seems more reasonable to guide him wherever such guidance is felt to be necessary. I subscribe to the idea that L1 should be treated as an ally in the process of FL teaching and that it should be consciously used instead of being ignored at all costs

... from a psychological point of view, it cannot be avoided... and from a pedagogical point of view, it can facilitate learning if used wisely and deliberately (Marton, 1979:30).

It was further argued above that TEAL should judiciously and gradually (i.e. in the secondary stage) make use of grammar as a teaching technique. Most probably "grammar" is a learning strategy which most Arab learners consistently utilize. As pointed out above, teaching practices in most Arab countries are dominated by explicit grammar teaching. It was such a recognition and due to other educational considerations that prompted decision makes in Jordan³ to incorporate "explicit grammar" in the secondary stage curricula (grades 11 & 12). However, grammar points/structures were introduced through relevant communicative activities/functions. For instance, instead of listing the various uses or meanings of each modal auxiliary on its own, in many cases the authors would start with modality concepts and then move to linguistic realizations: cf.

- Expressing possibility/ necessity/ obligation/willingness
- Giving and asking for permission

The conclusion that can be drawn from this argument is that both grammar and translation are unavoidable in our classes in the foreseeable future ; they will be used regardless of the teaching methodology adopted in the EFL courses we use and regardless of the specific suggestions/recommendations we explicitly spell out and emphasize in the Teacher's Book.

7. The Cultural Aspect

There is unanimous agreement amongst educationalists and linguists that learning a foreign language always implies some degree of cultural learning. To quote de Jong on this matter,

Language and culture are one, for language does not exist without a cultural context, and the other way round (de Jong: 1999:16).

On the other hand, applied linguists and educationalists are agreed that the ultimate goal of FL language education is to enable the learners to develop communicative competence in that language. Indeed, 'cross-cultural communication' is not simply a question of encoding and decoding neutral messages, but a subtle process of negotiation, interpretation and expression. To quote Walkinshaw (2000:17) on this matter,

Even if the EFL student is quite capable in English ... other factors can get in the way of effective communication, these factors are culturally based and can influence both the outcome of conversations and the student's attitude towards the speaker he is communicating with.

In other words, as Kramsch (1993) correctly points out, cultural knowledge in language learning is a necessary aspect of communicative competence. Added to this is the fact that the FL learner reacts to all experience as he perceives it, not as the teacher presents it.

This is a very serious issue which all educationalists and policy makers should address in a firm and systematic manner and which if left unattended to will constitute a serious threat to national identity. To quote Killick (1999:5) and Prodromou (1992:2) respectively on this matter:

we are not seeking to meld our students into a-cultural beings, or cultural chameleons: cross-cultural capability is concerned with responding to cultural difference, not with eroding it.

On the one hand, English can be a subtle form of cultural domination, far more effective than gunboat diplomacy; and on the other it can enrich local cultures and actually facilitate diversity on a local level.

This situation poses a serious problem to all educationalists and decision makers in the Arab World, for while we want to develop our learners' cross-cultural communicative competence, we certainly want to instill in them a sense of both pride and loyalty to their native language⁴, culture and heritage. I argue elsewhere (Mukattash, forthcoming) that:

For, while we want our children to be exposed to foreign culture, this should not be done at the expense of the NATIONAL CULTURE. Thus instead of letting our learners search for foreign cultures and attractions through the internet and foreign T.V. stations, we should provide them with a convincing and attractive (from their point of view) alternative, an alternative that can compete with the sophisticated ways and means which the West possesses to impart its own ideals and social values with the ultimate goal of "cultural domination"..

However, it is expedient to reiterate the position to which I subscribe (Mukattash, forthcoming):

The position which seems to be most feasible/practical is one the takes into consideration all elements surrounding EFL teaching, including practical, national as well as global considerations. This is not a matter of compromise; it is a strategy of reconciliation... reconciling L1 & L2 methodology and culture ... providing learners with ample opportunity to ponder on the universality of human language and human culture. On the other hand, this position safeguards against eccentricism and over-indulgence in foreign culture, in particular, Western Culture. For, while we want our children to be exposed to foreign culture, this should not be done at the expense of the national culture.

However, I will not pursue this issue any further in this paper since I deal with it in a detailed manner somewhere else (cf. Mukattash, forthcoming)

Notes

* An earlier draft of this paper was read at the 23 CDELT National Symposium held at Ain Shams University, Cairo, during the period 15-17 April 2003.

1. Some linguists have gone as far as suggesting a phonology for an assumed “international English language”, which is accent-neutral (cf. Jenkins, 2000 below).

2. To quote Goodman (1994: 39) on this matter:

One area where the visual is becoming particularly important is in the sphere of global communications Computers , the Internet and global publishing mean that visual literacy in traditionally verbal territory is becoming increasingly necessary in order for individuals to participate fully in the world of work , and to comprehend the vast quantities of available information . Some see a pressing need for people to get to grips with this new literacy .

3. The *Petra Course*, which consists of two levels (grades 11-12), is used in all public schools in Jordan. It was prepared by a team consisting of three Jordanian writers and three British writers and published jointly by Mcmillan and the Jordanian Ministry of Education. However, all students who sit for the General Secondary Certificate (G.S.E) are tested in this course whether they graduate from public or private schools. The course employs an “eclectic approach”: functional-notional, communicative, grammar-oriented, reading-based, utilizes L1 and makes use of translation.

The writer of this paper is one of the co-authors of this course.

4. It is worth pointing out that most linguists distinguish between Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). MSA is the educated formal variety used in public speeches, newscast, formal meetings, newspapers and other ‘high brow’ modern publications . What most Arabic curricula endeavour to teach in the elementary stage is MSA . It is unfortunate’ however, that a lot of teaching is done in colloquial Arabic.

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