

1. FIRST REPORT: APETAU First Regional Forum (August 7th, 2004)

On 7th August 2004 APETAU held its First Regional Forum, a one-day activity, at the Hashemite University in Jordan. The Forum was held in honour of Professor Albert Butros of the University of Jordan on the occasion of his retirement after a long and highly distinguished academic and diplomatic career. The main theme of the forum was: NEW CHALLENGES: FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE ARAB WORLD IN THE WAKE OF GLOBALISATION

The Forum was attended by over 80 professors and lecturers, mainly from Jordanian universities. However, a few colleagues from some Arab universities were also present and took part in the Forum seminars: cf.

- Hebron University / Palestine
- Birzeit University / Palestine
- Lebanese University / Lebanon
- King Saud University / Saudi Arabia
- Taibah University / Saudi Arabia
- University of Qatar
- Kuwait University / Kuwait
- Arab Open University / Kuwait

The Forum was arranged into two sessions each in the form of an open seminar. Below are details of the Forum Program and a synopsis of the main issues dealt with/raised in the two seminars.

The Forum was arranged for by an Organizing Committee formed by APETAU Board of Management. The following are the names of the committee's members:

- Professor Lewis Mukattash (APETAU President) / Arab Open University & University of Jordan
- Professor Marwan Obeidat (APETAU First Vice President) / The Hashemite University
- Dr Yaser Tamimi (APETAU Secretary) / The Hashemite University
- Dr Mohammed Hamdan (APETAU Treasurer) / The University of Jordan
- Dr Hanada Al-Masri / The Hashemite University

1.1. Forum Program

The Forum was arranged into two sessions as shown below.

1.1.1. First Session: Changing Roles of Foreign Literatures & Cultural Studies at Arab Universities

- **Chair:** Fuad Shaban (Petra University)
- **Rapporteur:** Tahrir Hamdi (Zaitouneh University; now at the Arab Open University – Jordan Branch)
- **Speakers:**
 - Mohammed Asfour (Sharjah University)
 - Mahmoud Kharbutli (Yarmouk University)
 - May Maalouf (Lebanese University)
 - Ibrahim Mumayiz (Hashemite University)
 - Marwan Obeidat (Hashemite University)

1.1.2. Second Session: Innovations & Experiences in TEFL in the Arab World

- **Chair:** Mohammad Farghal (Kuwait University)
- **Rapporteur:** Omar Atari (King Saud University; now at the University of Bahrain)
- **Speakers:**
 - Raghad Dweik (Palestine)
 - Najib El-Shehabi (Syria)
 - Hashim Noor (Saudi Arabia)
 - Majid Quran (Jordan)
 - Ibrahim Sallo (Iraq)
 - Abdallah Shunnaq (Jordan)

1.2. Forum Sessions: A Brief Account

1.2.1. First Session (Report prepared by Dr Tahrir Hamdi, Arab Open University – Jordan Branch)

"Arab scholars come and go, talking of Michelangelo and Edgar Allan Poe," quipped the Chairman of the first session, Fuad Shabaan, at APETAU's First Regional Forum.

Shabaan's opening remark seemed to set the stage for this session's proceedings, which focused on the "changing roles of foreign literatures and cultural studies at Arab universities." Shabaan argued that Arab professors have not adequately responded to present day challenges and proposed that Arab scholars need to be selective and teach works that reflect Western attitudes of superiority, thus allowing for a true analysis of imperialist intentions in the Western text. It is indeed a cultural war, added Shabaan, and our response must be strong and adequate enough to meet the challenge.

One way we can indeed meet that challenge, proposed Mohammad Asfour, is with academic excellence, which our English departments simply do not possess at a time of great technological advancement and globalization. We are not producing adequately equipped graduates to compete in a highly technologically-advanced job market. Our graduates lack the academic

excellence (especially in English language competency) and the knowledge that are required for survival in our global world. Asfour added that students need to be given the opportunity to explore global issues such as "human rights, democracy and terrorism" in order to build a necessary knowledge base and the required fluency to tackle such timely issues in our era of globalization.

Other speakers highlighted the importance of teaching culture as an integral part of any foreign literature program. Mahmoud Kharbutli argued that the surrounding tragic events have made it almost impossible to approach literature idealistically as the "domain of the classical trinity of beauty, truth and good" and necessarily must get into the realm of the cultural, however, without abandoning the basic role of foreign literature teaching as a basis for mutual cultural exchange and understanding. Ibrahim Mumayiz presented his paper entitled "Literature and Culture; Culture and Culture" in which he underscored the absolute necessity of not only studying the cultural background of any given literary work, but also identifying the shortcomings of that particular culture (regardless of its degree of "advancement") so as to serve the purposes of "objectivity." Cultures, argued Mumayiz, seen as a "universal, standardized human phenomenon," should extend themselves, rather than conflict with one another.

The conflict, however, as presented by Marwan Obeidat, is political and "not cultural or religious as some prefer to think." Obeidat said that the key is in "winning minds"—that is by teaching "them" (the rest of the world) about "us" (the Arab and Muslim world) and likewise by learning about "them," which can be most effectively done by encouraging American and European studies centers in the Arab world, education exchange programs, and intercultural and interfaith dialogues. Islamic-Christian conferences, for example, would provide a common ground for mutual understanding, especially when addressing the crucial political issue which is the foreign policy of the U.S. in the Middle East. By means of such dialogues, concluded Obeidat, we can "build bridges instead of walls."

Taking on a more confrontational stance, however, was May Maalouf, who advocated a post-colonial orientation in the teaching of foreign literatures. Maalouf proposed the foregrounding of oppositions such as "Self" and "Other" to enable the student to formulate a better understanding of the power dialectics in the Western text. Supremacy and domination are such basic ideological constructs in Western literature that the instructor need not be particularly selective in his search for them. Maalouf added that a more comparative approach, pitting the Western text (i.e. Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*) against its post-colonial counterpart (i.e. Jean Ryss's *Wide Sargasso Sea*), may prove to be a more fruitful endeavour for foreign literary study at Arab universities.

The final speaker, Tahrir Hamdi, emphasized the necessity of interrogating the Western text, arguing that texts make many suppositions, assumptions and draw conclusions that have the effect of maintaining an oppressive status quo. The unnatural, ideologically-motivated separation of literature from the world, culture and history can have devastating results upon the post-colonial subject.

Hamdi called for a shift from the "delicate" transmission of Western literature or a nation-centered canon to "terrible" learning or critique, thus allowing for a reversal or a radical inversion, especially at a time when our region is experiencing a cultural, political, economic and military invasion, whether under the guise of neo-colonial globalization or old-style colonial occupation.

After all the discussions and debates had ended, all were in complete agreement that we are now at a crossroads and that change is in order—but the question remains—in which direction should the winds of change be blowing? Should we build bridges or learn a historical lesson from Tareq bin Ziad and burn our boats?

1.2.2. Second Session (Report prepared by Professor Omar Atari of Bahrain University (formerly of King Saud University))

The Session Chairman Professor Mohammed Farghal opened up the session by offering his own envisionment of an all-encompassing framework for any debate on the multifarious concept of EFL. He numerated the following parameters:

1. Learners' Strategies.
2. Learners' motivation and attitudes.
3. Teacher's role.
4. The status and role of EFL in Arab university English departments.
5. Text material design.
6. Testing.
7. The role of translation in EFL and Translation studies.
8. Text linguistics and EFL.
9. EFL and globalization.
10. Variation in English.
11. ESP studies.

The first presentation offered by Raghad Dweik addressed the issue of introducing English in primary public schools. Dweik pointed to a lack of research to support this trend of introducing English in primary public schools. She stated that second language acquisition research shows that young learners manifest superiority to adults or older learners only in natural contexts where they have more chances of social interaction than their parents. Meanwhile, research results clearly show that older learners are superior in terms of their cognitive development and sophisticated study skills. Dweik pointed out that most young learners programs are far from working in optimal conditions. Finally, she stressed the need for carrying out solid research as well as getting feedback from similar young learners programs as prerequisites for any decisions to be taken regarding this matter.

The issue of the role and status of EFL in the Arab world was taken up by both Najib Shehabi and Ibrahim Sallo, albeit from two different perspectives. Shehabi talked about some TEFL innovations and experiences in Syrian schools

and universities. He traced the history of introducing English in the Syrian educational system and its later development into the university level. Shehabi pointed out that it was only a few years back that the teaching of English in Syrian schools had been done at the preparatory and secondary levels. Today, he stated, schools on all levels teach English. The introduction of English in primary schools in Syria has been a relatively recent accomplishment. This development in Shehabi's view is a reflection of the growing importance of English in the global arena, especially its fast growing role global trade, social development, economic growth, tourism and communication, especially the internet. Parallel to this recent development is the opening of private schools in Syria, namely AL-Shweifat, Montessori, and Little Village, which accord great attention to the teaching of English. Shehabi added that these private elementary schools as well as the public primary schools have very good teaching materials as well as highly trained teachers motivated by competition and good wages. At the college level, the teaching of English in Syrian universities has also witnessed some developments. Another important facet of the teaching of English Language in Syrian public schools is the attention given to the training of foreign language teachers. The Ministry of Education has recently greatly beefed up the budget of in-service training of English teachers.

Staying within the role and status of EFL, Sallo addressed the issue of EFL status in Iraq. He pointed out that the status of EFL in Iraq is that of a foreign language which has no internal communicative function. English is taught at both primary and secondary levels of education as a compulsory subject in itself with a minimum of six hours a week. Iraqi students are instructed in English for eight years from fifth year in primary school till the last year of their high school. In Iraq, ELT has become important because it is believed that most of the scientific literature is available in English. Moreover, candidates who apply for postgraduate studies have to pass a proficiency test in English conducted by the department of English in Iraq. Besides, Arabicization is accomplished by an emphasis on the role of English as a language of science and technology. Sallo pointed out, and rightly so, that unlike a second language situation, English in Iraq is not used in government, administrations, politics, law and trade. English is the medium of instruction in higher education only. Sallo added that although the used of English in Iraq does symbolize prestige and elitism, English is not used in publication except by one daily newspaper, and one journal published specially for foreigners. All in all Sallo asserted that TEFL in Iraq affords a window on the world of economic growth, advanced technology, applied sciences and a marker of climbing the socio-economic ladders, and its importance as a lingua franca.

The linkage between EFL and globalization as an issue of a compelling nature was addressed by Majed Al-Quran. Al-Quran drew attention to the interaction between globalization processes and TEFL the in Arab world. He delved into the potential outcomes of such interaction including the demands on the EFL specialists, teachers and policy-makers dictated by the compelling processes of globalization. He, thus, stressed the need to envisage the potential

requirements of adjustments to be undertaken in curriculum, program designs, teaching methodology, etc.

While these concerns were being threshed out, Hashim Noor chipped in to call for standardization of objectives and perhaps of philosophies of Arab university English developments. He drew attention to a lack of uniformity in curriculum objectives among the respective Arab university developments of English.

The proceeding debate on issues which could be classified as language planning issues, namely the role and status of EFL; standardization of objectives and curriculum has been quite adequately complemented by Abdallah Shunnaq's talk on the place and role of translation in Arab university English departments. Shunnaq attacked the role of translation as a technique in EFL, the place of translator-training programs. He drew attention to the prerequisite skills of translator trainees, namely L2 reading comprehension, which is more deliberate and demanding than that done by an ordinary reader. The linkage between reading comprehension and translating is indeed a very vital issue. The issue has been a real highlight.

Finally, Omar Atari's talk on the role of L2 writing and literacy in general added up another dimension to be reckoned within any debate on EFL as a multi-faced issue. While acknowledging the insights gained from empirical research findings on L2 writing, he called for steering research in another direction namely, L2 writing and its impact on the overall learner's foreign language acquisition.

2. SECOND REPORT: APETAU 2004 Board of Management Annual Meeting

APETAU Board of Management held its 2004 Annual meeting in APETAU Office/Amman on Sunday, 8th August 2004. The meeting was attended by eight (out of 13) members:

1. Lewis Mukattash , APETAU President
2. Marwan Obeidat, APETAU First Vice President
3. Samir Rammal, APETUA Vice President (Palestine)
4. May Maalouf, APETUA Vice President (Lebanon)
5. Hashim Noor, APETUA Vice President (Saudi Arabia)
6. Ibrahim Sallo, APETUA Vice President (Iraq)
7. Yaser Tamimi, APETAU Secretary & Publicity Officer
8. Mohammad Hamdan, APETAU Treasurer

Minutes in Brief

1. The Board endorsed the Annual Administrative Report as prepared by APETAU Secretary, Yaser Tamimi, a copy of which was subsequently sent to the Ministry of Culture in Amman.