

# **Internet-Assisted Language Learning (IALL) and Developing Arabic Proficiency**

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## **Abstract**

The field of TAFL (Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language) is in great need of pedagogical advancement that responds to the challenges of multiglossia and learner goals. Basic technology, such as the internet, is an untapped resource for such advancement and yet remains an uncomfortable domain for many Arabic language teachers. Resting on the assumption that encouraging students to take an active role outside of the classroom as autonomous learners facilitates and contributes towards proficiency, this paper proposes various ways that the internet can serve as a supplementary learning tool for intermediate and advanced Arabic language learners. It shows how various Arabic websites and other online programs can be pedagogically effective in developing all four proficiency skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking.

## **Introduction**

The internet today is an integral aspect of students' lives. Students surf the World Wide Web daily to communicate, gather information, listen to music or engage in other multimedia activities. University campuses provide students with access to remarkable high-speed connections through a local area network (LAN) that places students merely clicks away from an international arena of information, culture and, most importantly, language. The revolution that the internet can bring to second-language learning is still at its dawn; yet, the incorporation of the internet and technology into language classrooms has already had a considerable impact on language teaching in recent years. Creative language teachers are using this powerful medium to enhance language exposure and communication in and beyond the classroom.

With respect to the field of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language, teachers have made progress towards incorporating online Arabic resources into the classroom through exercises such as reading authentic Arabic materials taken from the web, listening to online news and accessing websites designed to aid learners; but the incorporation of the internet's maximum potential into pedagogy has been superficial.<sup>1</sup> It is imperative in this era of language teaching that Arabic language teachers explore further the possibilities that the internet can offer for learning situations. Therefore, this paper proposes ways for educators to maximize the prospects of what the internet can bring to learners. It is important that teachers, firstly, become aware themselves of its capabilities so that they can subsequently adequately encourage learners to engage the internet outside of the classroom, whether through homework assignments or supplementary activities.

To develop this proposal, I will expand and build on some of the ideas that Madhany presents in his recently published article, "Teaching Arabic with Technology, E-Mail, and the Internet." Whereas Madhany offers a brief introduction to the benefits of word-processing, emailing and using the internet, this paper additionally, at first, puts forth theoretical groundwork for the pedagogical role the internet can play, while also specifically focusing on the experience of the intermediate and advanced language learner. It describes how intermediate and advanced Arabic students, as autonomous language learners, can use online Arabic resources as an invaluable learning aid to practice, reinforce and develop proficiency language skills outside of the classroom. Also, to tackle one of the greatest challenges that students attaining higher levels of Arabic proficiency face—Arabic's extensive lexicon, this work concentrates on specific strategies that learners can adopt while using online resources to contribute to their vocabulary acquisition experience.

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<sup>1</sup> See Madhany (2006). Madhany discusses the teaching and learning values associated with using websites such as [www.SCOLA.org](http://www.SCOLA.org) and 'Aswat 'Arabiyya at [www.langqtss.library.emory.edu/arabic\\_listening](http://www.langqtss.library.emory.edu/arabic_listening) that host web-based programs that provide authentic Arabic materials for reading and listening.

## Learner Autonomy

Before going into greater depth about why the internet is relevant to language pedagogy, it is important to establish the theoretical groundwork from which we can better understand the efficacy of the internet. A primary assumption in this paper's proposal is the significant place *autonomy* holds in language learning. Little defines learner autonomy as "a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action" (1991, p. 4). It is also defined by Holec as the student's "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (1981, p. 3). The meaning of this term has greater implications than its tautological definition. Although no formal learning takes place without a student taking charge by actions such as registering for and attending classes, there are scales of learning. There is learning that happens in the classroom, through a textbook, through instruction, in a controlled environment that students are accustomed to but which may not cater to individual student needs. Then, there is a learning that happens outside of the classroom in which a learner functions within a self-created environment that caters to his individual needs and more importantly, challenges standard norms of how and when to learn. Holec develops this definition further to include student activities, such as determining objectives and selecting methods and techniques, to be part and parcel of "taking charge" (1981, p. 3).

Such a liberty does not always afford itself to every student in the classroom but can easily be exercised outside of the classroom. Autonomous learners in this sense learn independently and should also be taught *how* to learn. For example, learning how the internet can strengthen the process of developing Arabic proficiency is practicing learner autonomy. Moreover, a central concept to learner autonomy put forth by Hoven is one in which students develop "their" spaces for constructing knowledge by engaging in activities that are meaningful to them (1999, p.157). There is no reason then that the internet cannot function as a suitable platform from which to start practicing such autonomy.

Nation discusses the three crucial factors successful learner autonomy rests upon that will be contextualized below for the Arabic

learner. He describes them as *attitude*, “the need for the learner to want to take control and responsibility for learning”; *awareness*, “the need for the learner to be conscious of what approaches are being taken, to reflect on their efforts and to consider other approaches”; and finally *capability*, “the need for the learner to possess the skills and knowledge to be autonomous in a particular area of study” (2001, pp. 394-395).

Regarding the first concept of attitude and the question of why should learners take control and responsibility for their learning, there are several relevant reasons that clearly support the need for students, especially Arabic learners, to further build on their classroom learning experience. Firstly, there is a wide range of learner types in any typical language classroom that places a considerable burden on the teacher.<sup>2</sup> The ideal language teacher should be aware of these different learner types and accommodate them through her pedagogy. Yet, the reality is that even the most experienced teachers find it difficult to accommodate *all* learner types and needs. Learners whose needs are not fully met in the classroom should be encouraged to find appropriate avenues outside of the classroom that accommodate their learner style and strengthen their weaker skills.<sup>3</sup> Because one aspect of learner autonomy is learners’ assuming a proactive role in structuring and organizing their learning, teachers should assist learners in deciding which skills they need to give more attention to, what classroom materials they should like to re-evaluate, and how they can mentally process those materials in other ways.

Secondly, since the advent of the oral-proficiency movement and the shift of foreign language pedagogy towards communicative competence, a greater importance has been placed on teaching and emphasizing all four languages skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), *equally* in the classroom. With respect to Arabic learners, according to Batal, Arabic programs in the United States have generally paid far more attention to the teaching of reading and listening,

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<sup>2</sup> See Leaver (1998). In chapter 3, Leaver discusses teacher awareness of personality types and the different learner profiles and styles. The total number of the possible different learning style combinations is an astounding 400,000.

<sup>3</sup> For example, students of Arabic who struggle in their listening skills can be pointed towards programs such as ‘*Aswat ‘Arabiyya*’ where they can practice and develop their listening skills at their own pace and comfort.

the receptive skills, than to teaching the productive skills of speaking and writing (1995, p.115). This is primarily due to the unique challenge of diglossia, which the field of teaching Arabic has always faced and has still not managed to overcome pedagogically. Further, the speaking skills that do end up being taught and developed in the Arabic classroom are almost always of secondary discourse. This then poses a greater problem in that students desire primary discourse. A “discourse of familiarity among family and friends,” usually conducted in a regional dialect, does not emerge in the average Arabic classroom.<sup>4</sup> Irrespective of the register, for many students, speaking continues to be the most important goal for studying a foreign language. This is why the study-abroad programs are so invaluable. It is abroad, in the target language’s home, that students are finally pushed and forced into real-life situations where they have to speak and be understood. Yet, students should also not have to feel that their only prospects for speaking depend on traveling to the Middle East, befriending native speakers, or signing up for a language exchange partner on campus, all of which can turn into intimidating activities.

As we can see Arabic learners do face many challenges. A viable approach is to instill within students the *attitude* to take responsibility and control of enhancing their speaking skills, whether in primary or secondary discourse, and whether it is in or outside of the classroom. There is no reason why the internet is not a plausible recourse. Reputable language exchange programs exist online that enable students to have “live” conversations with native Arabic speakers. Once the attitude is fostered among students the second step is to then develop *awareness*, “the need for the learner to be conscious of what approaches are being taken, to reflect on their efforts and to consider other approaches.” Teachers of Arabic should be frank with students in discussing the various difficulties they will face in learning Arabic. We must familiarize our students with issues mentioned above such as diglossia and the need to find greater speaking opportunities, in order to create awareness among students that will thereby encourage them to practice successful learner autonomy.

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<sup>4</sup> See Ryding (2006). Ryding refers to this phenomenon as “Reverse Privileging.”

The last factor mentioned for successful learner autonomy is *capability*, “the need for the learner to possess the skills and knowledge to be autonomous in a particular area of study.” This brings us to the discussion of *who* is capable of browsing the Arabic internet. The enormous amount of Arabic material available on the internet, its vast and rapidly growing vocabulary, the various systems of Arabic transliteration used by native speakers, and the various multiglossia levels are the overwhelming realities of the Arabic internet. The internet could be intimidating and difficult to manage for beginner learners unless they are under guided assistance in a classroom setting or language lab. It seems that browsing and navigating the Arabic internet in Arabic is best suited for highly motivated intermediate and advanced Arabic students who have already attained a significant amount of vocabulary and reading fluency. This level of background is necessary for learners to effectively and productively engage with the internet. Other capability issues include having the nonlinguistic skills of sifting, synthesizing and evaluating text when dealing with the various Arabic materials students come across on the net.

Developing and practicing learner autonomy, without doubt, can lead to enhanced second language acquisition. Learner autonomy, then, has to be a fundamental component in intermediate and advanced Arabic students’ development towards general proficiency and, ultimately, native-like proficiency. In practicing learner autonomy, students move out of their individual comfort zones, participate productively in the learning process and carry the learning beyond immediate tasks (such as classroom assignments) to novel situations. The initial impetus, however, for students adapting such approaches to their learning experience lies with educators. This is why encouraging students to develop autonomy and to extend their student-centered learning outside of the classroom is argued by Hadley (2001) as a principle and priority in orienting instruction towards proficiency.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See pp 86-129.

### Why the Internet?

The internet offers a total dynamic experience. That is to say it has the ability to provide language learners with the opportunity to undertake and complete tasks in the target language using all four language skills. Learners can *read* articles, books (classical, medieval and contemporary) and news headlines; *listen* to news, poetry and music; *speak* with friends and language partners online; and also *write* personal emails or engage in synchronous online chat sessions. From a grammatical perspective, the internet is a resource that can instantly provide learners with authentic comprehensible input necessary for the development of grammatical competence.<sup>6</sup> From a psychological perspective, the internet reduces affective filters in that it is a low-anxiety, student-controlled environment. Students can browse subjects of their choice, read as much or as little as they want, enter and exit at their convenience; and there is no judging, grading or evaluation involved.<sup>7</sup> Other functional aspects of the internet include availability, visual aesthetics (students often complain about the colorless and pictureless nature of most Arabic materials) and economics (free for on-campus students, and many of the online resources require no registration fees).

Another major pedagogical motivation for bringing attention to the internet is the increasing societal demand for advanced second language learners who can function competently in a wide variety of public and professional contexts.<sup>8</sup> This creates a particular challenge for Arabic programs that face difficulty in producing Arabic language users whose Arabic resembles native-like speaker proficiency. Wahba (2006) further complicates this challenge by proposing that the aim of Arabic programs should be producing Arabic language users who are “completely functioning” rather than focusing on native speakers as such. When we begin to broach this level of competence we realize that the type of language performance advanced Arabic students need to aspire towards is not simply sophisticated grammatical com-

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<sup>6</sup> See Hinkel and Fotos (2002, pp.1-15)

<sup>7</sup> See Madhany (2006)

<sup>8</sup> See Byrnes (2002)

petence. Overall language performance involves linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. We desire Arabic learners who are “multicompetent” speakers able to perform a number of global tasks and engage in “real-world” activities.<sup>9</sup> Again, the major obstacle in achieving such competency is the neglect of teaching a dialect, alongside Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), that would enable learners to carry out various social functions. However, I will suggest here that activities such as sending/receiving emails and navigating and using Arabic websites, all of which can be carried out in MSA, should also be seen as critical skills in “real-world” activities. According to the Arabic ACTFL proficiency guidelines, a characteristic of the superior level speaker is one who can perform comfortably in most environments within the society.<sup>10</sup> The internet, too, is an increasingly growing environment within Arab society that should not be overlooked by teachers and students of Arabic. For example, Arab teenagers in many Middle Eastern countries turn to the internet to “hang out” in online chat forums where they freely discuss in Arabic topics such as religion, sex and politics in a totally uncensored environment.<sup>11</sup> Arab corporations, businesses, governments, universities, religious organizations and religious movements are also using the internet to conduct and manage their affairs in Arabic.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, we can not ignore the critical need for Arabic learners to develop cultural competence. Lafford defines cultural competence as “the ability to relate a second language to the psycho-socio-cultural reality in which it functions” (1997, 218). One could argue that the internet provides learners with the opportunity to facilitate their understanding of the various current social and psychological forces in the target culture and creates a comfortable context in which they can interpret the behavior of the target culture’s participants.

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<sup>9</sup> See Hadley (2001)

<sup>10</sup> See Allen (1989)

<sup>11</sup> See Noman and Helmi (2005). “Content and usage of Arabic Online Forums and Groups.”

[http://www.helmionline.com/internet/2005/10/web\\_content.html#more](http://www.helmionline.com/internet/2005/10/web_content.html#more)

<sup>12</sup> There are no studies to my knowledge that examine the diglossia varieties of Arabic emerging on the internet. The intra-language and “e-slang” used among native speakers on chat and forums are excellent research topics for discourse analysis studies on Arabic.



## Online Resources

Included in this section are a few examples of valuable online resources intended for intermediate to advanced Arabic learners, coupled with how learners can effectively use these sites to help develop the corresponding proficiency skills they seek.

*Reading:* The Arabic internet is the host to many high-quality websites containing authentic classical and contemporary Arabic literature. These websites are essentially virtual libraries. They carry hundreds of scanned books ranging in topics and genre periods. A very popular site such as [www.alwaraq.net](http://www.alwaraq.net) provides readers with access to full texts of classical and contemporary Arabic books. Topics include linguistics, history, philosophy, science, geography, literature and art. The website is well organized and easy to navigate. Of particular interest to second language learners is the general search engine that scans entire texts for specific words or phrases in Arabic. The simple task for users is to type in a word or phrase they want to read or research, such as *العزلة* or *التقدم*, and the website produces the following results: the total number of times the word appears in all of the books on the site, the number of books it appears in, the number of times the word appears in each individual book and its corresponding page numbers, the actual text and the book citations. Users can click on a specific book containing the word, and they will be brought to the specific pages on which the word appears. The site provides the complete sentence the word appears in while highlighting the selected word in red for reader convenience. This is particularly useful for learners who want to see how a particular vocabulary word is used in different literary contexts. This site also has online versions of major classical Arabic dictionaries, such as *lisān al-‘arab* and *tāj al-‘arūs*, which also come with their own built-in search engines by root. Students conducting research can save many trips to the library and avoid laborious efforts spent on finding a root entry in the multivolume and, at times, daunting hardback dictionaries.

Additional websites with similar contents and capabilities are [www.waqfeya.com](http://www.waqfeya.com), which allows users to download and print the books in PDF file form, and [www.adab.com](http://www.adab.com), which hosts the works of hundreds of classical and contemporary poets and also provides

audio-books of all poems. For reading current media Arabic, good websites include [www.bbc.co.uk/hiarabic/news/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/hiarabic/news/), [www.radiosawa.com](http://www.radiosawa.com), <http://www.ahram.org.eg/> and the website <http://www.arabtimes.com/links/paper.html>, which provides links to the majority of Arabic newspapers from each Arab country. Reading Arabic newspapers online can prove to be pedagogically enriching because it is interactive, colorful, and audio-visually stimulating.

*Listening:* The listening skill is a challenging Arabic skill to acquire and often the last one acquired by students. The process of listening acquisition involves training the ear to decipher lexical items and distinguish phonemes. Yet, its real challenge rests in fact that the fast-paced spoken Arabic that students meet outside of the classroom, in real-time, differs greatly from deliberated classroom Arabic. In tackling this gap through the internet, learners can accustom their ears to much longer pieces of listening input than limited classroom time can ever allow.

The majority of online Arabic listening resources are related to media Arabic and music. Excellent media Arabic sources are <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/news/>, <http://www.radiosawa.com>, [www.SCOLA.org](http://www.SCOLA.org) and <http://www.multilingualbooks.com/online-radio-arabic.html>. This last website is an excellent resource providing links to many Arabic radio stations from throughout the Arab World. Students can sample various regional dialects at the clicks of their fingers. These online radio stations host news, talk, information and music programs. 'Aṣwāt 'Arabiyya is a website designed specifically for second language learners that is located at [www.langqts.library.emory.edu/arabic\\_listening](http://www.langqts.library.emory.edu/arabic_listening). It, too, provides authentic listening material designed specifically to help learners improve their listening comprehension skills.<sup>13</sup>

Arabic music is an integral component of cultural production in the Middle East. For teachers, there are two compelling advantages to incorporating Arabic music into an Arabic curriculum. The first is that songs can serve as an effective means to help place the target language in its cultural context.<sup>14</sup> Current Arabic programs realize the criticality of building and developing cultural understanding—

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<sup>13</sup> See Madhany (2006) for more detailed discussion on 'Aṣwāt 'Arabiyya.

<sup>14</sup> See Suleiman (1990) for further discussion on integrating cultural contexts in the classroom.

pragmatic competency--among learners and are increasingly giving priority to this task by integrating various aspects of Arab culture and authentic content into the curriculum. Arabic learners, aside from teacher efforts, should be directed to assuming a more proactive role in engaging themselves with Arab culture through various mediums such as movies and songs.

The other advantage of listening to Arabic songs is that they are almost exclusively produced in regional dialects. Listening to songs, in and out of the classroom, serves as an excellent pedagogical tool for learners to familiarize themselves with characteristic features and markers of the dialects and their diverse lexicons. Arabic songs characteristically are quite repetitive, thus enabling learners to distinguish with ease dialect constructions and lexicon. One of the more popular and reliable websites for Arabic songs is [www.6arab.com](http://www.6arab.com). This site allows users to browse music by geographic regions. Other heavily visited Arabic music websites include [www.melodyhits.tv](http://www.melodyhits.tv) and [www.mazika.com](http://www.mazika.com).

A remarkable breakthrough in the internet world took place in February 2005 with the birth of the web-based application YouTube. YouTube of late has become a new American online cultural phenomenon. It is an online space for people to watch, share and comment on videos. The website [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) hosts more than 70 million videos on the site daily. Users can browse these millions of original videos uploaded by community members and share them with others. Registration is free and there are no complicated installation requirements. In a simple search I conducted by writing the word "Arabic," I came across 715,000 video results.<sup>15</sup> The content of Arabic videos on this site included the following: old and new Arabic music videos, Arabic television shows, religious lectures from famous contemporary Arab religious televangelists, Friday religious sermons, homemade videos and various Arabic language instruction videos. For Arabic learners, the various forms of stimulating audio and visual Arabic input on this website are endless, and learners can search in English and transliteration.

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<sup>15</sup> I conducted this search on Nov. 15th, 2008. Videos are added by the minute from users around the world.

As for Arabic movies, the website [www.copticweb.tv](http://www.copticweb.tv) provides access to Egyptian TV and complete Arabic movies from their movie library. This site has been especially popular since the recent debut of the controversial Egyptian film “The Yacubian Building,” a movie based on Alaa El Aswany’s best-selling novel that stirred up a great deal of controversy in the Middle East. The site hosts this movie in its entirety while requiring only easy-to-download media software.

*Speaking:* Arabic learners are in continuous search of innovative ways to practice speaking Arabic with native speakers as well as other students. Classroom time alone is not sufficient for students seeking to develop fluent speaking skills and is, for many, a high-anxiety environment that inhibits productivity. Natural fluency develops through practice, time and extensive and continuous interaction with native speakers of the target language. The ideal situation of studying and living abroad is not always a practical and feasible option for many students. Locally, student personalities can find it difficult to befriend native speakers in their respected communities and campuses. At times students also lack confidence in speaking because of issues such as self-image, pronunciation and fear of making grammatical mistakes. The internet, then, can be a safe and secure place for a diverse Arabic speaking experience for many students. It is less embarrassing to make mistakes in front of the computer, and, moreover, the control and power that the computer confers to the user reduces various other learner defenses.

One professional and well-organized program that gives users the opportunity to practice speaking with native speakers and other Arabic learners is Voicechat. It is offered at <http://www.unilang.org/> through UniLang, an online language community created by a nonprofit organization aiming to provide an open forum for people interested in learning languages. The website hosts a fairly reasonably sized Arabic section that offers general language resources, online grammar references, vocabulary lists, dictionaries and interactive vocabulary games. Logged-on users can chat live over a microphone with native speakers of Arabic and other Arabic learners. There is also a schedule posted where users can

check the date and time of Voicechat sessions and see who will be participating.<sup>16</sup>

Another excellent online speaking program is The MIXXER at <http://www.language-exchanges.org/>. This website is a free educational site for language learners and teachers to find a language partner for language exchange. Participants must specify the language they would like to offer as well their target language. The program that Mixxer language partners most commonly use to speak with one another is Skype, which allows people to call each other over the internet for free. It provides excellent sound quality and is available for downloading at [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com). On the MIXXER website, there are currently 23,038 registered members who are looking for language partners and 428 teachers looking for a language exchange for a class. Arabic learners can register with this program within minutes. Then they can find speaking partners with whom they can easily arrange appointments or communicate at random times depending on who is logged on.

*Writing:* As writing in Arabic, in its various forms of compositions, personal letters and e-mails, entails the most beneficial involvement for acquiring vocabulary, writing carries great importance for intermediate and advanced Arabic learners (Nation, 2001, p.71). An effective way for Arabic learners to practice writing on the internet is through sending and receiving Arabic e-mail and participating in online chatting. The benefits of asynchronous communication in second language learning, such as the benefit of learners' ability to

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<sup>16</sup>To run and use the Voicechat program from UniLang, users need to download the software TeamSpeak2, which is available for both Windows and Linux operating systems. All information for downloading and installing the program is provided on the UniLang website. A critical issue that arises with using the internet for a language exchange program is related to Arabic diglossia. There is no guarantee as to what dialect and register of Arabic a learner will encounter. More research and data needs to be collected from actual learners. On a positive note, this would be a "cold-turkey" activity for learners to find out themselves the various challenges involved in speaking with native speakers and to see how native speakers respond to MSA (for those learners using MSA). This experience may turn out to resemble similar situations students encounter when studying abroad in the Middle East and communicating with native speakers for the first time.

engage with the target language in a very familiar domain, have been extensively researched.<sup>17</sup> With respect to Arabic proficiency, mastering how to use an Arabic keyboard is also a crucial skill to develop as it is becoming part of the native-speaker skill-set. Native Arabic speakers, in and outside of the Arab world, are increasingly communicating with each other in Arabic over the internet by typing in Arabic. In his current research on the subject of teaching Arabic with technology, Madhany (2006) suggests the website [www.maktoob.com](http://www.maktoob.com) for sending and receiving Arabic-email. This website comes with a pop-up Arabic keyboard and is free of charge. This email provider is convenient and easy to use because it does not require an Arabized PC or Arabized software. Other email providers, however, such as [www.gmail.com](http://www.gmail.com), [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) and [www.hotmail.com](http://www.hotmail.com), are capable of sending and receiving Arabic emails on Arabized computers.

For online chatting, [www.gmail.com](http://www.gmail.com) allows users logged on the same time to chat with one another. This email provider is Arabic compatible and its Arabic interface enables users to compose Arabic messages from right to left. Online chatting is an interactive activity that Arabic students can be directed to undertake with their classmates outside of the classroom. A chat session with a fellow classmate, for example, makes for a convenient weekend homework assignment. Students can also be equipped with resources for fast online verb conjugating through websites such as <http://acon.baykal.be> to facilitate their learning experience during a live asynchronous chat session.

### Acquiring Vocabulary

Inevitably, the internet grants learners the opportunity to enrich and diversify how they use, retain and develop Arabic vocabulary. Learning vocabulary is a challenge Arabic learners face across proficiency levels and is an area of study that requires serious research and attention in TAFL discourse and pedagogy. Nation (2001) in *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* discusses fundamental concepts relating to what it means to *know* a word and methods of teach-

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<sup>17</sup> See Madhany (2004) and (2006) for information on how to Arabize computers and how to e-mail in Arabic.

ing vocabulary. Two of the optimal conditions for learning vocabulary that buttress this paper's proposal for using the internet are the psychological states of *noticing* and *negotiating*. These are states, I discuss below, that Arabic learners can experience while engaging language on the internet.

Learners "experience" these states in successful vocabulary learning events. As Nation describes, a learner experiences the following thought process while *noticing*: "while listening or reading, the learner notices a word is new or thinks 'I have seen that word before,' or thinks, 'that word is used differently from the ways I have seen it used before'" (2001, 64). While engaging language on the internet, it becomes obvious then that without awareness learners experience the state of *noticing*.

Moreover, to effectively learn a word one encounters, it is necessary for the learner to experience the state of *decontextualization*, in which the learner gives attention to the particular word as part of the language rather than as part of the message. This process involves *negotiating* the word's meaning. In Nation's work, studies show that words whose meanings and forms are *negotiated* by learners are more likely to be learnt than those words that are not negotiated (2001, 65). With this in mind, I present two on-line Arabic resources that can be used as vocabulary learning strategies in which a learner virtually *negotiates* a word. One strategy is to type the word in Arabic into the Arabic version of [www.google.com](http://www.google.com).<sup>18</sup> Google.com is a search engine that searches websites on the internet for the targeted word and lists the pages in which it appears. A helpful feature of the search results is that Google *highlights* the word in the texts. The importance of highlighting has been emphasized by researchers, who describe it as a feature of successful activities that create optimal vocabulary learning conditions. Users can then click on the various sites and read *in context* how the word is used in different contexts. Essentially, the search results provide learners with numerous example sentences. Example sentences of Arabic vocabulary items are a rare commodity for Arab-

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<sup>18</sup> To change Google search settings to Arabic you, go to Language Tools on the main search page and type in "Arabic" for the search options. Users can also specify the country they want to search websites from.

ic students as they are seldom presented in the Arabic materials used in the classrooms or in Arabic dictionaries.

Finally, another avenue learners can take to *negotiate* the meaning of a word is the website <http://arabiccorpus.byu.edu>. This website is maintained by Dilworth Parkinson from Brigham Young University. It allows word item searches from a large selection of Arabic corpora, including authentic data from newspapers, such as complete editions of Ahram and Hayat 1999, and Watan 2002; the Qur'an; novels; premodern literature and Egyptian colloquial corpora. Users can also identify the part of speech they are looking for. The search generates an overall summary of the results. This is an example summary for the word الهامة from this website:

word: AlhAmaQ  
search string: الهامة — AlhAmQ  
database: Ahram 1999  
search time: 7 seconds  
part of speech: noun  
search part of speech: noun  
total number of occurrences: 194  
1.18 instances of الهامة per 100,000 words in Ahram 1999.<sup>19</sup>

Learners can evaluate the frequency and importance of the word in various genres and also study word collocations. Under the option Citations, the word is displayed, highlighted in red and shown with the ten words before it and the ten words after it from the text. This makes for the perfect collocation focus activity. It also calculates the number of occurrences of the words that appear before it and after it. So for example, with the word الهامة, one sees that in ten instances the word “القضايا” appears before it and that the word “في” appears after it 28 times.<sup>20</sup> This information will help learners quickly learn what the important collocations are, if any, for many words. Students can

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<sup>19</sup> [www.arabiccorpora.byu.edu](http://www.arabiccorpora.byu.edu). String entered: الهامة.

<sup>20</sup> Due to a lack of space, I am unable to discuss the various interactive vocabulary games that are available online. On the site <http://home.unilang.org/main/index2.php>, students can master up to 400 beginning- to intermediate-level vocabulary items. This site is excellent for learning primary discourse vocabulary items that do not appear in works such as the *al-kitāb* series or EMSA volumes. Games include Memory and Hangman.



plug in vocabulary items from their class vocabulary lists and textbooks to enhance and facilitate the acquisition of that vocabulary.

### Conclusion

As we have seen, there is compelling evidence for the effective role the internet can play in developing the Arabic language learning experience for students. The internet is not simply a resource for reading and listening; it can also help students develop their speaking and writing skills. It is hoped that the strategies and proposals presented in this paper will serve as an introductory framework for educators to discuss and explore the endless possibilities of the internet and strengthening approaches to Arabic language acquisition. The field needs to supplement and develop the Arabic language acquisition experience for learners. Future research should be aimed at designing and presenting more web-based activities for learners as well as eliciting from students which web-based activities they are undertaking, if any, to enhance their learning experience. Mahmoud Abdalla remarks that “one of the crucial factors in success of learning a foreign language depends mainly on what the learners themselves bring to the learning situations” (2006,326). Learners today are equipped with limitless technological resources and, if directed, can bring a wealth of assets to learning situations. We as teachers can further encourage them to reflect on the resources they have taken advantage of while responding to and managing their learning experiences. There is no doubt that the generations of internet babies are excellent candidates for assuming dynamic, productive and proactive roles in shaping their own language learning experiences and thereby shaping second-language acquisition pedagogy.

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