

## Arabic to Where?

**Panel Moderator: Rajaa Chouairi, The U.S. Military Academy, West Point**

**Panelists:**

**Mahdi Alish, The U.S. Military Academy, West Point**

**Leslie McLoughlin, University of Exeter, United Kingdom**

**Karin Ryding, Georgetown University**

**Munther Younes, Cornell University**

**Rajaa:** When we teach any language we are really teaching literacy. I mean by literacy an entity, not in its classical definition that has been taught to us, which is reading and writing only. We teach people to become literate in a foreign language, that is our goal. Through this literacy, other entities and domains will follow, such as literature, music, folklore, tales, television, radio, movies, even buying tomatoes in the market. In one word, we become communicative in the language. But what is this literacy? Are orality and its tradition literacy? Are folklore and tales that people tell their grandchildren in the evening of a wintry night a form of literacy? Is watching the Rahbani brothers and Fairuz singing to the Holy land a form of literacy? Yes, all of these events are literacy events. We cannot speak of literacy without speaking of the oral tradition that makes all of us call it as such. Are we in our academic institutions being true to this concept of literacy? Are we really graduating people in Arabic after so many years who are effective, efficient or eloquent enough users of the language to fit this definition?

This has to be seriously questioned. Four of the most eminent Arabists are among us, and they will each state their opinions about this dilemma. There will be contradictions. Some believe in teaching both varieties, the spoken and the classical al-Fusha. Some may believe in a different formula.

(To the panel) Let us start with one agreement, just for the sake of the panel, even though you may not agree: let us not call classical Arabic MSA (Modern Standard Arabic), let us call it El Fusha. Let us also not call the spoken variety a dialect because: is it one? Many dialectologists are too quick to call a spoken language a dialect. To call a language a dialect I believe it must achieve a status of vernacularity toward standard spoken mother language. This is where questions arise. Spoken Arabic, if it were a dialect, in reference to what spoken language? Classical Arabic is not a spoken variety anywhere.

I foresee five main problems Arabic pedagogues have to face in the formulation of curriculum and lesson plans and in the establishment of Arabic programs.

1. There has not been any adequate ethnographic research or study conducted on classical Arabic and its usage or spoken Arabic and its usage in the Arab World. In reality Arab language pedagogues observed Arab systems and how they worked in schools in the Middle East and tried to apply them in the curriculum in the United States and the west.
2. Classical Arabic does not fully reflect all the literacy practices in the Middle East.

3. Classical Arabic is a constructed language with a constructed, conscious grammar that cannot be spoken in daily fluent speech.
4. Arabic pedagogues are teaching language—competence or a beautiful form of language that makes no sense.
5. Applied Linguistics is dominating language teaching and instead of taking the classroom to the field, it is taking the language to the lab.

Please welcome our distinguished panel. Each panelist will read his/her paper, then we will follow with a period of questions and discussion. I will be running the panel and the discussion. First in the order of speaking is Dr. Karin Ryding, Professor Emerita at Georgetown University; then Dr. Mahdi Alosh, USMA West Point; then Professor Leslie Mcloughlin, University of Exeter, England; and then Dr. Munther Younes, Cornell University. Thank you so much.

[The following conversation took place after presentation of the four panelists' papers, which – in somewhat modified form – precede this transcription.]

**Rajaa:** Mahdi, do you mean by continuum that classical Arabic is able to handle literary ideas and functions more efficiently than spoken language?

**Mahdi:** Any continuum is based on how Arabic is used by native speakers. As you may know, the first Arabic of a native person is the one acquired at home. Colloquial is the first language, and standard Arabic is acquired through school, but by the time the student is an adult and speaks as an adult, this student has already a system. On the one hand is standard Arabic, the learned Arabic; on the other hand, there is the spoken language that they picked up naturally. But you find that very few people use either extreme; they mix and match. There are many factors and variables in this equation, but if we integrate also age, gender, education, economic status, etc... all these of these things play into the model and create even finer distinctions. So my spontaneous speech is determined by whom I am speaking to, about what, in which circumstance, the topics, if the speaking is between family members or if people are from the same speaking community. Arabs have this ability to accommodate. I was in Morocco two years ago [Dr. Alosh is Syrian], and I did not have a problem with anyone: cab drivers, salesman, etc., because they accommodate, they use the forms they know....

**Rajaa:** So are you suggesting that in every discourse used by native or non-native speakers, there is always a mixture and people always speak in a continuum?

**Mahdi:** Yes, this is the characteristic of the linguistic performance of native speakers.

**Rajaa:** OK. In this case, let me ask you about native speakers. Let's go to literary work and take a song by Fairuz. In which song by Fairuz do you witness both varieties on a continuum?

**Mahdi:** I don't know the name of a specific song. It appears that... yes, it happens all the time.

**Someone shouting from the audience:** A song is not a conversation, Dr. Chouairi.

**Rajaa:** Please, if you have any remark or question in the audience, write it down and we will address them later. But I will answer this remark: OK, let us take a passage from a realistic play and not a song. Let's take a conversation from a play of the

Rahbani brothers, Dureid Laham, or Muhammad al-Maghout. Can you name a passage where you would see a continuum in the usage?

**Mahdi:** This is the point. As educators we are not here to replicate the native speaker process in the classroom, because we cannot: this is beyond our means. I would like to give my students the ability to pick up the whole process, so to speak, without going overseas. But this is impossible. But we know that there are now opportunities for students who are Americans to go overseas and learn this very quickly. In fact, a couple of students talked to me through email; they said: "In fact, we have learned only al Fusha [in class], but we did not have a problem." After three weeks, they were able to communicate with everybody, including with the members of the families with whom they were living.

**Rajaa:** Would any one of the other three panelists like to ask Dr. Alish something on this point? Munther, would you like to ?

**Munther:** Yes, very briefly, on the continuum issue. I think Arabic is different from other languages, and I have heard German mentioned twice here. [to Rajaa] You and I had a conversation about German; you probably know more about it than I do. In Arabic, no one, no speech community consisting of two people or more, converses in Fusha, meaning MSA.... German, on the other hand, *hoch deutsch*, is used by a community of speakers. This is a very important distinction, so when we talk about a continuum in Arabic, it is different than in other foreign languages where it would be a natural continuum. In Arabic there is a qualitative jump when conversing in al Fusha that is different from other languages; probably Arabic is unique and this would be my response...

**Rajaa:** Leslie would you like to answer that?

**Leslie:** I am a speaker of English and have spent a long time learning a language and also teaching it. I am very lucky my career was made of decades of teaching the language so I am very familiar with the problems that arise. This question of the continuum is absolutely fundamental. The end result of all these years that I spent teaching Arabic is to say that right now, in 2009, we are absolutely perfectly ready to face these problems especially since we all have analyzed in our different ways the nature of these problems, and we all have been involved in teaching methods that are varied and efficient. It is so fantastic that we can reach today these rather complicated objectives such as: How do you manage to teach the dialect plus al-fusha within the constraints of time that we have in the classroom? How can we do it? We do it by using all the technological means available to us today. Before I came to New York, I looked up "Arabic language" on Wikipedia, and I was amazed at the excellent information I came up with. One page leads to another, and you can discover and follow exactly what is happening in the Arab world today, to the extent that you could see how Arabic has evolved and how technology makes a major difference in this domain. For example, young Arabs send text messages these days using an abbreviated form of Arabic. So that's one thing which is available nowadays, the technology... The point I am trying to make is that the way in which we can use technology can lead to a positive change in the teaching of Arabic, so there is no contradiction between what we find on a continuum. I am convinced this is true.

**Rajaa:** I personally still don't see a continuum, and I have had major discussions with Mahdi about that. Mahdi, would you like to answer this before we take another question?

**Mahdi:** There is one point that one of the audience members raised earlier. Certain kinds of languages are considered communicative, and others are not. Munther has said also that, yes, people will speak fusha, but this is probably not communication. Now technology has changed many things: if you want, there are several satellite TV stations that feature call-in programs, and they receive calls from all the Arab world and Europe and the U.S., and when someone uses his own dialect, what does the host of the program say?: "Use standard Arabic, please..."

**Person from the audience:** Yes, because it is the language of the newspapers that even the cab driver can understand.

**Mahdi:** Yes.

**Rajaa:** OK, Mahdi. Thank you so much. Next question to Professor Ryding. Educated Spoken Arabic, could it be formalized? Wasn't it – and isn't it – a form of code switching when it was first observed among educated people using both varieties: spoken and al-Fusha? In other words, can we standardize this form in order to organize it and teach it through a curriculum? Or does this code switching happen so spontaneously and erratically that one cannot standardize it?

**Karin:** First of all, the continuum is very real, I think. Code switching is real, and as I said before, Formal Spoken Arabic or Educated Spoken Arabic is not simply dropping Fusha words into a dialect context. It is a strategy that native speakers know how to use. And you ask if there is a way one can describe it (standardize it): yes. But you can only describe the core features that all Arabs share, such as **شاف, راح**. Charles Ferguson, in his 1959 article on Arabic Koine, made a list of fourteen features that he noted are shared by most Arabs, and these are still close to what we see shared among urban vernaculars. So when you have formal educated spoken Arabic, it naturally has a flavor of where the person is from. So there is a Levantine, an Egyptian, a North African, etc... but it is much easier to understand each other when you can accommodate each other. I have the experience... I told you... I learned Lebanese Arabic, but informally, and I thought, "If I know Lebanese Arabic, I could go to Tunisia and speak Lebanese Arabic." No, they wouldn't take it from me... they just laughed.

**Rajaa:** I have a lot of questions from the audience. One of them: Dr Alish, how would you relate to the fact that as Arab native speakers, we feel weird if we converse in classical standard Arabic (al-fusha)? How can you set a curriculum using such a variety?

**Mahdi:** This is a great question. First of all, Arabs do not feel weird when they speak standard Arabic, it depends on the context. If I were standing outside this room and conversing with other Arabic speakers in standard Arabic, that would be weird, but if I were here lecturing in standard Arabic... I use standard Arabic all the time, OK? It is said that Egyptians use Egyptian Arabic for everything, but that is not really true. I was at the American University in Cairo to run a four-day (8-4 p.m. everyday) training, but because it was a training for formal situations, all twenty-four professors and teacher, all female, they used pure, perfect standard Arabic. So that is a myth

about Egyptian Arabs. They do use standard Arabic when the situation allows. But once we break, I use my Syrian Arabic, and they use their Egyptian Arabic.

**Rajaa:** I have a question related to this one. You're an educated Arabic speaker, and I am an educated Arabic speaker, and we are close friends. We have spoken about very high subject matter such as philosophy, music, and politics. Have we ever spoken in classical Arabic?

**Mahdi:** Not in classical Arabic, but if you transcribe what you say – because [to the audience] he likes to talk also about poetry and philosophy – if you transcribe his speech, most of it would be standard; of course, it is colored by his Lebanese Arabic, but most of the structures, most of the words are very high flung language.

A person in the audience: Dr. Alish, the fact that you are friends and in a social context, you still have to use colloquial only.

**Rajaa:** To Professor McLoughlin, a question from the audience: Would the professor add to his list of myths about Arabic that most educated Arabs do not believe that non-Arabs can rarely achieve any high proficiency? (Laughter over the complication of the question).

**Leslie:** I don't understand the question.

**Rajaa:** Neither do I.

**Leslie:** There is a myth that you cannot expect non-Arabs to achieve good and correct pronunciation, etc. This is quite a common belief, but to come to the question of can foreigners reach a really high level of proficiency? I can only say I have seen many, many foreigners from many nationalities achieve a very high standard. There was a conference in Cairo in 1996, a conference about problems of translation for Egypt as a state, and they invited speakers from all over Europe – in fact all over the world – and when the conference began, it was announced that there were two languages, English and Arabic. And I made the point that since we all knew Arabic, why didn't we all just speak in Arabic? The language of the conference became Arabic. The best speaker of Arabic was a young Finn. Yes, it is perfectly possible for a foreigner to acquire a very high level of Arabic. We tend to overcomplicate problems of conveying high level knowledge to our students. Somebody here said yesterday that we underestimate how clever our students are. Our students can sort out these problems and figure out how native speakers behave and communicate. They sort out that if somebody is using dialect and then uses something close to Fusha, that is something natural they can cope with. I have seen this so often I can give you a couple of examples from my own experience of seeing the language in action. It was at Number 10 Downing Street with Mrs. Thatcher, and we had a very senior visitor from what I could only call an Arab country, and the interpretations were in English-Arabic and Arabic-English. On the British side, at a table like this, was Mrs. Thatcher in the middle, and all along here were foreign officials, all of whom knew Arabic to a very high standard. The visitor was speaking clearly to me. He was speaking in something which was closer to his own dialect, it was a kind of standard Arabic, but it had features of his own dialect, and the key thing is this: he was stating in colloquial: *إِذَا مَا* which means "if not," while in classical Arabic it could also mean "if" (followed by a pronoun). And I knew, as the interpreter, what he meant. One of the native English speakers said to

the speaker in Arabic: “Do you mean ‘if’ or ‘if not?’” And the visitor was astonished at the question, because a native speaker has all these internalized. It is perfectly possible to convey that level of knowledge to our university students.

**Rajaa:** A follow-up question to that is: How many of you would hire non-Arab speakers to teach your classes?

**Leslie:** We’ve just hired one.

**Mahdi:** There are several. In fact, one of my students is now a professor at the University of Tennessee. When he speaks, he speaks just like an Arab. You can’t distinguish.

**Rajaa:** I have a question for all of us from an audience member. I think they are going to shoot all of us five here, since we, all five, do teach or speak Levantine Arabic. The question says, “There are 100 million people who speak Egyptian spoken language; why not get rid of Levantine Arabic?” [loud laughter] Anyone want to tackle what is the merit of Levantine Arabic in school? Karin, I heard you last year say something beautiful about this subject, would you like to answer?

**Karin:** I would say, based on my experience as supervisor at the State Department and training diplomats, I would say the core Levantine base for what we call Educated Spoken is the easiest type of Arabic to travel. I would say Jordanian Arabic as a base is easily understood all over the world, and that’s the basis on which I wrote my two books. I also think Egyptian travels well. But whichever base you choose, it should be a central one – that is, geographically central – and then that is adjustable as you move around. Any of you gentlemen like to respond to this?

**Mahdi:** In Arabic, it is not a problem. Dialect is part of Arabic. So Levantine, Egyptian, Moroccan are all the same. They have the same status. But, if we turn the situation around or try to replicate it in the classroom, that would create problems. It would be like a moving target: what is it that we are teaching? You mention Levantine Jordanian and Egyptian, but as a program, we don’t know what to teach. Why should we select one of them? It doesn’t make sense to me.

**Leslie:** One point about Levantine Arabic. The danger of people like us, especially the non-native speakers of Arabic, is to quote from our own experiences. We naturally do so, and I could be accused of simply extrapolating from the fact that I learned Arabic in Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and then used Arabic ever since. This is not the case. The reason why I would advocate the use of Levantine Arabic is because of the situation today: the Levantine Arabic is much more widely known today than it even was ten years ago, because of Satellite television. Again, you can’t overestimate the focus on Levantine Arabic on the Satellite stations. It just so happens that these days, the best soap operas are in Levantine Arabic. They are fantastic.

**Rajaa:** One question to Dr. Younes. How can you explain the fact that American Arabs who acquired colloquial Arabic cannot understand Fusha?

**Munther:** Well, I guess it depends on the degree of the exposure and language. In the Arab world, it is not a problem because you are exposed to TV and are allowed to hear classical Arabic. Here it is just a matter of restrictions. We have a lot of these Arab heritage learners who come into the classroom, and it doesn’t really take much time before they can start relating forms that they are familiar with from dialect – Lebanese, Syrian – and see the shared features with Al Fusha.

**From the audience:** I do believe in the integrated model approach that Dr. Younes and Professor McLoughlin take. It is a solution to the dilemma. It represents the reality in the Arab countries. This is the way we use the language. Why is there a problem?

**Rajaa:** We have time for two or three more questions, lady from audience... Allow me to interject here. At West Point, we pride ourselves with a very strong Arabic program. We use very successfully *Allan wa Sallan*. We do not drown in the issues of textbooks. I fully agree there are some books out there that are limited, but in general, Arabic books are very good. *Allan wa Sallan* has a wide variety of functional topics. We do teach colloquial at West Point. In a matter of a month or two, our students acquire it due to a very strong base in classical Arabic. So I am not going to take sides on issues of books.

**Question from the audience:** I want to go back to the conversation using you [to Mahdi and Rajaa], two friends talking about poetry and philosophy. If an observer was in that room listening to your conversation and thought it would be nice to transcribe it for posterity or for publication, would it be transcribed into classical Arabic? Would it be changed? It would not be transcribed just as you said it.

**Rajaa:** You are right. Let us not take the United States as a barometer of what's going on in Arabic today. In Beirut today, there are some major literary schools and phenomena happening in the spoken variety that you keep erroneously calling dialect. Since the advent of great literary clubs such as the cenacle libanais الندوة اللبنانية that hosted and promoted people like Salah Labaki, Michel Trad, Said Akl, Taha Hussein, Nizar Qabbani Andre Gide, Leopold Senghor, etc., and the great Arabic literary renaissance at the beginning of last century, major literary work has been written in the spoken variety. Said Akl and the Rahbani brothers, possibly the top classicist (using al-fusha classical variety) poets in the Arab World, chose to use the spoken variety for all their theatre and the bulk of their poetry. What does it tell us?\* The most influential plays, the most effective poetry, have been in spoken variety and written as such, using the Arabic alphabet. Today, in Beirut, the German Cultural Center is doing fascinating research and publishing extensively about this topic.

[To the other panelists] Any of you would like to make a quick comment?

**Munther:** Someone just wrote a book six or seven years ago, her name is Niloofar Haeri, and the book is *Sacred Language, Ordinary People*. She cites an interview with Hosni Mubarak [president of Egypt], a two-hour interview only in Egyptian Arabic, but the following day it was printed in the newspaper, and every word was changed; it was all changed, and she writes extensively about that. She writes about the power of the language and al Fusha.

\* One famous incident happened in Egypt and was related to me personally by Said Akl himself. Many years ago, in the first half of the twentieth century, Abd al-Wahab (famous Egyptian composer) loved a great poem by al-Akhtal al-Saghir Beshara al-Khoury. Yet the poem, which was in classical Arabic, proved difficult to put to music, and they needed it for a movie. So they hired a local colloquial Egyptian poet who sat with al-Khoury and transferred the great poem written by the Lebanese poet into an Egyptian poem that became known throughout the Arab World as: يا ورد مين يشتريك.

**Rajaa:** The newspaper *Tishrin* in Damascus had an interview with Ziad Rahbani two months ago, and Ziad Rahbani is known to speak spontaneously, he says something very funny and the Arab world loves him. The interviewer stated to him that, by law, they had to translate the conversation into classical Arabic. Ziad was upset and could have cancelled the interview, which he did not. What was very impressive was that the Syrian journalist acknowledged that by transcribing this conversation, 30-40% of the meaning was lost! [To someone in the audience] Do you have a question?

**One person from audience:** We are still discussing the same thing over and over. I was here last year, and I see we are discussing the same question. How can we try to make rules for Egyptian vernacular, Moroccan vernacular, Levantine vernacular?

**Rajaa:** You have four experts in the field of Arabic right here. I give you from now till tomorrow morning to get them to agree on one curriculum.

**Same person from audience:** Okay, well can we agree on one thing. We want to talk in Arabic together, some of us are from different Arab countries, are we going to speak the standard Arabic?

**Munther:** No, no, no...

**Karin:** No, we can't say that exactly.

**Mahdi:** It depends.

**Karin:** We would have to adjust...

**Mahdi:** It depends. You are going to adjust to each other. If we want to communicate with each other, sometimes we have to use the standard Arabic...

[Audience shouting.]

**Rajaa:** [to a Sudanese professor in the audience addressing him in Levantine Arabic with his Zahle accent] When I speak to you, what do you use: Classical Arabic?!

يا عمي لما بحكي معك, بشو بحكي؟ بالفصحح؟!

[Audience noise, laughter, and loud discussion.]

**Rajaa:** Excuse me, Mahdi has a point to make.

**Mahdi:** It depends on the context. Last June, we had the first Arabic conference for teaching Arabic as a foreign language at De Paul University. I wrote in the invitations that the language of the conference was exclusively Arabic, but which Arabic? It's formal Arabic. It is the Arabic we call *fasih*, which is close to *Fusha*. So, it worked perfectly, nothing went wrong and everyone was on the same page.

**Rajaa:** Leslie has an answer, ladies and gentlemen.

**Leslie:** I'm afraid I am very simple-minded. I'm concerned with teaching the language, and the answer for all these complications is that we make it clear to the students there are occasions for *Fusha* that are normally academic, media, etc. We don't make a big issue out of this, this is perfectly normal, the *al fusha* is appropriate to certain types of function. I don't see a problem with this. We underestimate the student [when we see it as a problem]. We have only to make it clear to them from day one that there are various registers in Arabic, and our teaching throughout the courses should reflect that. I don't see a problem at all, because, as I said, I am very simple-minded. But I can give you a couple of examples of the complication of what happens. When I did my master's in linguistics, I focused on the issues that have been raised here. What happens when somebody gives an address in colloquial and the newspa-

per has to put it in al fusha? I made this my dissertation. So I knew a certain amount about this forty years ago. And what happens in practice is really what we have been talking about this morning. There are all kinds of possibilities; that some journals simply could not convey what Ziad Rahbani was saying and others could. So what's the surprise in that?

**Rajaa:** The surprise is that ... I told you the story yesterday of Fouad al-Bustani [one of the pioneers of Arabic language in the 20th century] when he could not tell his students how to say in classical Arabic the expression: *وز عينك يا قمر*! I do have recorded conversations with Nizar Qabbani, Omar abu Richeh, Said Akl, and the Rahbani brothers; you are talking here about the top people who wrote classical poetry in the Arab world. These conversations are from the television and seen all over. What is very interesting is that the discussion on the poetry was done in the spoken variety, not in Al Fusha although the topic was in Al Fusha. Taha Hussein himself realized this, and he tried to tackle this subject, but he had major political issues in Egypt that he had to deal with, and he was very frustrated (he was criticized because he thought that Egyptian Arabic should be used in literary work the way Levantine was being used in Lebanon). I don't think that the nature of discourse is really any longer determining the nature of the language on the speaking end. I do see a lot of lectures in the Arab world, and a lot of them are done in spoken Arabic. Parliamentarians, when they speak, they start the first few minutes in Al Fusha, then they slip into spoken language.

**Karin:** I agree with you, Rajaa, as an outsider, I see this all the time. I just think we have to understand that al-Fusha is okay if you have a script. If you don't have a script, what is your spontaneous language?

**Mahdi:** No, no. I was invited to the University of Maryland four or five years ago to participate in a conference where this issue came up in discussions of the training of diplomats to use Arabic. I collected and analyzed all kinds of interviews including one with Ambassador Ross, Christopher Ross. He speaks Arabic better than Arabs because his classical Arabic is top notch, and also he can perform at the vernacular level. According to the government [ILR] scale he may be a 5, perfect. But I also brought in an interview on television, very spontaneous, with the American attaché in Damascus, discussing everyday things including music military bands visits to and from the U.S. He used standard Arabic but he peppered it – the standard format – with Syrian Arabic words he picked up. Of course, when you compare the two [interviews], there is no comparison. One was 1+, the other was 5, but for public diplomacy that 1+ that has the combination of standard and some colloquial was also okay for a diplomat to reach that level. But for people, you mention Mubarak: look at how the public in Egypt and outside Egypt react to a president speaking in the low variety of language. They love it... He was charismatic. The way language has a political/ideological role in the Arabic world, you cannot ignore that. Standard Arabic is still viewed by most Arabs as the language to be taught. Somebody raised the issue of whose language is closer to Fusha.

**Leslie:** I mentioned that in the context of the myth, and it is sadly the case that some of these myths are still used. You have been touching now on the issues of lan-

guage which are absolutely vital in the situation we are in today, and especially in the U.S. and its diplomatic efforts. The gentleman that you mentioned, Christopher Ross, he learned his Arabic where I learned mine, the British school in Lebanon, and as you say, he acquired an excellent level in both spoken and fusha. He was also the guest on an Al-Jazeera program in which he spoke for ten minutes in fusha about the American approach in 2001 to the Arab and Islamic world. It was an absolutely crucial incident in the relationship with the Arabic and Islamic world. He spoke ten minutes in Arabic on American policy; in excellent Arabic. In the course of that ten minutes, he didn't mention Palestine once while he read his piece. Naturally, one of the hosts said to him, "Thank you, but you didn't mention the word Palestine," and Ross said to them in Arabic, "This is irrelevant." The next day, number two to Osama bin Laden put out a video saying, "If this is the extent of American knowledge of the situation we are in, they are unable to see the significance of Palestine." I quote that as an example to show that language is absolutely crucial.

**Rajaa:** Let us wrap it up. Very briefly please.

**Leslie:** Delighted to have this opportunity, and I would like to emphasize that for me, the ideal of teaching the kind of students we have, like university students, is from day one a combined approach of dialect with knowledge of fusha – with the condition that we explain to the students in the first hour all these registers of Arabic.

**Karin:** I agree with Dr McLoughlin. What I would like to see is more integration in approaching the teaching of Arabic and teaching discourse skills: the thing that Arabs know how to do naturally, not just dialect and fusha, but what it is that happens and how to do that. We need discourse analysis. We need to have much more information about how Arabs really speak to each other on various occasions; we don't have the documentation. We have a lot of ideas, myths, and feelings about it, but we don't have the documentation. We really need the research.

**Mahdi:** In my case, in fact I would encourage everybody to make the distinction between a native speaker in Arabic and what he does, and a language program for non-native speakers. This is a completely different game, and we have to play it well. While I follow and agree with you about discourse and communicative ability, the way I do it is basing everything in the textbooks on language function. What is it that we do to the language and with the language in order to convey meaning, regardless of the code? I am not concerned with the code, the language we use, and Dr. Younes has mentioned that about 90% of the words used in his textbook are shared between both varieties. So why don't we concentrate on this aspect of Arabic that is shared in order to train our students to perform language functions that would propel them very quickly up the scale, because every student one day will go through the oral proficiency interview.

**Munther:** One of my favorite stories is called "The Emperor's New Clothes"; some of you have heard the proverb. The issue is very simple, but it is very common for us in the profession to close our eyes and not look at the real issue. I think we need to take off the Emperor's clothes and see him naked and see... We don't need to keep pretending and beating around the bush, as the issue is very simple: students need to speak and they need to read Arabic, they need spoken Arabic and written Arabic.

**Rajaa:** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you. I give sometimes the impression that I am for one or another, but I am not. I am a classicist, but I still feel we waste a lot of time in our curriculum. What variety is needed? I still have a problem with calling the spoken language variety a dialect. It is not, because it does not emanate from a functionally spoken language. It is a variety. Arabic has two varieties, a spoken one and a classical one called al-Fusha, and some of the greatest literary works that have appeared in the last 30-40 years have appeared in both varieties, not in one exclusively or in one more than the other.