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### **The Language Scholar Journal**

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The Language Scholar Journal is published by the Leeds Centre for Excellence in Language Teaching.

ISSN: 2398-8509

The Language Scholar Platform: <http://languagescholar.leeds.ac.uk/>

# Intercultural communicative competency in an age of globalization: using technology in teaching the Arabic language as culture

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**Key words:** TAFL, intercultural, technology, culture, Arabic

Given the rising interest and enrolment figures in Arabic language teaching programmes, the new global technological and security concerns, and the recent shift in understanding the importance of teaching culture in foreign language pedagogy, there has been an inexplicable lack of scholarship on the integration of culture and technology in the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language. Likewise, research into appropriate web-based tools that address the unique cultural context of the Arabic language and into creative teaching materials that can support the integration of culture and technology in the Arabic teaching classroom is lacking too. Existing scholarship on these topics also tends in many cases to be theoretically based and does not explain exactly how to create intercultural communicative competence through experientially embracing the changing world of technological communication in the target culture. A significant part of this everyday communication takes place in colloquial Arabic rather than MSA. However, despite the extensive scholarship on the issue of diglossia and the integration of colloquial Arabic alongside MSA in the Arabic curriculum, there is limited research into effective methods of employing colloquial Arabic in cultural training within the Arabic classroom. If such an employment and integration does not happen, Arabic learners will find it difficult to reach a true intercultural communicative competence.

This paper will look at possible ways the above issues could be resolved by employing certain technological forms of communication and cultural products in the ever-changing contexts of language use. Such a new way of teaching Arabic would require integrating the various discussions and scholarship on the teaching of Arabic, breaking existing boundaries, and promoting a new re-defined role for the Arabic teacher, as well as an increasingly innovative, experiential, and student-centred use of technology, curriculum and web-based tools that could support these changes.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to examine the pragmatic possibilities of using technology in the teaching and learning of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in Arabic: both on the analytical level, as ICC is a concept that has been taken up recently by some Arabic teachers and scholars as a guiding light amongst the many debates besetting the relatively new field of Arabic pedagogy; and on the practical level by suggesting, in the second half of the article, much needed interactive and student-centred activities for successfully realizing the theories on achieving ICC. These activities -- with clear learning outcomes and assessment criteria but also enough student autonomy to allow for explorative collaboration with technological media within communities of practice -- were 'interacted' by students at the UK campus of Queen's University of Canada, called the BISC, where one of the authors was in charge of the creation and teaching of all aspects of the Arabic programme, integrating both formal and spoken Levantine Arabic, and including a large experiential cultural component. The curriculum that the intercultural activities formed a large part of had a clear vision of the role of culture in the teaching and learning of Arabic; the quantity and quality of the cultural elements inside and outside of the classroom; the ratios of time devoted to the teaching of culture and language, written and spoken texts, and traditional and modern culture; the planned interaction of learners with instructional content and technology; and the processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives. The curriculum and activities are ideally suited for a full-time undergraduate beginning Arabic course where the teacher is prepared to apply a theme-based approach designed for a small-medium class size, 'as a means of systematically linking and articulating levels of instruction, as well as providing thematic coherence'.<sup>1</sup> These limitations facilitate the Arabic learner's engagement in meaningful ICC activities through the use of instructional technology employing authentic texts that allow for theme-based/content-based

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<sup>1</sup> Karin Ryding, *Teaching and Learning Arabic as a Foreign Language: A Guide for Teachers* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013), p. 60.

'communication and empathy with native and non-native speakers of Arabic through the formation of communities of practice online and in blended learning situations'. Such an interactive, student-centred, and self-reflexive approach to teaching Arabic language and culture reduces affective filters and fosters an atmosphere of 'mutual respect' that can be 'motivating, fulfilling, and, above all, effective' in learning to create, and perceive, meaning from various viewpoints.<sup>2 3</sup>

The teaching and learning of Arabic has received a great deal of attention recently and can be seen, itself, symbolically as a guiding light and test for our age of uncertain globalization and rapidly advancing technology. Arabic has recently been reported as 'crucial to the UK's future'<sup>4</sup> and as the fastest growing language in the US.<sup>5</sup> It is also one of the most popular languages to learn today, with enrollments in both UK and US higher education (HE) increasing faster than any other language.<sup>6 7</sup> What is, perhaps, most striking about the teaching and learning of Arabic is that it has become, in a sense, a barometer measuring the success of the humanist project of globalization and technological progress in fostering intercultural understanding. Karin C. Ryding, one of the foremost Arabic linguists and experts on pedagogy, describes the soaring interest in the language as intimately connected with the interdiscursive globalization that drives its popularity:

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<sup>2</sup> Vance Stevens, 'Learner Strategies at the Interface: Computer-Assisted Language Learning Meets Computer-Mediated Communication', in Kassem M. Wahba *et al.*, eds., *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Ryding, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> Teresa Tinsley and Cathryn Board, 'Languages for the Future: which languages the UK needs most and why', (2013), 22-23 <<https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/languages-for-the-future-report.pdf>> [accessed 20 April 2017].

<sup>5</sup> Dailymail.com Reporter, 'Arabic is now the fastest-growing language in the U.S.', *Mailonline* (2015), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3261972/Arabic-fastest-growing-language-U-S-1-million-Americans-speaking-home.html> [accessed 18 April 2017].

<sup>6</sup> 'Arabic language studies booming in the US', *ICEF Monitor* (2014), <http://monitor.icef.com/2014/12/arabic-language-studies-booming-us> [accessed 28 March 2017].

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp, 'Arabic: more accessible than you think', British Council (2014), <<https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/arabic-more-accessible-you-think>> [accessed 12 April 2017].

an interconnected world with ever-increasing international links and interests, as well as key economic and political concerns at the global level, have raised the public profile of Arabic language and literature, Arab society and culture and the Arab world in general.<sup>8</sup>

It is with high intercultural hopes that learners look to the Arabic language (a third of HE learners in the US choose it because of a liking of, or interest in, the Arab world/culture/history).<sup>9</sup> According to the British Council, Arabic has been identified as a priority language in many interculturally intensive areas, from business to international relations and diplomacy to international education strategy. And yet, the teaching of Arabic language and culture still has one of 'the greatest gaps' in terms of 'very little representation in UK education systems'. Globally, 'the Middle East and Africa are amongst the fastest growing regions in terms of internet use'.<sup>10</sup> Internet usage in Arabic is increasing,<sup>11</sup> especially in the spoken vernacular form not usually written but which is now commonly being used in online chat (almost 50% of online chat on Facebook is in dialect).<sup>12</sup> Increasing digital Arabic content, especially in vernacular, is important for global development:

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<sup>8</sup> Ryding, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> 'Arabic language studies booming in the US', *ICEF Monitor* (2014).

<sup>10</sup> Teresa Tinsley and Cathryn Board, 'Languages for the Future: Which Languages the UK Needs Most and Why' (2014), 19-23 <<https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/languages-for-the-future-report-v3.pdf>> [accessed 20 April 2017].

<sup>11</sup> 'Internet Usage in the Middle East'. Internet World Stats. Miniwatts Marketing Group (2017) <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm> [accessed 18 April 2017].

<sup>12</sup> Ahlem Chelghoum, 'Social Network Sites and Arabic Diglossia Between Threatening Modern Standard Arabic and Strengthening Colloquial Arabic', *International Journal of Language and Linguistics, Special Issue: New Trends in Arabic Sociolinguistics* (Vol. 5, No. 3-1, 2017) <<http://article.sciencepublishinggroup.com/pdf/10.11648.j.ijll.s.2017050301.15.pdf>> [accessed 18 April 2017], pp. 36-43.

[V]ernacular is one of the reasons that mobile phones have spread so fast [in the Arab-speaking world]: the main applications (voice and text messages) are offered in the language that is most relevant to their users.<sup>13</sup>

And yet, today most HE programmes in the UK and US still don't even teach this variety of Arabic. As Arabic linguist Munther Younes states, '[students enrolled in Arabic] would like to be able to speak with Arabs, converse with them, understand them [. . .] If you want to converse with Arabs, you have to converse in a language they communicate with' -- a vernacular or dialect.<sup>14</sup> Can it be that most curricula in Arabic language and culture, in a technological age of globalization, still haven't addressed this problem? Curricula in Arabic language and culture still exhibit a 'scarcity of web tools that specifically address the particularities of Arabic language, namely, its diglossic nature and its use of a non-Latin alphabet', and there is a 'shortage of well-designed and innovative teaching materials' that use technology to teach Arabic language and culture in its different registers.<sup>15</sup> Mahmoud Al-Batal, who, like Younes, has pioneered a controversial approach to integrating instruction of the formal written variety of the language (known as MSA) with the spoken dialects, recently stated that the vast majority of Arabic learners come to the language 'because they are interested in learning about the Other', suggesting that there is still a great need for intercultural in addition to merely linguistic communication in Arabic. 'The diffusion of satellite television [. . .] is breaking down the firewall between MSA and the dialects', Al-Batal points out, but new pragmatic technological approaches and activities

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<sup>13</sup> Chris Vein, 'Why Increasing Digital Arabic Content is Key for Global Development'. *The Guardian* (28 April 2014) <<https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2014/apr/28/global-development-digital-arabic-content>> [accessed 17 April 2017].

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Redden, 'Shifting Winds in Arabic Teaching', *Inside Higher Education* (2008) <<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/10/01/arabic>> [accessed 17 March 2017].

<sup>15</sup> Mohammed Husni Mohammed Tamimi, 'Teaching Culture in Arabic: Perspectives on the Use of Blended Learning and Hypermedia' (The University of Arizona, 2014), p. 16.

for the teaching of Arabic language and culture in both its registers is not forthcoming in a manner to match such global realities.<sup>16</sup>

There still persist serious obstacles to the teaching of ICC in Arabic: Ryding observes that teachers and scholars encounter difficulties inspiring 'appreciation' and 'respect' for Arabic culture, and there are 'issues of teaching for content and intercultural understanding in a world where Middle Eastern countries are often portrayed in terms of their opposition to Western interests and values'.<sup>17</sup> ICC in Arabic seems to be intrinsically linked to issues of globalization but apparently not always able to surmount obstacles preventing its practical realization in the world we live in. Many of these obstacles could, possibly, be related to problems inherent in how globalization is being carried out, that is, not with a commitment to pragmatic intercultural understanding, as described by Daniel Yankelovich:

Some argue that globalization reduces the importance of regional and local differences. But there is no evidence that globalization is having such effects. The world remains fractionalized, even polarized. Ethnic, racial, national and religious divisions may be growing even more important, not less.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, some of these obstacles could be related to how curricula in Arabic language and culture have not yet sufficiently adopted a pragmatic outlook that takes advantage of technological and globalizing realities in a practical, interactive activities-based manner. Such an outlook would bring about an authentic self-reflexive understanding of 'the value of everyday socio-pragmatics, creativity, and aesthetics' within Arabic language and culture on

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<sup>16</sup> Francesca Paris, 'Al-Batal Speaks at the College on the Future of Arabic Pedagogy', *The Williams Record* (8 March 2017), <<http://williamsrecord.com/2017/03/08/al-batal-speaks-at-the-college-on-the-future-of-arabic-pedagogy/>> [accessed 20 April 2017].

<sup>17</sup> Ryding, p. 219.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Yankelovich, 'Ferment and Change: Higher education in 2015', *The Chronicle Review, Chronicle of Higher Education*, (November 25, 2005), <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i14b00601.htm> [accessed 28 December 2015].

the learners' part. Further, this kind of understanding would foster intercultural communication and unity, because it would help learners 'integrate language, behavior, and appreciation of difference' as it is interacted in the actual globalized world.<sup>19</sup> This would allow Arabic language and culture to really create the interdiscursive linkages of globalized coherence and development associated with the recent profound interest in the language. The simple fact is that Arabic has not yet been fully able to show what it can do in the way of intercultural communication on the global technological level; a great deal of the hype about the language has been on the theoretical level, and until qualified Arabic teachers create more practical, innovative, activities-based materials and approaches to the teaching of language and culture, Arabic will never fully realize its potential as the language of successful intercultural global development. As Younes has told us, the actual conversation with Arabs in their spoken dialect bringing about such development has only just recently begun. The reality is that, for example:

less than 1% of total global online content is in Arabic and less than 0.2% of global digital content is hosted in the Middle East and North Africa, although native Arabic speakers represent about 4.5% of the world population.<sup>20</sup>

This means that in terms of actual communication, in the real activity-based everyday world employing technology, intercultural globalized communication from different viewpoints with Arabic native-speakers has been greatly under-realized. 'And still MSA is taught almost as if it were another language, with no application in the real world', Al-Batal reminds us.<sup>21</sup> Still what is lacking in many curricula in Arabic language and culture is 'developing [learners'] ability to make and grasp meaning from multiple perspectives' within an

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<sup>19</sup> Ryding, p. 220.

<sup>20</sup> Chris Vein, 'Why Increasing Digital Arabic Content is Key for Global Development'.

<sup>21</sup> Francesca Paris, 'Al-Batal Speaks at the College on the Future of Arabic Pedagogy', *The Williams Record* (8 March 2017).

interdiscursive globalized communication.<sup>22</sup> This article's pragmatic analysis and student-centred, interactive activities based in interdiscursive globalized communities of practice address obstacles to the potential of Arabic language and culture to bring our world closer together. In addition to the lack of scholarship on the topics of both the teaching of culture and the use of technology in Arabic pedagogy, examples of activities employing the innovative use of technology to teach ICC in Arabic are desperately needed. This article hopes to contribute in addressing these gaps in scholarship.

The reformulation of language and culture along new lines as ICC was first set forth by Michael Byram: 'Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role'.<sup>23</sup> Earlier, Meinert Meyer defined ICC as part of a broader foreign speaker competence, in terms of 'the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of a foreign culture'.<sup>24</sup> Based on Meyer's definition, Byram states that ICC entails, in addition to an exchange of information, also 'the ability to decentre and take up the other's perspective on their own culture, anticipating, and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behavior'.<sup>25</sup> Importantly, Byram analyses ICC interdiscursively through various discourse systems: 'knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups. These values are part of one's social identities'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ryding, pp. 219-20.

<sup>23</sup> Tamimi, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> Tamimi, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Tamimi, p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Byram, *et al.*, *Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching: A Practical Introduction for Teachers* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2002) p. 7.

The teaching of ICC cannot be separated from the use of technology. Online learning (including video/audio of authentic linguistic and cultural sources available online on advanced platforms facilitating student-centred learning), Web 2.0, social media, blended learning, and mobile devices have made it not realistic to develop curricula teaching ICC without employing technology. The suggested activities in the following section stress the essential link between technology and ICC in Arabic in today's globalized world. They demonstrate the interactive and interdiscursive nature of ICC: technology allows the learner to 'actively collaborate [...] with the medium to construct knowledge,' and to 'focus on the information that is relevant for the acquisition of the knowledge and skills chosen'—in constructing and revising ICC mental models that help them explain and communicate with the outside globalized world.<sup>27 28 29</sup>

## **PRACTICAL STUDENT-CENTRED ACTIVITIES FOR ACHIEVING ICC USING TECHNOLOGY**

### **Overcoming primordialist assumptions using learner background knowledge in laying the groundwork for ICC**

One of the most difficult initial impediments for learners of Arabic language and culture on their journey towards ICC is what can be termed the primordialist or essentialist approach to culture. The primordialist approach to culture can be illustrated by the remark an Arabic learner once made on Valentine's Day to a native Arabic speaker, in response to a discussion about marriage customs and celebrations in the Levant: 'Oh, you are in your Middle-Eastern world; that's why you didn't know today is Valentine's Day'. As is perhaps

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<sup>27</sup> G. Dor & N. Seel, 'Instructional Delivery Systems and Multimedia Environments', in S. Dijkstra *et al.* eds., *Instructional Design International Perspective, volume 2: Solving Instructional Design Problems* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), pp. 145-183.

<sup>28</sup> S. Dijkstra, 'Educational Technology and Media', in *Instructional Design International Perspective, volume 2: Solving Instructional Design Problems*, pp. 137-143.

<sup>29</sup> Waheed Samy, 'Instructional Media and Learning Arabic', in Kassem M. Wahba *et al.*, eds., *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 264.

well-known, this is not a realistic assumption by the learner, especially as very few people are not aware of Valentine's Day around the world, and the celebration of this holiday often gets carried to much further extremes in the Middle East than in Western culture. The primordialist view of culture exists on the part of some people in all cultures. This learner apparently, unrealistically, chose to see 'Middle-Eastern culture' as inaccessible and in opposition to Western customs and values, as an extreme 'Other'. She exhibited a level of ICC that Robert Hanvey in his four-stage paradigm for measuring cross-cultural awareness describes as the lowest, 'Level 1: Information about the culture may consist of superficial or visible traits, such as isolated facts or stereotypes. The individual very likely sees the culture as odd, bizarre, and exotic. Ideas are often expressed in terms of what the culture lacks'.<sup>30</sup> Some portrayals in the media work within the territory of such primordialist interpretations exhibiting a low level of proficiency in cultural understanding and cross-cultural awareness. However, Scollon *et al.* argue that a heuristic approach to intercultural communication embedded within discourse systems or communities of practice available through global technologies are ultimately 'maps designed to help us navigate the territory of human communication, not the territory itself'. These heuristic maps have the 'analytic power and flexibility' to,

[get] us away from the idea that intercultural communication always has something to do with people from different countries or, even worse, people of different ethnicities communicating (or, as is usually assumed, miscommunicating).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hadley, p. 355.

<sup>31</sup> Ron Scollon, Suzanne B. K. Scollon, and Rodney H. Jones, *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach* (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), p. 4.

This view, expressed by the learner on Valentine's Day, demonstrates that she was unable to experience what Claire Kramersch, a foremost authority on the interdiscursive teaching of ICC, calls 'the symbolic dimension of intercultural competence'<sup>32</sup>.

The above situation of mis-communication is a perfect example of the role of discourse in symbolically constituting and creating culture:

Our culture is now subjectivity and history; and is constructed and upheld by the stories we tell and the various discourses that give meaning to our lives. By defining culture as discourse, we are looking at the interculturally competent individual as a symbolic self that is constituted by symbolic systems like language, as well as by systems of thought and their symbolic power.<sup>33</sup>

In the example of the Valentine's Day learner, the opportunity of interculturally communicating in a symbolically rich manner capable of interdiscursively connecting the lives of two people within an instance of self-reflexive and sympathetic understanding of the complex meaning in everyday life was, unfortunately, missed.

It is perhaps worth noting that the Valentine's Day learner was not a student of language and culture at the BISC, and was learning the Arabic language on a purely linguistic level divorced from its cultural background. At the BISC, globalized technologies allowed Arabic learners to experience within the span of a few weeks interdiscursive experiential learning activities in Arab cooking/dining, Arabic calligraphy, and Levantine dance; as well as to communicate with instructors of these activities and with other native-speakers with similar

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<sup>32</sup> Kramersch, Claire, 'The symbolic dimensions of the intercultural', *Language Teaching*, 44 (2010), pp 354-367 <doi:10.1017/S0261444810000431> (p. 360).

<sup>33</sup> Kramersch (2010), p. 356.

interests within communities of practice over the internet or on social media. Soon after, the learners were able to participate in a London evening of Arabic karaoke illustrating the cooking/dining, calligraphy and dance artistic forms. Then, in a further student-centred approach, the learners practiced the karaoke songs sung on their way home or in their free time. Later, employing themes, information and language from the above ICC learning experiences, group skits were created and staged by students (and filmed by the teacher). Content-based instruction (CBI) was built into the twin themes of the course (food/music), 'as a means of systematically linking and articulating levels of instruction, as well as providing thematic coherence'. These CBI approaches comprised of: task-based assignments, reintroducing content to make learners aware of demands and reduce any negative affect, comprehensible input as well as guessing at meaning. They included the theme-based techniques of 'recycling texts, rereading, and repeated exposure to strengthen acquisition'.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most gifted learners in the beginning module of Arabic language and culture at the BISC provides an example of how Arabic teachers can use technology interdiscursively in a student-centred approach, in conjunction with learner background knowledge and interests, to reduce the effects of primordialist views of culture. This learner seemed to also have a somewhat predetermined and fixed idea of Arabic 'culture', exhibiting little interest in the intercultural activities, which were a required part of the course. He was so gifted in languages that Arabic was just another conquest among several other languages he had mastered. As this learner loved music, especially Western hip hop, it was agreed that he would focus more on the musical aspect of the twin Arabic music/food theme of the course. After encountering the Arabic pop song, *sahharouni-l-leil* سهروني الليل عيونك (راغب علامة), *ouyunak* by Ragheb Alamah during the module's intercultural experiential field study at a

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<sup>34</sup> Ryding, pp. 59-60.

karaoke bar in London, this learner downloaded the video of it from Youtube onto his Ipad and, after a complete translation of the song's lyrics into English was provided to him, he proceeded to learn the entire song by memory. This learner had fallen in love with the song as well as its video, and he became very interested in Arabic music in general, even blogging and communicating about this interest on the internet and on social media in communities of practice. Later, he elected to film himself singing the song from memory as part of the ICC component of the module. This incorporated preview and follow-up review learning activities. During most of the interactive experience, the learner had full student-centred control of the technological media used and when and at what pace the learning took place.

Almost every learner has his or her own individual 'gateway' of interest(s) in learning Arabic language and culture, through an artistic or aesthetic creation, a practice, or a product. Therefore, it is important to provide learners with the 'intellectual scope needed to begin comparing cultural values', employing 'the humanities framework that should inform Arabic teaching', by exposing them to a broad 'network of human creations' they can choose from. It is especially through this approach that learners can become interculturally aware of the previously mentioned 'value of everyday socio-pragmatics, creativity, and aesthetics, and how understanding these helps a learner to integrate language, behavior, and *appreciation of difference*', that Ryding stresses is missing from many curricula in Arabic language and culture (italics mine).<sup>35</sup> Teachers will find that 'appreciation of difference' connects learners with native-speakers of other cultures interdiscursively, and difference often transforms into an interculturally shared discourse or discourse system, thereby transcending the usual borders of 'culture'. Even though the learner of the karaoke song initially appreciated that Arabic pop music was, in many respects, very different from the Western music he loved,

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<sup>35</sup> Ryding, p. 220.

his deepening appreciation and love of Arabic music transformed this 'different' music into 'his' music, as interculturally part of the music he loves. This example is, therefore, one of true intercultural and interdiscursive understanding. In fact, when this learner was encountered practicing his song as he walked between classes, because of the way he was enjoying and getting into the music, it could have been that he was listening to his favorite Western hip hop song. This is an inspiring pedagogical example of how, within an age of globalization, we can interdiscursively, using technology in attaining intercultural understanding, heal the fragmentation and sense of separation that still afflicts our world. In this example, through technology, the focus on, and collaboration with, the discourse system of music serves as a mental model of constructing ICC that also 'explain[s] to the learner what [he/she] perceive[s] from the outside world.'<sup>36</sup> This model can later be applied to other interdiscursive forms of ICC in increasing globalized understanding.

### **Overview of ICC activities at the BISC**

At the BISC's Arabic programme, the authors started designing the cultural component according to what can be described as the four F's approach (folk dances, festivals, fairs, and food), as delineated by Alice Omaggio Hadley.<sup>37</sup> They then began to adapt the reach of this approach to compare cultural values in more depth. They were guided in creating this integral part of the course by the principle that 'the world of Arab cultural practices and products, institutions, aesthetics, and values' can be most fruitfully incorporated within an Arabic language curriculum,

if it is taught within and around a network of human creations: things that are spoken, written, woven, drawn, built, chanted, broadcast, carved, designed, or sung.

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<sup>36</sup> Waheed Samy, 'Instructional Media and Learning Arabic', in *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 264.

<sup>37</sup> Alice Omaggio Hadley, *Teaching Language in Context* (Boston: Heinle, 2001), pp. 345-6.

Or those things that are connected to judgement or feeling: what is laughed about, cherished, worshipped, admired, disliked, feared, popular, taboo, desired, or awe-inspiring.<sup>38</sup>

In short: culture is best taught through the employment of a network of various discourse systems or communities of practice. That is why the curriculum of Arabic language and culture was designed around the twin themes/discourse systems of 'food and music', incorporating a wide network of cultural models, traditions, behaviors, values, and products, all revolving around the perspective of the marginalized discourses of women in the Middle East, a perspective that both male and female learners could relate to self-reflexively and empathetically based on the lives of women in their own cultures.<sup>39</sup>

Around this focus of perspective a 'kind of multilayered but coherent interdisciplinarity' incorporating many discourse systems was achieved to help students understand meaning from various perspectives, and connect Arabic language and culture in meaningful and innovative ways. In the following activities, both formal and informal approaches to culture, not only using MSA but also everyday dialect (Levantine) as it is created through interaction and inter-discourse situations, were incorporated, with the aim of allowing the students to experience the richness of the Arabic collective consciousness and the relationship between the Arabic oral and written traditions.<sup>40</sup> For example, in teaching about cultural products of the Arab world, food preparation and leisure activities were employed in the form of a dinner that was prepared by the students from a recipe they had researched earlier watching online cooking programmes in Arabic aired from Dubai. The students also actively

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<sup>38</sup> Ryding, p. 220.

<sup>39</sup> Howard L. Nostrand, 'Empathy for a Second Culture: Motivations and Techniques.' In G. A. Jarvis, ed., *Responding to New Realities. ACTFL, Foreign Language Education Series*, vol. 5 (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 1974) p. 277.

<sup>40</sup>Ryding, p. 225.

participated in the community of practice on one of the Dubai chef's Facebook page using the food-related Arabic vocabulary they had learned as part of the food preparation activity. The students were asked to take screen shots of the conversations they were involved in and hand them in for assessment. In conjunction with the food/dining activity, calligraphy and Dabke<sup>41</sup> Levantine dance workshops were held as experiential field studies for this module to complement the cooking experience, as all are part of a complex, symbolic, interactive system of cultural artistry and expression, operating interdiscursively on linguistic, visual, musical, entertainment, and other levels. These activities allowed the learner to actively collaborate with technological media in constructing models of ICC through the use of online video/audio and engagement with communities of practice.

During the cooking and dining experience, the learners were required to use both colloquial and MSA, followed by a viewing of a film in colloquial Arabic recapitulating linguistic and cultural material already learned. This experience allowed the learners to use Arabic in both a functional and cultural framework enjoyable for them.<sup>42</sup> Vocabulary that was used during the food preparation and dining experience was grouped into semantic clusters with cross-cultural differences in meaning and cultural significance between apparently equivalent vocabulary being made clear to the learners both through explanation and direct experience during the preparation and dining.<sup>43</sup> Some of these new words were actively employed in the online conversations the students 'interacted' in with followers of the Dubai chef's Facebook page as part of the experience of becoming members of an Arabic-speaking cultural community of practice in building ICC. The food/dining activity was designed with the teaching and learning objective of fostering ICC at a level of proficiency corresponding to what Hanvey describes as the second stage of his paradigm for measuring cross-cultural

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<sup>41</sup> Dabke is a folk dance that is particularly performed in weddings and happy celebrations across the Levant.

<sup>42</sup> Hadley, p. 378.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 377.

awareness, 'Level II: Learners at this stage focus on expanded knowledge about the culture in terms of both significant and subtle traits that contrast with those of their own culture'.<sup>44</sup>

In order to stress that 'the two aspects of culture—practices and products—are not separate [. . .] [but] are [rather] interwoven with each other through language, and can be a vital part of the Arabic language classroom', two important linked activities were also integrated into the language instruction of the beginning Arabic class.<sup>45</sup> First, selected pop music videos about various social aspects of women's lives and identity were watched on Youtube, discussed and analyzed by the class. These videos included Fairuz's علموني *allamouni* and قديش كان في ناس *addesh kaan fii naas*, Nancy Ajram's إحساس جديد *ihsaas jdeed* and ماشي حدي *maashi haddi*, and Haifa Wehbe's أنا هيفا *ana haifa*. Following that, the learners chose to sing the lyrics of some of the songs they liked most in a karaoke bar in London as well as in the classroom, thus contextualizing the products (songs) within a cultural practice of social interaction (after some student-centred practice). The music videos and karaoke activities were designed with the teaching and learning objective of fostering ICC at a level of proficiency corresponding to what Hanvey describes as the third stage of his paradigm for measuring cross-cultural awareness, 'Level III: At this stage, the individual begins to accept the culture at an intellectual level, and thus the culture becomes believable because it can be explained. The individual can see things in terms of the target culture's frame of reference'.<sup>46</sup>

In the second part of the linked activity, group skits were created and staged by learners (and filmed by the teacher) employing themes, information and language from all the above

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<sup>44</sup> Hadley, p. 355.

<sup>45</sup> Ryding, p. 225.

<sup>46</sup> Hadley, p. 355.

ICC learning experiences, including the food/dining, music videos and karaoke activities.

The skits were expected to:

incorporate knowledge of sociopragmatics: 'Values, beliefs, traditions, customs, norms, rituals, symbols, taboos, deportment, etiquette, attire, and time concepts [...] which are often the source of expectations regarding behavior, such as gestures, body language, physical distance between speakers, and deference due to status, age, and gender'.<sup>47</sup>

A preview and follow-up activity were part of the group skit ICC learning experience. The follow-up activity consisted of watching the video of the skit several times and analyzing whether, in addition to accuracy of language, gestures and other cultural features – eye contact, forms of respect, customary social distance, etc. -- learned in various preview activities (including the dinner and Arabic film) were adhered to in the groups skits.

Finally, in assessing the learners' intercultural competence, a portfolio was assigned to be turned in at the end of each semester. Portfolios can develop learners' ability to engage in research, explore and reflect on their own culture as well as Arabic culture. Portfolios 'are amongst the few appropriate alternatives to traditional classroom achievement assessment'.<sup>48</sup> For example, one of the tasks assigned through the cultural portfolio was a set of three Skype and Adobe Connect web conferencing (audio and video) conversations between the class members and native Arabic-speaking volunteers, in which the learners were asked to discuss certain topics appropriate to their proficiency level. These conversational sessions were recorded and later used for self-correction and analysis in

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<sup>47</sup> Ryding, p. 226.

<sup>48</sup> Renate A. Schultz, 'The Challenge of Assessing Cultural Understanding In The Context Of Foreign Language Instruction', *Foreign Language Annals*, 40.1 (2007), 8-26 (p. 18).

class. This interactive theme-based web conferencing activity was based on the recommendations of Kinginger *et al.* for intercultural communication taught through teleconferencing technology. The learners and native-speaking volunteers '[collaborated] on a set of parallel tasks and texts' so that learners could see aspects of Western and Arab culture in comparison.<sup>49</sup> The conversations focussed on comparing the lives and artistic expressions of women in the West and the Arab world as seen through multiple perspectives. Supplemental communication between the learners and the volunteers was accomplished through email in Arabic.

The above web conferencing activity dovetailed with a capstone year-end set of CBI activities revolving around authentic Arabic online video representations of various aspects of the lives of women in the Arab world from multiple viewpoints, employing both MSA and dialect: a television broadcast; a narrative on the gender media activism of Nawal El-Saadawi; and a Western media representation in English of Arab/Muslim women. The video narratives employed CBI approaches in fostering ICC. Copies of the three videos' transcripts, which can be recycled in more advanced stages of learning, were circulated to learners to be used in online communities of practice, blogs, and further web-conferencing on the same, or similar, theme.<sup>50</sup>

A written assignment that was also part of the cultural portfolio involved an activity which asked the learners to watch a video about a group of Syrian male and female university students relaxing at a café. The students spoke candidly using both simple Levantine Arabic and English, addressing a person filming them who seemed to be a foreigner with only a basic knowledge of spoken Arabic. They were from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds and expressed differing perspectives about their lives, ambitions, and

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<sup>49</sup> Hadley, p. 363.

<sup>50</sup> Ryding, p. 60.

discourses of interest and study. Learners taking part in this activity could self-reflexively examine the discourses of social interaction, gender relationships, ambitions and career interests, both as these affected the Syrian students and as they affect them from the perspective of their Western culture. In exploring the perspectives underlying the worldview of this social gathering and the practices enacted in it, the learners were being required to reflect on their own social beliefs, norms, and views of people from other cultures. This activity was guided by a set of five questions that, according to Kramersch, the “‘interculturally competent speaker’ asks and reflects upon’ in interdiscursively comprehending the various aspects of ‘the symbolic dimension of intercultural competence’.<sup>51</sup>

Not which words, but whose words are those? Whose discourse? Whose interests are being served by this text? What made these words possible and others impossible? How does the speaker position himself or herself? How does he or she frame the events talked about? What prior discourses does he or she draw on?<sup>52</sup>

Kramersch’s questions are similar in their interdiscursive reflection on context in the construction of cultural meaning to six instructional aims formulated by Ned H. Seelye, which also guided the activity and are summed up by him as, ‘we can help the student develop *interest* in *who* in the target culture did *what*, *where* and *when* and *why*’.<sup>53</sup> We are reminded of what Kramersch said about culture being involved with ‘subjectivity and historicity’.<sup>54</sup> ICC is interdiscursive in nature because ‘the role of discourse in constructing culture connects what is said to what is constructed in language.’ Therefore, ‘the role of discourse in forming our lives relates directly to issues of cross-cultural competence and the

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<sup>51</sup> Claire Kramersch, ‘The symbolic dimensions of the intercultural’, *Language Teaching*, 44 (2010), pp 354-367 doi:10.1017/S0261444810000431.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>53</sup> Ned H. Seelye, *Teaching Culture: Strategies of Intercultural Communication* (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 1993), pp. 30-31.

<sup>54</sup> Kramersch, p. 356.

depth of meaning contained in our daily practices of communication'.<sup>55</sup> These theoretical formulations drawing from leading critics in the field of ICC informed all the interdiscursive activities suggested in this article. They also informed the teaching and learning objective in the activity involving the filmed Syrian students. This activity was designed to foster ICC by guiding the learners, even though they had only completed just under a year of Arabic, to experience a glimpse of what Harvey describes as the highest stage of his paradigm for measuring cross-cultural awareness -- a stage that demonstrates initial interdiscursive ICC of the symbolic aspects and expressions of culture:

Level IV: This level, the level of empathy is achieved by living in and through the culture. The individual begins to see the culture from the viewpoint of the inside, and thus to be able to know how the culture bearer feels.<sup>56</sup>

Kramersch's questions and Seelye's aims, guiding the activity, and Harvey's highest stage of cross-cultural awareness delineating the learning objective, provided a framework for the teaching and learning of ICC within the Syrian students' video activity.

The Syrian students' video activity forged ICC bridges between the perspectives and discourse systems of the learners and the Syrian students in the video. This task was facilitated by the fact that the learners had much in common interdiscursively with the Syrian students: both groups were about the same age range; both included male and female members interacting within a group activity with certain prescribed social expectations, i.e., an Arabic class and a get-together at a cafe; and both groups shared many interests, aspirations, and problems in life. That is, both groups interdiscursively and symbolically mirrored each other, and this relationship facilitated the development of both an

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<sup>55</sup> Ryding, p. 225.

<sup>56</sup> Hadley, p. 355.

appreciation of difference as well as an empathetic viewpoint from within the culture. Moorjani and Field argue that 'the study of a second culture can only be a contrastive process, a dialogue between two ways of living and viewing the world'.<sup>57</sup> This calls for a reiteration of the most important tenet in fostering ICC argued for in this article as well as its suggested activities: the teaching of ICC should be student-centred and self-reflexive, encouraging the building of inner mental models through the use of theme-based content that serves as a bridge in also allowing for dialogic learning with native speakers in communities of practice encouraging the interdiscursive application of those models to the world of the target culture. This is precisely why globalized forms of technological communication that foster dialogic, interactive ICC are now urgently needed in the teaching of Arabic language and culture. 'The information represented in the media of globalized technology is a reduction of the information' in the target culture, which is explained by the learner in the creation of mental models that collaborate with the technology and dialogically interact with the target culture in the outside world in building ICC.<sup>58 59 60</sup> Another aspect of this tenet has also guided all the suggested use of materials and recommended instruction in this article: 'one [ . . . ] liability of authentic materials is that they assume no intercultural dialogue and can only be effective (as far as the teaching of culture is concerned) with the help of an interculturally sophisticated instructor'.<sup>61</sup> It is with an understanding of the importance of such a dialogic and interdiscursive use of materials and guidance by a

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<sup>57</sup> Angela Moorjani and Thomas T. Field, 'Semiotic and Sociolinguistic Paths to Understanding Culture', A. J. Singerman, ed. *Toward a New Integration of Language and Culture*, reports of the North-East conference on the teaching of foreign languages (Middlebury: North East Conference, 1988), pp. 25-45 (p. 26).

<sup>58</sup> G. Dor & N. Seel, 'Instructional Delivery Systems and Multimedia Environments', in S. Dijkstra *et al.* eds., *Instructional Design International Perspective, volume 2: Solving Instructional Design Problems* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), pp. 145-183.

<sup>59</sup> S. Dijkstra, 'Educational Technology and Media', in *Instructional Design International Perspective, volume 2: Solving Instructional Design Problems*, pp. 137-143.

<sup>60</sup> Waheed Samy, 'Instructional Media and Learning Arabic', in Kassem M. Wahba *et al.*, eds., *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 264.

<sup>61</sup> Angela Moorjani and Thomas T. Field, p. 26.

teacher of Arabic language and culture that this article has suggested its carefully designed activities, which can, hopefully, be of help to Arabic teachers in our fast-changing technological world of globalization.

## CONCLUSION

This article has examined some of the possibilities of using technology in the teaching and learning of ICC in Arabic. The first part looked at the increasing interest in Arabic as a language that can offer learners practical interdiscursive opportunities that draw on ICC in a globalized world. It also analyzed some of the major obstacles to the pragmatic use of technology in the teaching of Arabic language and culture to improve globalized intercultural understanding, such as the fact that the vernacular variety of Arabic is still not taught in most UK and US HE institutions. If technology is not employed in effective ways in the teaching of ICC in Arabic then learners will not only find it difficult to overcome primordialist assumptions and stereotypes about Arab culture, but they will also find it challenging to achieve the level of ICC that will allow them to 'communicate effectively with native speakers' from various viewpoints.<sup>62</sup> Goals of 'translingual and transcultural competence' that lie at the heart of ICC and communication between languages were stated in the 2007 MLA report, and they have still to be fully realized in the teaching of Arabic language and culture.<sup>63</sup> Yet they remain an objective that Arabic pedagogy should continue to aim towards. To facilitate achieving these goals, the second half of this article suggested a range of innovative, student-centered, and interactive practical activities that can be employed by teachers of Arabic language and culture to interdiscursively teach ICC.

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<sup>62</sup> Ryding, p. 219.

<sup>63</sup> Modern Language Association (MLA), 'Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages. Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World', *Profession* 2007, pp. 234-45.

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