

# Intercultural Competence and Language Variety on Study Abroad Programs: L2 Learners of Arabic

Jeremy Palmer

*American University of Sharjah*

There is somewhat of a discrepancy in the findings of two recently published papers regarding the study of Arabic among students from the United States. Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin (2007) presented statistics showing that enrollments in Arabic in the United States greatly increased from 2002 to 2006 - more than any other language - (at 126.5%). Arabic is truly becoming more mainstream and even fashionable in language education in the United States. Yet, study abroad (SA) in the Arab world has not yet caught on as it has in some countries. In a recent paper, Gutierrez et al. (2009) found that less than one out of a hundred American students – of those who embark upon study abroad programs -- chooses to study abroad in the Arab world each year. This means that more than 99% of all the American students who study abroad are in countries outside of the entire Arab world. Unfortunately, the latter paper does not differentiate between students who studied abroad in the Arab world for language study and those who were taking courses delivered in English. It is highly probable that the percentage of students studying abroad *specifically to learn Arabic* is even less than the already negligible finding.

This paper presents results from a project investigating over ninety learners of Arabic who studied abroad in the Arab world within the last few years. It explores their linguistic and cultural experiences during their time abroad. One of the most important issues in this paper is that of the development of intercultural competence on study abroad programs. Byram (2000) defined an interculturally competent individual as

someone who is able to see relationships between different cultures -- both internal and external to a society -- and is able to mediate, that is interpret each in terms of the other, either for themselves or for other people. It is also someone who has a critical or analytical understanding of (parts of) their own and other cultures -- someone who is conscious of their own perspective, of the way in which their thinking is culturally determined, rather than believing that their understanding and perspective is natural (pp. 8-13).

In this paper the terms intercultural competence and acculturation are used in a partially synonymous manner.

This paper presents results pertaining to the ability among research participants to perform certain social and linguistic functions in Arab society. These functions are taken from Ward & Kennedy's (1999) research instrument known as the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS). For example, research participants were asked how much difficulty they experienced due to people staring at them during the first two weeks of their study abroad program in relation to the last two weeks. Other functions queried the research participants' level of difficulty dealing with someone who is unpleasant, their ability to make themselves understood, and seeing things from the host country's point of view. The change in ability to perform these functions is analyzed with the additional variables such as the amount of interaction in which they engaged with host nationals, their age, gender, and program country.

In addition to the ability to perform the social and linguistic functions in the host country, research participants were queried about their use of Arabic language varieties. Arabic is considered to be a language in which the linguistic phenomenon known as diglossia is found (Ferguson, 1959). Diglossia is defined as the existence of higher and lower registers of speech that are somewhat exclusive in use. The higher register is known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and is generally used for writing, though an oral version is used by the well educated in formal situations. The lower register is referred to in this paper as Spoken Colloquial Arabic (SCA) and is used for day-to-day communicative functions. SCA is the language friends, family, and in-groups use in routine communication. In some academic circles in the Middle East and elsewhere, SCA engenders a certain negative stigma, which some may feel leaves the issue unworthy of scholarly study. In the United States, however, many students desire to learn SCA (Palmer, 2007) and more and more Arabic programs are catering to them (Redden, 2008). In this research, participants reported how frequently they spoke SCA and MSA during their study abroad programs. Moreover, research participants were asked about their pre-program exposure to the different varieties of Arabic. Other variables were also analyzed with regards to language use and variety: amount of interaction with host nationals, desire to speak either SCA and MSA, and possible feelings of ridicule while speaking SCA and MSA.

The following research questions are investigated:

1. What is the relationship between program country and the amount of exposure to Arabic?
2. Which factors influence research participant performance in the SCAS functions? Such factors include pre-program exposure to

different varieties of Arabic, program country, age, gender, and amount of interaction.

3. How does exposure to different varieties of Arabic relate to the amount of interaction with host nationals?

In the following pages this paper explores literature concerning study abroad programs, intercultural competence and Arabic language varieties. After a review of the literature, the methodology used in this research is included. The results of this research will then be presented followed by a discussion and implications.

## Study Abroad Research

Literature concerning study abroad is plentiful and has increased in recent years. In 2005, the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program published a report about the need for more participation in study abroad programs. The Commission states that it hopes to have one million U.S. students participating in study abroad each year within one decade. Particular mention is made concerning Arabic and other less-commonly-taught languages, “Americans remember the desperate search for speakers of Arabic, Farsi, and Pashto that followed the national calamity of September 11, 2001” (Commission, p. vi). Indeed, less than one quarter of all Americans hold a passport. This program will provide global learning opportunities for many additional American students. It should be noted, however, that there is no language stipulation in this program. The report does mention “[f]oreign language abroad should be strongly encouraged for receipt of a Lincoln Fellowship and would be desirable for Lincoln Scholarships” (Commission, p. xi). It is hoped that students studying abroad in non-English-speaking countries will learn the language of their host country.

One may expect students to make more linguistic progress on a study abroad program than those in normal classes at home. Such an expectation may stem from the abundant opportunities for target language use and communicative interaction. There is considerable research about study abroad programs and language gains. Interestingly, the research is not always unanimous in its findings. After reviewing numerous studies about study abroad language acquisition, Freed (1995) wrote, “[w]hat emerges from these studies is a somewhat contradictory picture of the linguistic benefits to be gained from an in-country language learning experience” (p. 8). Regardless, research claiming the linguistic benefits of study abroad has been published for a number of decades.

Miller and Ginsberg (1995) wrote, “it is often claimed that the only way that students ever acquire functional language ability, at least at advanced levels, is during study abroad” (p. 293). Miller and Ginsberg (1995), however, described a number of “*folklinguistic theories*” that some students hold about language learning (p. 294). Such beliefs can actually impede students from taking full advantage of study abroad programs. There is certainly renewed interest in research about study abroad programs. What lacks, however, is “empirical evidence to support assumptions and intuitions regarding the linguistic advantages of time spent abroad” (Freed, So and Lazar, 2003, p. 35). The following review contains a number of articles that investigate issues related to study abroad. Some of these articles do provide some evidence into the linguistic benefits of study abroad programs.

In a widely quoted article, Carroll (1967) attempted to reify the benefits of study abroad for language majors throughout the United States. Carroll (1967) reported that “[t]ime spent abroad is clearly one of the most potent variables we have found ... Certainly our results provide a strong justification for a ‘year abroad’ as one of the experiences to be recommended for the language majors” (p. 137). It should be noted, however, that some aspects of Carroll’s research have not gone unchallenged (see Freed (1995) and Rifkin (2005) for commentary about Carroll’s research). Since Carroll’s study, there have been many further studies investigating proficiency gains in the study abroad setting.

A more recent large-scale study appeared in 2008 concerning intervention in study abroad programs and was published by the Georgetown Consortium Project. In this paper, Vande Berg et al. (2008) sought generally to “document second language, intercultural and disciplinary learning” of American study abroad students in comparison with that of their counterparts as a control at several American campuses (p. 1). Among other aspects, the authors sought to understand how language gains relate to intercultural learning. Their sample consisted of 968 students (830 on study abroad programs and 138 as controls in the US) learning seven foreign languages. Arabic was one of the languages investigated. The authors used a Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) for pre- and post- measures of proficiency. The authors assigned numerical values to the levels included in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) scale for the analysis. Cultural aspects of the study abroad programs were measured using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The authors report that the students on the study abroad programs progressed further than their counterparts at home in language proficiency. The results were similar for measurements of intercultural development. This study found that females studying abroad made more progress in oral proficiency than

males abroad. As for intercultural development, females made statistically significant increases, but the data from the males revealed no significance.

The above studies have shown potential linguistic benefits for foreign language learners on study abroad programs. For thorough reviews of research about issues related to study abroad, see Kinginger (2005) and Dufon and Churchill (2006).

## Study Abroad and Interaction

Other than measuring proficiency, researchers are also interested in how students spend their time on study abroad programs. Sometimes ‘time on task’ is related to proficiency, and sometimes it is not. In her article about language contact, cognition and pragmatic comprehension in study abroad, Taguchi (2008) investigated a number of issues related to gains of study abroad students. In particular, she investigated “gains in accurate and speedy comprehension of second language (L2) pragmatic meaning over time,” as well as whether these gains were related to “cognitive processing ability and the amount of language contact in an L2 environment” (p. 33). Among a number of findings, Taguchi (2008) concluded that “[t]he amount of speaking and reading outside class that the students reported on the language contact survey significantly correlated with the gains in comprehension speed but not with the accuracy of comprehension” (p. 33). These results differ from a related study by Ginsberg and Miller (2000), which found among eighty five learners in Russia (former Soviet Union) that “[t]here is no association between gains in language proficiency and the amount of time the students expose themselves to the native culture and engage in linguistic interactions with native speakers” (p. 256). Thus, research concerning interaction and study abroad is not uniform in its findings.

## Study Abroad and Sociocultural Adaptation

Interaction and intercultural competence are important issues for students studying abroad. Students who participate in study abroad programs have the opportunity to be exposed not only to linguistic features of the target language, but also features of the culture itself in a manner that likely surpasses what would be available at their home institution. For some students this may be a welcome challenge, though for others it may be an undesirable obstacle.

Kinginger (2004) tracked the language learning experiences of one female student (pseudonym: Alice) learning French for four years at home as well on study abroad programs in Canada and France. In particular, Kinginger was interested in the concept of identity reconstruction. Alice did not have the benefit of a stable home-life as a child. In fact, she worked from an early

age to support herself. One constant aspect of her life was the desire to learn French. She worked hard to support herself through school, dreaming of a beautiful country in which she wanted to learn the language well and to make herself “more ‘cultural’” (Kinging, 2004, p. 228). Unfortunately, Alice did not find that which she had sought. Rather she went through many difficulties dealing with co-nationals who were more affluent than her and with many inhospitable French persons. At one point she was even suicidal because her dreams of a cultured, green, and loving France had been shattered. Eventually Alice overcame her situation and became what she considered to be truly French. It was not long, however, before she was again disappointed because of a political discussion and anti-American sentiment. This challenge eventually served as a motivator for Alice to learn more about world politics. Thus, Alice went through a series of hardships and frustrations in her pursuit to learn French. However, she persevered and overcame each challenge as she learned more about the language and culture. Although Alice’s background may not be representative of many language learners today, any language learner may face the challenges she experienced. (For another study about issues related to identity and interaction among American learners in France, see Whitworth [2006]).

Intercultural competence has also been studied for a number of years. In addition to interaction and cultural issues, the nature of Arabic as more than one ‘language’ adds further challenges for the learner.

## Arabic Teaching and Diglossia

One of the challenges any student of Arabic faces is the existence of great variance in Arabic which exists in the form of a substantial divide between the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ varieties, as well as profound differences in local ‘informal’ varieties. Diglossia has presented difficulty for all learners of Arabic. The teaching and learning of Arabic in the United States has long followed the model of language use and observation in the Arab world. This model consisted of what some might consider gratuitous reverence for the written language (MSA) and outward contempt for spoken varieties of Arabic. Maamouri (1998), describing the situation after Arabic was standardized in the eighth and ninth centuries, wrote, “the notion [appeared] that the now codified written standard was the ‘real language,’ and that all other varieties of it were ‘degenerate’ and ‘corrupt’ versions” (p. 33). This ideology is still common today inside and outside the Arab world. Ibrahim (1989), commenting on the historical practice of holding the written language to be inflexible, wrote, “Arabic grammar was written and continued to develop as a closed system independently of living usage and continuous linguistic

change” (p. 40). Such living usage and continuous linguistic change has been occurring for many centuries. Modification of the written language has been much slower. This lack of linguistic vitality has produced uncertainty among native and non-native users of Arabic. Maamouri (1998) wrote,

Young Arab users do not feel that they are free to use and innovate in [MSA]. Pupils entering school have to ‘unlearn’ or even suppress most of their linguistic habits while they try to acquire a new set of ‘rigid’ rules (p. 41).

Commenting on this oxymoron, Maamouri (1998) wrote, “[MSA] is nobody’s mother tongue and is rarely or almost never used at home in the Arab world” (p. 33). The mother tongue of Arabic speakers would be expected to be the local spoken variety of Arabic, whereas MSA would be learned later. As for the situation in the United States, Ryding (1995) wrote, “the educational establishment [in America] has for decades enforced the concept of MSA first and foremost, this is completely the reverse of the native speaker’s experience with Arabic as a mother tongue” (p. 226). Thus, the experience of the majority of American learners of Arabic differs from the linguistic facts on the ground in the Arabic world in that they are not learning spoken varieties. Unfortunately, there is no known published empirical research supporting the efficacy – or lack thereof – of teaching spoken varieties of Arabic. There is, however, motivational research demonstrating positive student feedback in relation to the learning of SCA (Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004) and research indicating that many Arabic learners in the United States want to learn SCA (Palmer, 2007).

One may argue that Ferguson’s binary and idealized definition of diglossia is reflected in the teaching of Arabic. Prominence and prestige are assigned to the higher register, and the lower is thought to be ungrammatical and not worthy of academic attention. Thus, students who wish to learn spoken varieties of Arabic are often left to their own devices. Commenting on this biased approach, Ryding (1995) wrote that it leads to “undermining of learner confidence in spoken interaction ... [and] the net result of this has been the early discouragement of many potential Arabic students” (p. 227). Fortunately, this situation appears to be changing. In 2008, Ryding commented that “[i]n the past five years, about, it is now possible to raise the issue, and not be shouted down” (Redden, 2008).

The lack of academic attention paid during class time to the spoken varieties of Arabic may support Ferguson’s idealized definition of diglossia. As for post-Fergusonian refinement of diglossia as a concept, however, there is

little empirical research. The preeminence of MSA in Arabic programs in the United States ignores important post-Fergusonian research. For example, the conception of a mixed Arabic, or Educated Spoken/Standard Arabic (ESA), is left mostly unheeded in Arabic language teaching and learning. Although the notion of ESA needs more supporting empirical research, there is evidence that such a language variety (or a mixed version of MSA and SCA) may already exist (Parkinson, 2003; Mahmoud, 1986; El-Hassan, 1977, 1978;). The fact is that SCA, whether it be a dialect, variety, or language, is often ignored. Finally, Fishman's (1971) claim that bilingualism and diglossia may be found in the same speech community is left unconsidered in many Arabic language programs in the United States.

## Participants

Data was collected from learners who participated in a study abroad program somewhere in the Arabic-speaking world in the past three years (at the time of survey completion). The total number of respondents is ninety four, though not all of them answered every question. Some of these respondents were still on a study abroad program at the time of survey completion. Research participants were on programs that lasted from one to twenty four months. The mean is 5.1 months out of the eighty seven who responded to this question validly. One subject was dropped because of a program length of less than one month. It should be noted that if a learner reported a number of weeks, this number was rounded to months. In addition, semesters were logged as four months each. Thus, if a learner reported 'two semesters,' this was interpreted as eight months. There were fifty four females, thirty nine males and one person who did not select a gender. The youngest age of the respondents was eighteen and the oldest was thirty eight. The mean was 25.7. The majority of the respondents (n=82) indicated U.S. nationality (including dual citizens).

## Research Instruments

The research instruments were administered to the participants online using a professional survey program. Along with a survey inquiring about demographic information and previous exposure to different varieties of Arabic, the following instruments were used in this research: Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (Ward & Kennedy, 1999), Arabic Variety Survey (Palmer 2007, 2008 and the author's previous work with the NMELRC), Language Contact Survey (adapted from Taguchi, 2008) and Cultural Interaction (Saint Mary's College Study Abroad Survey).

As mentioned above, the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) from



Ward & Kennedy (1999) presents learners with a variety of social functions and asks how much difficulty they encountered performing such functions. In the online survey, the author slightly adapted this scale and referred to it as the SCAS scale as the Sociocultural and Language Adaptation Scale, though the original name (SCAS) will be used in this paper. The research participants were asked to respond to the items twice, once while considering the first two weeks and once for the last two weeks of study abroad. The responses were totaled for each of the periods to provide an overall picture of how much difficulty – or degree of acculturation -- the research participants experienced at the beginning and at the end of their programs.

The Arabic Variety Survey (Palmer 2007, 2008 and NMELRC) was used to elicit research participant opinions and experiences within a range of Arabic varieties. The research participants selected degree of agreement with a number of statements about study abroad and SCA. For example, the research participants responded to the statement “communicating in the local spoken variety of Arabic led to ridicule in the host country.” The research participants also responded to a number of statements regarding their desire to learn MSA and SCA. These statements were presented in a Likert-type scale with possible selections ranging from ‘disagree strongly’ to ‘agree strongly’ (and ‘not applicable’).

The Language Contact instrument, adapted from Taguchi (2008), gathered data concerning the amount of Arabic exposure learners experienced on a weekly basis. Taguchi’s survey is based upon work from Freed et al. (2004). Research participants were asked to report the average amount of exposure they experienced each week during their study abroad from zero to ten hours. If they experienced more than ten hours of exposure, they select the option ‘more than 10’. Research participants were asked to report this amount of exposure to MSA, SCA, and a mix of MSA and SCA.

Finally, an adapted study abroad survey from Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame was used to measure the amount of interaction in which the research participants engaged with the host nationals. For example, the research participants were asked how frequently they engaged with the host nationals while shopping for food, in taxis, cafes, student clubs and more. The research participants selected three to five times per week or more, one to two times per week, less than one time per week, never, or not applicable. These responses were totaled to provide a numerical score that demonstrated how frequently they interacted with host nationals.

## Results

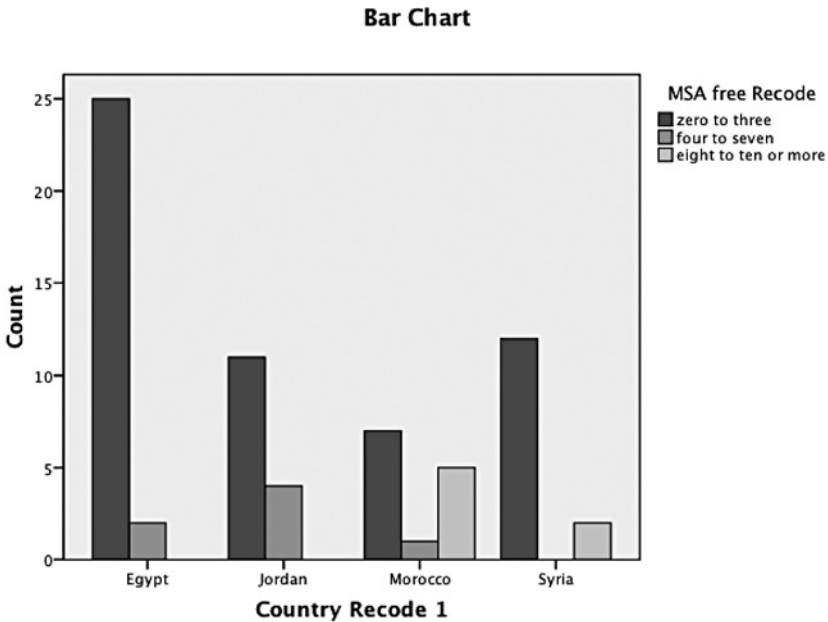
The results were analyzed using the statistical software package SPSS. The

results will be presented in correspondence with the research questions.

### Research Question 1

The first research question investigated the relationship between program country location and the amount of exposure to Arabic (SCA and MSA). Program country was analyzed with MSA contact hours (MSA communication beyond and not including homework). The MSA contact hours indicate the amount of time research participants spent conversing in MSA beyond and not including homework each week. It should be noted that there were twelve possible countries in the variable 'program country.' For this analysis, however, only those with at least five research participants were included. Thus, the remaining countries in this analysis are Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Syria. For the statistical analysis, the variable MSA contact hours was recoded from the individual options zero to ten hours and the option 'more than 10 hours' to the following groups: zero to three hours, four to seven, and eight to ten or more. A Pearson Chi Square test was performed. The Pearson Chi Square test succeeded in rejecting the independence of the variables,  $\chi^2(6, N = 69) = 22.30$ ,  $p = .00$ . This indicates a statistically significant relationship between program country and amount of speaking MSA beyond and not including homework. From the results it appears that research participants in Morocco are more likely to spend their time communicating in MSA (53% in column 'zero to three hours'). Research participants in Egypt (92.6% in same column), Jordan (73.3%), and Syria (85.7%), however, spent very little time communicating in MSA beyond homework. It should be noted, however, that eight (66.7%) of the cells in the test had less than the expected five responses, which somewhat reduces the power of this test (min. expected was 1.32). Figure 1 shows the number of participants in each band ( $N = 69$ ). In this analysis, the program country was labeled as 'Country Recode 1' and MSA contact hours as 'MSA free Recode' in SPSS.

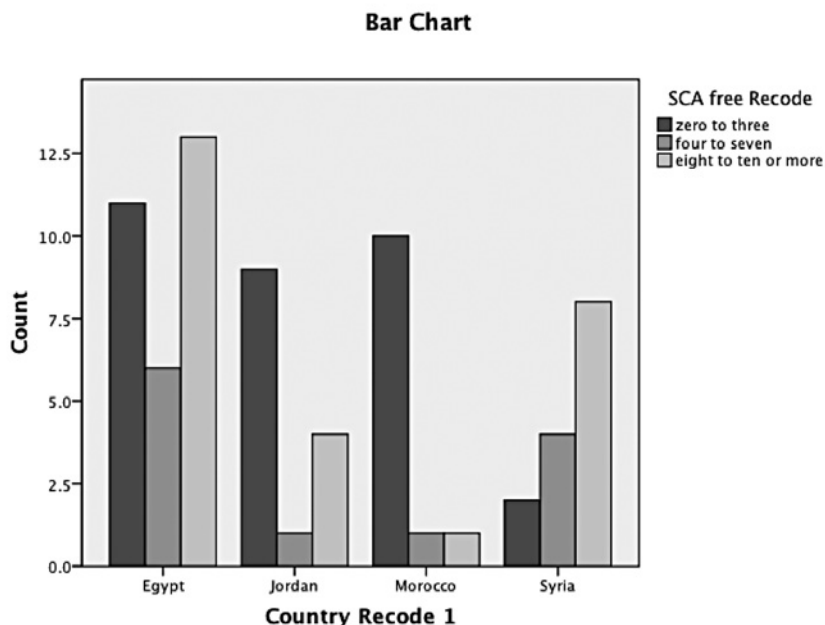
Figure 1. Program country and MSA communication



This illustration shows that the majority (79.7%) of the responses pertaining to MSA communication fall in the column ‘zero to three.’ This indicates that the research participants did not spend many hours per week communicating in MSA beyond homework assignments. The next analysis investigates program country with the amount of communication in SCA.

Program country was also analyzed with SCA contact hours (SCA communication beyond and not including homework). The SCA contact hours indicates the amount of time research participants spent conversing in SCA beyond and not including homework. The variable SCA contact hours was recoded as above. A Pearson Chi Square test was performed. The Pearson Chi Square test succeeded in rejecting the independence of the variables,  $\chi^2(6, N = 70) = 15.68, p = .02$ . Thus, there is a statistically significant relationship between program country and amount of communication in SCA. It should be noted that four (33.3%) of the cells had less than five responses, which somewhat reduces the power of the analysis (min. expected was 2.06). Figure 2 shows the number participants in each band ( $N = 70$ ).

Figure 2. Program country and SCA communication



This illustration shows that the highest percentage of responses pertaining to SCA communication fall in the column 'zero to three' (45.7%) hours. The column 'four to seven' had a percentage of 17.1% and the column 'eight to ten to ten or more' had a percentage of 37.1%. Country to country, the responses in the various categories differ. For example, the highest percentage of responses for SCA communication in Egypt is in the column 'eight to ten or more' (43.3%) hours. Syria also has the highest percentage in the same column (57.1%). Interestingly, Morocco's highest percentage is in the column 'zero to three' at a remarkable 83.3%. Jordan's highest percentage was also in the column 'zero to three' at 64.3%.

### Research Question 2

The second research question investigated the factors that influence research participant performance in the SCAS functions, or degree of acculturation. Such factors include pre-program exposure to different varieties of Arabic, program country, age, gender, and amount of interaction.

At the outset, a T-test was performed to investigate whether the research participants reported a statistically significant difference pertaining to the

degree of difficulty in performing the social functions at the beginning and end of their programs. The T-test revealed significance  $t(92) = 15.09, p = .00$ . Results indicated that the mean of the first two weeks ( $M = 91.45, SD = 17.82$ ) was significantly higher than the mean of the last two weeks ( $M = 68.77, SD = 15.48$ ). Thus, this analysis found that research participants do become more acculturated by the end of their study abroad programs.

The first factor concerns previous exposure to different varieties of Arabic (SCA and MSA) and degree of acculturation. This exposure was analyzed in reference to beginning and ending degree of acculturation. In addition, the calculated amount of change the research participants experienced from the beginning to the ending of their programs was also analyzed.

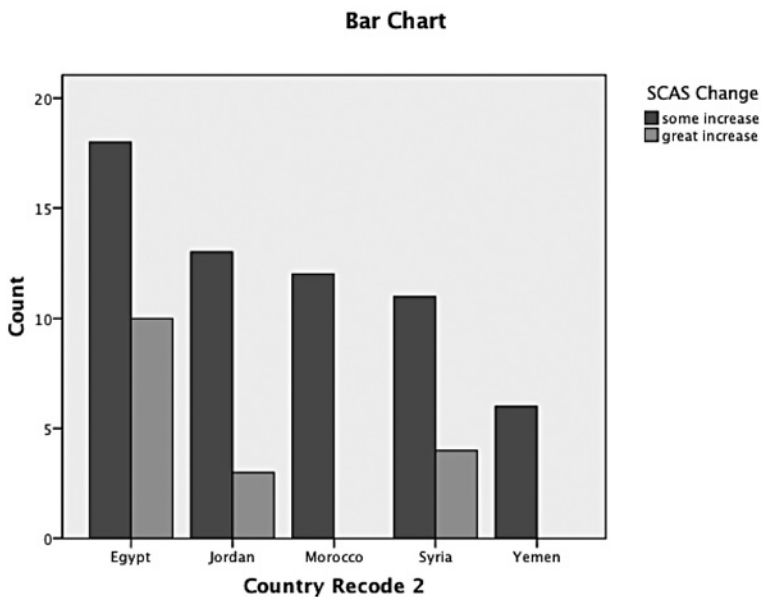
The opening analysis for this factor investigated the relationship between previous exposure to SCA with degree of acculturation at the beginning of the program. Due to great variance in the particular variety and amount of SCA previously studied among the research participants, this variable was recoded to include only two levels: previous study and no previous study. The exact question to which the research participants responded is: "Which, if any, spoken varieties (dialects) of Arabic (SpA [SCA]) did you study before arriving to your study abroad program? Please include the number of semesters for each variety (dialect)." This variable (previous exposure to SCA) was analyzed with the sum of the SCAS scale for the first two weeks. A GLM Univariate was performed. The analysis revealed that those with previous exposure to SCA ( $M = 86.27, SD = 19.64$ ) reported greater acculturation than those without ( $M = 95.30, SD = 14.86$ ) during the first two weeks of the study abroad program. The GLM test succeeded in rejecting the equality of the means,  $F(1, 83) = 5.76, p = .02$ . Exposure to SCA before the program indicates greater acculturation at the beginning of the program. It should be noted that the R Squared is only .065, which somewhat reduces the power of this analysis.

None of the other analyses dealing with previous exposure to Arabic and acculturation revealed significance. This means that previous exposure to SCA and acculturation at the end of the program was not significant. Moreover, previous exposure to SCA and degree of change in acculturation from beginning to end of program was not significant. Finally, none of the analyses investigating previous exposure to MSA revealed significance. The next factor that was investigated deals with program country.

Program country was analyzed with Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) change. The term 'change' here means the difference in the summed totals from the beginning and ending scores on the SCAS. These scores were then assigned to three variables: decrease, some increase, and great increase. Research participants who reported more difficulty with the SCAS tasks had

ending scores lower than beginning thus representing a decrease in acculturation. Those who found the SCAS tasks easier at the end of their programs were placed – depending on how much change – into the variables ‘some increase’ or ‘great increase.’ Countries with fewer than five respondents in this analysis were not included. The remaining countries were Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, and Yemen. A Pearson Chi Square test was performed. The Pearson Chi Square test failed to reject the independence of the variables,  $\chi^2(8, N = 79) = 10.72, p = .22$ . Results indicated that the majority (75.9%) of the responses per SCAS change were in the column ‘some increase.’ In fact, the majority of the responses from every one of the countries were in the column ‘some increase.’ Because there were only two responses in the category ‘decrease,’ a second Pearson Chi Square test was performed without the data from that column. Again, the test failed to reject the independence of the two variables,  $\chi^2(4, N = 77) = 8.41, p = .08$ . It should be noted that five (50.0%) of the cells had expected count less than five (minimum expected was 1.32). The test did, however, approach significance. Figure 3 shows the results in a bar graph.

Figure 3. Program country and SCAS change minus ‘decrease’



The additional Pearson Chi Square shows a result that approaches significance. The results show that no research participants in Morocco or Yemen reported a great increase in acculturation, whereas those in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria did. In fact, research participants in Egypt reported the highest percentage in the column 'great increase' indicating that they were able to make significant change in acculturation over the duration of their study abroad programs.

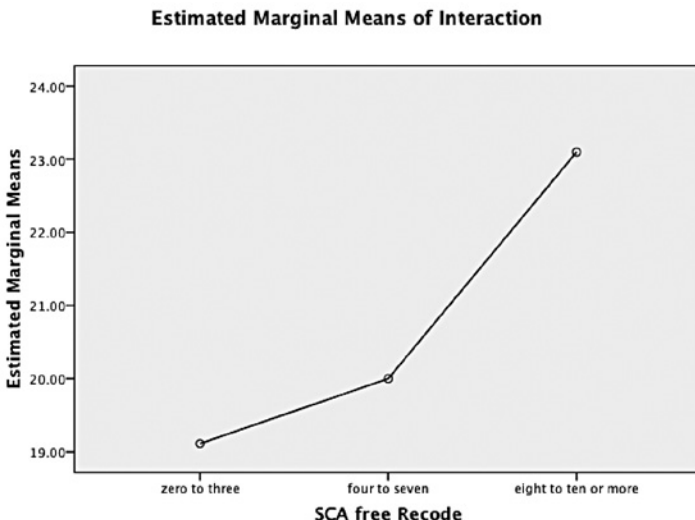
None of the analyses combining SCAS with age, gender, or amount of interaction revealed significance. The next research question investigated the issue of interaction in relation to exposure to different varieties of Arabic.

### Research Question 3

The third research question investigates how exposure to different varieties of Arabic relates to the amount of interaction with host nationals.

SCA contact hours (SCA communication beyond and not including homework) were analyzed with interaction. A GLM Univariate test was performed. The GLM successfully rejected the equality of the means,  $F(2, 77) = 4.03, p = .02$ . Those who spent zero to three hours communicating in SCA each week had a lower mean ( $M = 19.11, SD = 5.26$ ) than those who communicated in SCA four to seven hours ( $M = 20.00, SD = 5.67$ ). Those who communicated in SCA for eight to ten hours or more had the highest mean ( $M = 23.07, SD = 6.50$ ). Thus, the more hours spent communicating in SCA corresponds with increased interaction (R squared at .095). Figure 4 is a graph from this analysis.

Figure 4. SCA communication and interaction



This illustration shows that the mean of interaction increases within each group of SCA communication. A Post Hoc test (LSD) was also performed. Significance was found in the following meanwise comparison: ‘zero to three’ hours with ‘eight to ten or more’ at  $p=.007$ .

The issue of how learners feel about the different varieties of Arabic they encountered as participants in study abroad programs in the Arabic-speaking world was also investigated in the third research question. Amount of interaction was analyzed with two variables dealing with learner affective factors.

The first variable deals with how much desire the research participants manifest toward learning Arabic. This variable is the combination of two statements from the Arabic Variety survey instrument. These statements were:

1. Learning MSA was a priority for me in the host country.
4. I was enthusiastic about learning MSA in the host country.

These particular statements were selected due to their nature about desire and learning MSA. The results of these statements are therefore combined into one variable called ‘MSA desire.’ The participants’ responses were summed for this analysis. This same pattern was followed for the same statements and SCA. The corresponding category is called ‘SCA desire.’

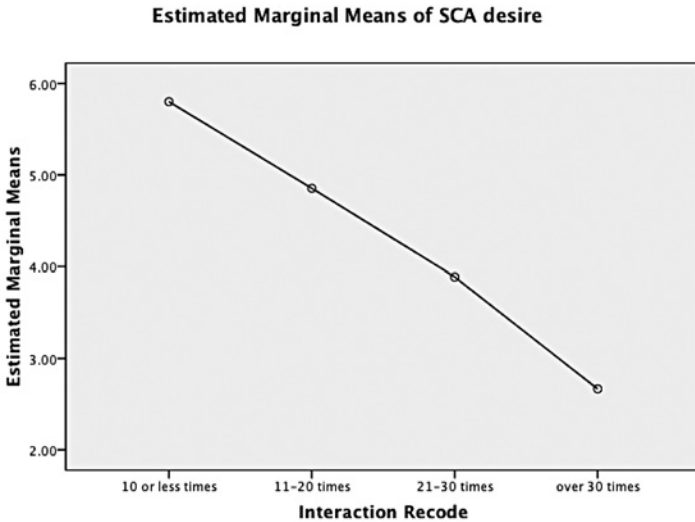
The second variable concerns ridicule and Arabic varieties. Research participants were asked to respond to the statement: “Communicating in MSA led to ridicule in the host country.” This statement was selected due to the current debate in the field of Arabic teaching and learning regarding the role of MSA and SCA. It is hoped that the responses from this item will help instructors and program administrators better understand the diglossic nature of Arabic as experienced by their students. The same statement was also analyzed for SCA.

The variable ‘interaction’ was recoded to make it categorical for the following analyses. Interaction is a sum of how often research participants interacted in a variety of situations each week in the host country. Responses from the survey were totaled with the lowest response of five and the highest at thirty three (with one atypical response of forty two). In the following analyses, categories for interaction were: ten or less times, eleven to twenty times, twenty one to thirty times, and over thirty times. The variables for MSA and SCA desire are considered continuous data because they are sums of some questions from the Arabic variety portion of the survey. The dependent variables thereafter, however, are categorical because they each come from only one Likert-type question.



Interaction was analyzed with SCA desire. A GLM Univariate test was conducted. Figure 5 is a graph from this analysis.

Figure 5. Interaction and SCA desire



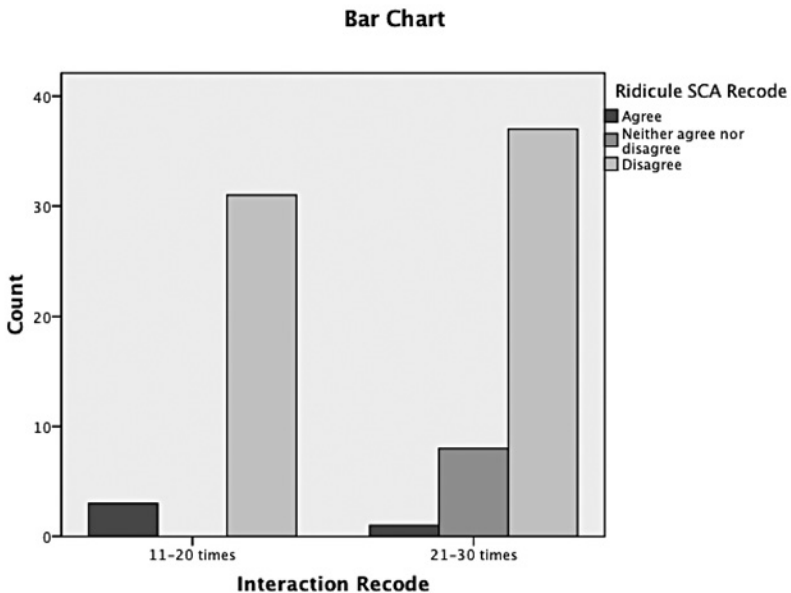
This illustration shows that those who interacted more with the host nationals had a greater desire to learn SCA. For each level of interaction the mean of SCA desire goes down, showing greater desire to learn SCA. The row '10 or less times' in SCA desire had a mean of 5.80 ( $SD = 1.79$ ) whereas the last row 'over 30 times' had a mean of 2.67 ( $SD = 1.15$ ). There is, however, no statistical significance between the means. The analysis failed to reject the equality of the means, though it does approach significance,  $F(3, 83) = 2.66$ ,  $p = .053$  (R squared was .088). The results may indicate that the more one interacts with the host nationals, the more desire one has for learning SCA in the host country.

Due to the fact that there were less than five responses in the row 'over 30 times' for amount of interaction, an additional test was performed without this row. The additional test also revealed a result that approaches significance,  $F(2, 81) = 3.01$ ,  $p = .06$ . Thus, it is still probable that the more one interacts, the more one has a desire to learn SCA (R squared was .069).

Interaction was analyzed with SCA ridicule. A Pearson Chi Square test was performed. The Pearson Chi Square test failed to reject the independence of the two variables  $\chi^2(6, N = 86) = 10.10$ ,  $p = .12$ . However, due to the fact that there were fewer than 5 responses in the rows '10 or less times' and 'over

30 times,' an additional Pearson Chi Square test was performed without the data from those rows. The test succeeded in rejecting the independence of the two variables,  $\chi^2(2, N = 80) = 7.91, p = .02$ . It should be noted that four (66.7%) of the cells had expected count less than five (min. expected was 1.70). Figure 6 is a graph depicting the results of this analysis ( $N = 80$ ).

Figure 6. Interaction and SCA ridicule modified



This illustration shows that the majority of the responses fall in the column 'disagree' in SCA ridicule (85.0%). Both rows '11-20 times' (91.2%) and '21-30 times' (80.4%) have the highest percentage of responses in this column. Thus, the more one interacts with the culture, the less probability there is that one would feel ridiculed when communicating in SCA. Due to the fact that there were less than five responses in the column 'agree' in the variable regarding ridicule and SCA, a third test was performed without that column. The additional test succeeded in rejecting the independence of the variables,  $p = .02$  in Fisher's Exact Test. Figure 7 shows the results of this analysis and the expected cell counts.

Figure 7. Interaction and SCA ridicule – third test

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.159 <sup>a</sup>	1	.013		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	4.417	1	.036		
Likelihood Ratio	9.027	1	.003		
Fisher's Exact Test				.018	.011
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.078	1	.014		
N of Valid Cases	76				

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.26.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

This table shows the results of the third Pearson Chi Square test in this analysis. This test succeeded in rejecting the equality of the variables. Thus, the more one interacts with the host nationals, the more one is likely to disagree that communicating in SCA led to ridicule.

## Discussion and Implications

The first research question investigated the issue of program country. The majority of the analyses in this research included responses from research participants who studied in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Syria. Each of these countries is known for a difference in culture and customs. Each country also has its own spoken variety of Arabic that is unique. The exception here is that Jordanian and Syrian are both usually classified as Levantine, though there remain noticeable and marked differences in the varieties. The results of these analyses revealed significance in the amount of contact hours in both MSA and SCA with program country. In particular, research participants in Morocco spoke more MSA and less SCA in their free time than research participants in any other country. The opposite is true for the countries Egypt and Syria. Jordan follows the pattern of Egypt and Syria in MSA contact hours, but not SCA hours. This is interesting because one frequently hears the claim that Moroccans are able to understand Levantine and Egyptian because of a variety of media productions, whereas the reverse does not hold – Egyptians and Levantines are unable to understand Moroccan Arabic easily. Perhaps Moroccans are used to having their local spoken varieties considered

unintelligible by foreigners and therefore do not encourage foreign students to learn it, though this is conjecture.

The second research question was about acculturation. The opening analysis in this question revealed that the research participants found the SCAS functions more difficult at the beginning of their program. This indicates that the research participants did acculturate as time passed.

The next analysis investigated pre-program exposure to SCA and the degree of acculturation at the beginning of the study abroad program. The results indicate that the more pre-program exposure to SCA, the more acculturated learners are at the beginning of the programs. This may be beneficial for Arabic departments to know. The nature of SCA is very much related to understanding the culture of the locations in which it is spoken. Describing the nature of SCA, Versteegh (2004) wrote, “the colloquial language as the language of family and home is associated with the in-group, with intimacy and friendship, whereas the high variety is associated with social distance and official relationships” (p. 195). Thus, it is logical that learners who have pre-program exposure to SCA are more acculturated at the beginning of the program because they are intimately learning about the culture through its language. Language departments would be wise to consider the benefits of offering courses in SCA to students before study abroad programs. This statement, however, will certainly be met with skepticism by those who are concerned about which SCA should be taught. This author argues that the answer is relatively straightforward if a particular institution of higher education already has a study abroad program in place. For example, if an institution has a study abroad program in Egypt, it would make sense to introduce pre-study abroad students to Egyptian Arabic. This would likely help them to be more culturally prepared before arriving in Egypt. As for institutions of higher education that do not yet have programs in place, they might consider the results of the extensive research performed by the NMELRC. This research found “that 86% of students who expressed interest in learning Spoken Arabic [SCA] prefer either Levantine or Egyptian Arabic” (Al-Batal & Belnap, 2006, p. 396). Thus, it may be a good idea to first look at opening a program in Egypt or the Levant. There is certainly value and importance in other Arab countries as well.

Program country was also investigated with the amount of change in acculturation. The amount of change in acculturation was selected because it has the potential to show in which countries research participants experienced considerable change in acculturation. There were twelve countries represented in the data, though only those countries with at least five research participants therein were used in these analyses. The remaining countries in this analysis were Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, and Yemen. Results show that the amount of

change in acculturation is nearly significant with program country. The results may indicate that research participants in Morocco and Yemen did not achieve a level of great change in acculturation. Some of the research participants in the other countries in this research were able to make a great increase in the amount of change in acculturation. Such discrepancy may be attributed to differences in the cultures. Ward and Kennedy (1999) found results in their past research that “suggest that sociocultural adaptation problems decrease as a function of ethnic and cultural similarity” (p. 667). For example, the authors reported that “Chinese sojourners in Singapore experienced less sociocultural difficulties ... than non-Chinese (p. 667). It may be that Morocco and Yemen are less similar culturally to the research participants’ home cultures than those in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. The issue of modernity and development may also contribute to these results (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Certainly, Yemen is the least developed of all these countries. Morocco, however, is quite modern and developed. Future research should investigate this issue.

The third research question investigated exposure to the different varieties of Arabic and research participant interaction with host nationals.

As for SCA contact hours and interaction, results indicate that the more hours spent communicating in SCA corresponds with increased interaction. Due to the colloquial nature of SCA, this result is not surprising. Students out in the public are most likely communicating and interacting with people in the native SCA. Perhaps it is easier for natives to speak SCA? This would seem reasonable based upon Maamouri’s (1998) claim about MSA not being a mother tongue. Thus teaching and learning SCA may restore the learner’s confidence in spoken interaction that is lost in rigid MSA curricula (Ryding 1995).

Amount of interaction was analyzed with the desire to learn SCA. The results approached statistical significance. It would appear that those who interacted more with the host nationals had a greater desire to learn SCA. This relates to a finding above that that revealed the research participants who interacted more with locals spent more time communicating in SCA. An additional modified GLM without the row ‘over 30 times’ also found near statistical significance among the variables. Thus, it is likely that those research participants who interact more with the locals have a greater desire to learn SCA and spend more time engaged in communicating in SCA. It is hoped that such results will validate institutions of higher education that are now pursuing an integrated approach. Certainly, the subject is no longer taboo – in the United States -- as Ryding stated in Redden 2008.

Interaction was also analyzed with regard to SCA ridicule. Results found that the more one interacts with the culture, the less probability there is that

one would feel ridiculed when communicating in SCA. This may be because SCA is frequently used in daily communication and among in-groups.

## Limitations

There are several limitations that should be noted in this research. The first limitation is the wording of some of the questions. In the section about language contact, for example, research participants responded to the statement: “Beyond and not including homework, on average, how many hours each week did you spend conversing in ...” followed by a number of varieties of Arabic. The question should have been: “Beyond *class time* and not including homework, on average, how many hours each week did you spend conversing in ...” This revised question would clarify that the MSA communication was taking place outside of homework *and* class time in order to accurately calculate the amount. It is assumed that the research participants inferred this meaning, though future research should correct this. The term “priority” in the third research question also has the potential for misinterpretation. The term should, perhaps, not have been combined with “desire” in the analysis regarding student desire to learn MSA and SCA.

Other limitations deal with the nature of the research participants’ programs. The recruitment materials only indicate that volunteers needed to have studied Arabic in the Arabic-speaking world within the last three years (at the time of completing the research instrument). No attention was paid to whether the research participants were in intensive language programs or in programs in which some or all of the instruction was content-based and in English. At least one research participant was in no program at all and was self-studying or using tutors. Moreover, some of the research participants only studied MSA or SCA (not both) during their time abroad. It is assumed, however, that living abroad produces some exposure to both varieties. It is also unknown whether the research participants had participated in study abroad more than three years previous to their contribution in this research.

Another limitation is that some of the research participants received a complimentary copy of a book in Arabic and English for participating. This was only available to those who were in the most recent administering of the research instruments.

Finally, in a few rare instances a small number of research participants wrote textual comments throughout the research that seemed to contradict certain selections they made in the research instruments. The author changed the research instrument selections to reflect the textual comments. Such instances were very atypical. The author did not, however, read every comment to check for contradictory information.

## Future Research

There are a number of directions this research could take in the future. One of the directions is a comparison of intensive Arabic programs abroad with domestic immersion programs. A study could be conducted to investigate proficiency and acculturation in these types of programs with normal university classes as a control. It would be interesting to see how study abroad programs compare and contrast with domestic immersion programs. It would also be interesting to investigate how these two programs differ from the normal coursework at a university (the control group).

## References

- Al-Batal, M. & Belnap, R. K. (2006) The teaching and learning of Arabic in the United States: Realities, needs, and future directions. In Kassem M. Wahba, Zeinab A. Taha, & Liz England (Eds.), *Handbook for Arabic language teaching professionals* (pp. 389-399). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Byram, M. (2000). Assessing Intercultural Competence in Teaching. *Sprogforum*, 18(6), 8-13. Retrieved February 24, 2010 from <http://inet.dpb.dpu.dk/infodok/sprogforum/Espr18/byram.html>.
- Carroll, J. B. (1967). Foreign language proficiency levels attained by language majors near graduation from college. *Foreign Language Annals*, 1, 13-151.
- Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. (2005). *Global competence and national needs: One million Americans studying abroad*. Retrieved July 7, 2009, from [http://www.nafsa.org/public\\_policy.sec/public\\_policy\\_document/study\\_abroad\\_1/lincoln\\_commission\\_report](http://www.nafsa.org/public_policy.sec/public_policy_document/study_abroad_1/lincoln_commission_report).
- DuFon, M. A. & Churchill, E. (2006). Evolving threads in study abroad research. In M. A. DuFon & E. Churchill (Eds.), *Language learners in study abroad contexts* (pp. 1-27). Cleveland, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- El-Hassan, S. A. (1977). Educated Spoken Arabic in Egypt and the Levant: A critical review of diglossia and related concepts. *Archivum Linguisticum* 8(2), 112-132.
- El-Hassan, S. A. (1978). Variation in the demonstrative system in educated spoken Arabic. *Archivum Linguisticum* 9(1), 32-57.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. In Thom Huebner (1996) (Ed.), *Sociolinguistic Perspectives: Papers on Language in Society 1959-1994* Charles A. Ferguson (pp. 25-39).

- Fishman, J. A. (1971). Societal Bilingualism: Stable and transitional. In Joshua A. Fishman, Robert L. Cooper & Roxana Ma, *Bilingualism in the Barrio*. In C. F. Voegelin (Ed.) Language Science Monographs, Volume 7 (pp. 539-557). Indiana University: Indiana University Publications.
- Freed, B. F. (1995) Language learning and study abroad. In B.F. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context* (pp.3-33). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Freed, B. F., Dewey, D. P., Segalowitz, N., & Halter, R. (2004). The Language Contact Profile. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 349-356.
- Freed B., So, S. & Lazar, N. A., (2003). Language learning abroad: How do gains in written fluency compare with gains in oral fluency in French as a second language? *ADFL Bulletin* 34, 34-40.
- Furman, N., Goldberg, D. & Lusin, N. (2007). Enrollments in languages other than English in United States institutions of higher education, Fall 2006. *Modern Language Association of America*. Retrieved January 11, 2010, from <http://www.mla.org/homepage>.
- Ginsberg, R. B. & Miller, L. (2000). What do they do? Activities of students during study abroad. In Lambert, R. & Shohamy, E. (Eds.), *Language policy and pedagogy: Essays in honor of A. Ronald Walton* (pp. 237 - 261). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins North America.
- Gutierrez, R., Hawthorne, A., Kirk, M., & Powers, C. (2009). Expanding U.S. Study Abroad in the Arab World: Challenges and Opportunities. *Meeting America's Global Education Challenge*, 4, 1-40. Retrieved January 11, 2010, from [http://www.iie.org//Template.cfm?Section=Study\\_abroad\\_white\\_papers](http://www.iie.org//Template.cfm?Section=Study_abroad_white_papers).
- Ibrahim, M. 1989. Communicating in Arabic: Problems and prospects. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *Language Adaptation* (pp. 39-59). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Kinginger, C. (2004). Alice doesn't live here anymore: Foreign language learning as identity (re)construction. In Pavlenko, A. & Blackledge, A. (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts* (pp. 219-242). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Kinginger, C. (2005). *Research on language learning in study abroad (1998-2005)*. (CALPER Professional Development Document CPDD 0507). University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research.



- Kinginger, C. & Farrell, K (2004). Assessing the development of meta-pragmatic awareness in study abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, X, 19-42.
- Maamouri, M. (1998). Language education and human development: Arabic diglossia and its impact on the quality of education in the Arab region. *Mediterranean Development Forum*. Morocco: World Bank.
- Mahmoud, Y. (1986). Arabic after Diglossia. In (Eds.) J. A. Fishman, A. Tabouret Keller, M. Clyne, B. Krishnamurti and M. Abdulaziz. *The Fergusonian Impact: In honor of Charles A. Ferguson on the occasion of his 65th birthday, I: From Phonology to Society; II: Sociolinguistics and the Sociology of Language*. Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter: 239-251.
- Miller, L., & Ginsberg, R. (1995). Folklinguistic theories of language learning. In B. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context* (pp. 293–315). Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Palmer, J. L. (2007). Arabic Diglossia: Teaching only the standard variety is a disservice to students. *Arizona Working Papers in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching*, 14. Retrieved May 21, 2009 from <http://w3.coh.arizona.edu/awp/Volumes.htm>.
- Palmer, J. L. (2008). Arabic Diglossia II: Student perceptions of spoken Arabic after living in the Arabic-speaking world. *Arizona Working Papers in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching*, 15. Retrieved May 21, 2009 from <http://w3.coh.arizona.edu/awp/Volumes.htm>.
- Parkinson, D. B. (2003). Verbal features in oral Fusha performance in Cairo. *Int'l J. Soc. Lang* 163, 27-41.
- Redden, E. (2008). Shifting winds in Arabic teaching. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/10/01/arabic>.
- Rifkin, B. (2005). A Ceiling Effect in Traditional Classroom Foreign Language Instruction: Data from Russian. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89(1), 3-18.
- Ryding, K. C. (1995). Discourse competence in TAFL: Skill levels and choice of language variety in the Arabic classroom. In M. Al-Batal (Ed.), *The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language: Issues and directions* (pp. 223-231). Provo, Utah: American Association of Teachers of Arabic.
- Schmidt, S. D., Inbar, O. & Shohamy, E. (2004). The effects of teaching spoken Arabic on students' attitudes and motivation in Israel. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88 (2) 217-228.
- St. Mary's College Study Abroad Survey. [http://www.saintmarys.edu/~cwil/php/intercultural.learning/documents/abroadsurv\\_\\_2005\\_final-long.pdf](http://www.saintmarys.edu/~cwil/php/intercultural.learning/documents/abroadsurv__2005_final-long.pdf).

- Taguchi, N. (2008). Cognition, language contact, and the development of pragmatic comprehension in a study-abroad context. *Language Learning*, 58(1), 33-71.
- Vande Berg, M., Connor-Linton, J. & Paige, M. (2008). The Georgetown consortium project: Interventions for student learning abroad. 1-58.
- Versteegh, K. (2004). *The Arabic Language* (Third edition. First in 1997). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ward, C. & Kennedy, A. (1999). The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. *Int. J. Intercultural Rel*, 23(4), 659-677.
- Whitworth, K. F. (2006). Access to language learning during study abroad: The roles of identity and subject positioning (Doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2006). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 67/08, Feb 2007.