Classroom discourse in an Arabic foreign language classroom and the perceived benefits of interactions among learners: A case study of college-level Heritage Language Learners (HLLs) and Foreign Language Learners (FLLs)

DISSEPTION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Manal S. Habbal, MA, MBA
Graduate Program in Education: Teaching and Learning

The Ohio State University

2017

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Keiko Samimy, Advisor
Dr. Carmen Taleghani-Nikazm
Dr. Joseph Zeidan
Abstract

Growing interest in Arabic language learning due to the sociopolitical climate in the United States has led to an increase in the number of Arabic language classrooms at institutions of higher learning throughout the United States. In addition to Foreign Language Learners (FLLs), Heritage Language Learners (HLLs) have been steadily enrolling in Arabic language classrooms. It is widely confirmed that these two types of learners enter the classroom with different backgrounds, language skills, and motivations. This dissertation investigates the FLLs’ and HLLs’ contributions to the interactions and learning that take place within the classroom context. It explores how the two types of Arabic learners and the instructor perceive the presence of FLLs vs. HLLs and how any differences influence interaction patterns and learning development.

Qualitative research, with a case study approach, was conducted for data collection and analysis. A beginner-intermediate level Arabic language classroom at a large Midwestern university was selected as a site for the study. Along with classroom observations, interviews were conducted with four students (2 HLLs and 2 FLLs) and the classroom teacher, which allowed for a better understanding of the participants’ beliefs and perceptions of factors that impact the Arabic language learning experience. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (SCT),
which allows for an investigation of cognition as well as social context. In addition, this research was informed by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories that explicitly take social context into account. These include theories of Interaction (Gass, 2003; Gass & Mackey, 2007; Long, 1996) and theories of affect and motivation (Dornyei, 1996, 2005; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Ushioda & Dornyei, 2012).

Results of the study show different factors that influence the interaction process, and consequently the learning that develops within the classroom context. Some of the factors were context specific, while others were learner specific. The study also reveals that FLLs feel a degree of intimidation from the presence of HLLs who are native speakers of the language, although they consider them to be a valuable resource for learning the target language and culture. In addition, the findings expose the role of pedagogical methods on the interaction process and the learning that takes place within the classroom context. For language teachers, the presence of HLLs in the classroom poses an additional challenge and requires that extra effort be made to find pedagogies that suit the needs of all learners and motivate them to collaborate in the classroom.
Dedication

To my children, Abir and Abdul, and my family for their never ending support
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who encouraged me to embark on my academic journey. Many individuals have contributed, directly or indirectly, to my persistence and determination to attain my doctorate, and I am forever thankful. But above all, I thank God for giving me the courage and strength to keep on going and achieve my dreams.

Next, my sincere thanks go to my advisor, Dr. Samimy, for her unwavering support, compassion, and guidance. She is a wonderful scholar and teacher, and I could not have done this without her inspiring and valuable ideas and suggestions. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Carmen Taleghani-Nikazm and Dr. Joseph Zeidan for their steady support, valued advice, and guidance throughout this journey. Dr. Taleghani-Nikazm is a distinguished scholar in the fields of Foreign Language Education and Applied Linguistics, and I feel fortunate to have received her insightful suggestions while writing this dissertation. I am also so grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Dr. Zeidan. He is a well-known scholar in Arabic Language and Literature, particularly Arab Women’s Literature. He believed in me as a teacher as well as a researcher and has been a supportive and empowering force throughout the research process.
In addition, I would like to extend special thanks to Dr. Edwina Carreon. She has provided her support and expertise in dissertation writing and has always helped me stay on track and keep on writing. Besides Dr. Edwina, a number of colleagues have assisted, in one way or another, and I am thankful for all they offered.

I would also like to offer my deepest gratitude to the Arabic language instructor who gave me access to his classroom and agreed to be a participant in the study, as well. His participation has certainly provided useful insights and added value to my findings. In addition, I thank all my student participants who graciously and passionately shared their experiences and beliefs about their experiences studying Arabic; without them, this study would not have been possible. I hope that my study allows their voices to be heard.

Finally, I thank my children, Abir and Abdul, for being in my life and giving me the strength and determination to complete this project. They are simply the greatest source of motivation and I hope I have made them proud. I am also forever indebted to my family who encouraged and supported me throughout my studies and I am tremendously grateful for everything they continue to do, to help me achieve my dreams.
Vita

1989............................................ B.S. in Medical Technology, The Ohio State University

2000............................................ Master of Business Administration, M.B.A. University of Dayton

2012............................................ M.A. in Foreign and Second Language Education, The Ohio State University

2008 – 2011................................. Graduate Teaching Associate, Arabic 101-104 Arabic Individualized Instructions, The Ohio State University

2011 – 2012................................. Grammar Instructor, American Language Program (ALP), The Ohio State University

2012 to present............................. Lecturer, ESL Composition Program, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Education: Teaching and Learning

Area of Specialization: Foreign, Second, and Multilingual Education
Table of Contents

Abstract................................................................................................................................. ii

Dedication............................................................................................................................... iv

Acknowledgment...................................................................................................................... v

Vita........................................................................................................................................ vii

List of Tables.......................................................................................................................... xii

List of Figures.......................................................................................................................... xiii

Chapter 1: Introduction.......................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Background and rationale................................................................................................. 1
  1.2 Problem statement........................................................................................................... 6
  1.3 Purpose of the study......................................................................................................... 9
  1.4 Significance of the study................................................................................................. 10
  1.5 Research questions.......................................................................................................... 12
  1.6 Theoretical framework................................................................................................. 13
  1.7 Limitation of the study................................................................................................. 16
  1.8 Definition of terms......................................................................................................... 16

Chapter 2: Literature Review............................................................................................... 19
  2.1 Arabic language learning............................................................................................. 20
  2.2 Arabic language characteristics and diglossia............................................................. 21
  2.3 Who is learning Arabic?............................................................................................. 22
  2.4 Defining HLLs.............................................................................................................. 24
    2.4.1 Heritage Language Acquisition (HLA)................................................................. 26
2.4.2 Language proficiency levels of HLLs......................................................27
2.5 HLLs of Arabic.............................................................................................29
2.6 HLLs in foreign language classrooms.........................................................30
  2.6.1 Placement issues.......................................................................................32
2.7 Sociocultural Theory (SCT).......................................................................33
2.8 SLA..................................................................................................................35
  2.8.1 Prominent theories in SLA.................................................................37
  2.8.2 The Sociolinguistic approach to SLA....................................................38
  2.8.3 SLA and perspectives on interaction...................................................39
  2.8.4 Interaction Hypothesis.............................................................................40
  2.8.5 Conversations and input.........................................................................42
2.9 Collaboration and proficiency differences..................................................44
2.10 The classroom as a community of practice...............................................47
  2.11 The construct of identity............................................................................50
    2.11.1 Agency and investment.......................................................................52
2.12 Affect and motivation in language learning..............................................54
  2.12.1 Affective variables................................................................................54
  2.12.2 Motivation in L2 learning......................................................................56
2.13 Exploring learners’ and teachers’ beliefs...................................................61
2.14 Pedagogical issues in the foreign language classroom..............................63
  2.14.1 Native speaker (NS) vs. non-native speaker (NNS) teacher..................63
  2.14.2 Toward a communicative classroom....................................................64

Chapter 3: Methodology.....................................................................................67
  3.1 Introduction..................................................................................................67
  3.2 Research questions......................................................................................68
  3.3 Research design ..........................................................................................70
    3.3.1 Case study approach..........................................................................73
    3.3.2 Classroom observations......................................................................75
    3.3.3 Interviews.............................................................................................76
  3.4 Research setting............................................................................................77
  3.5 Participants.....................................................................................................79
    3.5.1 Phase 1.................................................................................................79
    3.5.2 Phase 2.................................................................................................80
  3.6 Data collection instruments.........................................................................81
    3.6.1 Background questionnaire...................................................................82
    3.6.2 Classroom observations notes............................................................83
    3.6.3 Audio/video recording.........................................................................85
    3.6.4 Students/teacher interviews...............................................................86
3.7 Data collection procedures.........................................................86
3.7.1 Data collection timeline..........................................................88
3.8 Validity and reliability of study....................................................91
3.9 Data analysis.............................................................................96

Chapter 4: Findings..........................................................................99
4.1 A description of the Arabic classroom.........................................100
4.2 Participant case studies..............................................................103
  4.2.1 Caitlyn.................................................................................103
  4.2.2 Sofi.....................................................................................114
  4.2.3 Zain...................................................................................123
  4.2.4 Joelle..................................................................................132
  4.2.5 Steven...............................................................................145

Chapter 5: Cross-case analysis........................................................166
5.1 Motivational factors....................................................................166
5.2 Identity issues............................................................................172
5.3 Self-assessment of Arabic language competency..........................178
5.4 Perceived proficiency differences...............................................183
5.5 Attitudes toward the diversity of learners.................................188
5.6 Group work and peer collaboration.............................................190
5.7 Learning preferences and learners' concerns..............................193
5.8 Perspectives on pedagogical practices........................................197

Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusion..............................................202
6.1 Answer to research question 1....................................................204
  6.1.1 Learners' attributes.............................................................204
  6.1.2 Contributions of HLLs........................................................208
  6.1.3 Communities of practice within the classroom.......................210
6.2 Answer to research question 2....................................................212
  6.2.1 Classroom discourse..........................................................214
  6.2.2 Learners' attributes as determinants of interaction...............216
  6.2.3 Proficiency differences and collaboration............................216
  6.2.4 Nature of assigned tasks....................................................219
  6.2.5 Identity positioning.............................................................220
  6.2.6 Agency..............................................................................223
List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Research Process.................................................................69
Table 2. Student Classification.............................................................................80
Table 3. Participants in Phase 2...........................................................................81
Table 4. Data Collection Timeline.......................................................................90
Table 5. Summary of Findings.............................................................................164-165
Table 6. Summary of Emergent Themes...............................................................200-201
List of Figures

Figure 1. Language Learning Motivational Factors………………………………………172

Figure 2. The Rate of Interaction in the Classroom………………………………………215

Figure 3. Cognitive and Contextual Factors Affecting Interaction…………………249
CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

Foreign language education, at all levels of the educational process, experienced a steady growth between 1980 and 2009 as reported by the Modern Language Association (MLA, 2010). During this period, Arabic witnessed the largest spike -- a 46 percent increase in enrollment. Although a recent MLA report (2013) shows a slight decline in foreign language learning, Arabic remains among the top ten studied languages in the United States. The interest in learning Arabic in colleges and universities across the U.S. has significantly grown following the September 11th, 2001 terror attacks, and continues to grow at the undergraduate level according to MLA (2013) report.

In addition to the increased interest in Arabic learning at higher institutions, Arabic is currently the fastest growing language in the United States, as conveyed by a number of published reports. Based on a study by the Pew Research Center, Richards (2016) reports that the number of Arabic speakers in the United States has grown by 29% between 2010 and 2014. In fact, data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that the number of Arabic speakers has nearly doubled, increasing from 615,000 in 2010 to 1.1 million by 2014.
Moreover, it is projected that the number of Arabic speakers in the United States will increase from 1.6% in 2010 to 1.8% in 2020. This number can be even larger as a result of the recent immigration of refugees from war-torn Arab countries, such as Iraq and Syria.

Similar to foreign language learning, heritage language learning has also been receiving a lot of attention within recent years. In fact, in most U.S. colleges and universities, language classrooms are no longer comprised of foreign language learners only. As Montrul (2010) states, “An increasing trend in many postsecondary foreign language classes in North America is the presence of heritage language learners” (p.3); now, classrooms are more likely to include a number of heritage language learners (HLLs), in addition to domestic learners.

The use of the term heritage language learner in the restricted sense adopted within the foreign language teaching profession is relatively new, and its use was not widespread until the publication of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning (ACTFL, 1996). Up to that time, Spanish instructors were the only members of the foreign language teaching profession who had worked with large numbers of students who already understood and spoke the language that they taught (Valdes, 2005, p.412).

Many scholars in the field of language education (e.g., Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Lee, 2005; Valdes, 2005) have discussed possible differences between heritage language learners (HLLs) and foreign language learners (FLLs). In the
past few decades, research on heritage language learning has made it apparent that HLLs differ substantially from traditional FLLs (Kondo-Brown, 2005; Duff, 2008). Their background knowledge, language skills, familiarity with the culture, motivation, and other factors make them a special class of language learners (Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Lee, 2005). It is important to remember, however, that heritage language learners’ proficiency levels can vary greatly, depending on the previous exposure the learners have received. For example, and because they are usually raised in homes and communities where the heritage language is used, some HLLs come to the classroom with well-developed native-like pronunciation and fluency in colloquial. On the other hand, some HLLs do not receive much exposure to their heritage language for various reasons.

Most heritage language scholars (e.g. Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Lynch, 2003; Montrul, 2008, 2010; Valdes, 1997, 2005; Xiao, 2006) agree that HLLs’ linguistic characteristics---as compared to non-heritage language learners---can be hypothetically noted in the following areas:

- *Oral and aural skills:* Heritage language learners, to some degree, have been exposed to the spoken version of the heritage language and thus have already developed some skills in listening and speaking.

- *Phonology, morphology, and syntax:* HLLs usually have advantages over non-heritage language learners in pronunciation and basic knowledge of the word order and grammatical rules of the spoken form of the heritage language.
- **Metalinguistic competence and awareness**: In most cases, HLLs have little metalinguistic knowledge of the heritage language.

- **Sociolinguistic rules of the language**: Most HLLs have already developed some knowledge in this area and have a better ability than non-heritage language learners in understanding and communicating more effectively with native speakers of the target language.

Having these specific language skills, heritage language learners’ classroom participation patterns might differ from those of foreign language learners. Therefore, when designing language programs, it is important to recognize the different types of learners and build on this linguistic resource present within the classroom. In order to better inform the field of foreign language teaching and learning, we need to clearly understand the characteristics, concerns, and needs of the heritage as well as the foreign language learners. Furthermore, it is important that we investigate factors which influence language learning within the classroom context. In addition to learner specific factors, contextual factors can play a significant role in the language learning process.

From SCT perspective, learning is a social activity, in addition to being a cognitive one. Thus, many scholars in the field of language education and SLA discuss the importance of interaction among learners in the language classroom (Gass & Mackey, 2007; Long, 1996; Richard-Amato, 1996).
The present study aims to depict the characteristics of different types of learners present in the foreign language classroom, with a specific focus on heritage language learners, to determine how these differences can actually be utilized to help language acquisition through interaction among peers in the foreign language classroom. The study, further, explores the perceptions of Arabic language learners on various issues related to their learning within the Arabic classroom. In an attempt to find some explanations, this study answers the following research questions:

1. How do different learners (HLLs and FLLs) contribute to the teaching-learning process in the Arabic language classroom?

2. In what ways does interaction among learners influence students’ learning as perceived by language learners in the Arabic language classroom?

   A. What are the language learners’ perceptions on having learners from various lingual and cultural backgrounds in the context of their classroom?

   B. What are the teacher’s perceptions on having HLLs in the foreign language classroom and on the interaction between these learners and FLLs?

3. How can pedagogical choices affect classroom interaction?
4. What role does motivation play in the participation patterns of learners in the Arabic language classroom?

1.2 Problem Statement

Nowadays, foreign language classrooms at most universities across the United States are likely to have heritage language learners among their students. According to Montrul (2010), a growing trend in many postsecondary foreign language classes in North America is the presence of heritage language learners. The presence of both heritage language learners and foreign language learners in the foreign language classroom requires that educators and researchers take a closer look at the interaction process that takes place within the classroom; it also requires that they investigate the unique linguistic and social characteristics of the heritage learners and the affective variables that influence their learning process.

As a previous college instructor of Arabic as a foreign language, I have had a number of heritage language learners in my classrooms. During my three years of teaching Arabic, I've noticed some differences in the interaction and participation patterns of this group of students. Reviewing current literature on heritage language learners, some of my observations were confirmed; these include certain linguistic skills and cultural knowledge that heritage language learners usually hold. Most of the research on heritage
language learners, however, has been focused on identity issues, motivation, linguistic skills, and cultural characteristics (e.g., Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Lynch, 2003; Montrul, 2008, 2010; Valdes, 1997, 2005); it rarely discusses how these differences influence classroom discourse, interaction, and the learning that takes place within the language classroom’s context.

As stated above, with the presence of heritage language learners in most language classrooms, language educators need to understand all issues pertaining to this group of learners in order to provide every student, including HLLs, the best language learning experience. Gaining an understanding of language learners’ backgrounds, their motivation for learning the language, the ways they interact in the classroom during group activities and how much they benefit from interacting with peers is very important. Currently, most language instructors assign group activities which allow for learner-learner interaction within the classroom context. As teachers anticipate that interaction among learners can enhance language learning, realizing the patterns of interactions of different learners and how learning occurs when students’ proficiency levels vary in different skills, will provide teachers with valuable information that can be very helpful when designing classroom activities.

A number of scholars (e.g., Kondo-Brown, 2005; Lynch, 2003; Montrul, 2010; Valdes, 2001) have presented the field of language education with critical information pertaining to heritage language learners’ characteristics and profiles. Lynch (2003), for
example, points out that heritage language speakers are “generally characterized by linguistic processes and social factors attributed both to SLA and to situations of language contact” (p. 31), and calls for the growing field of heritage language acquisition to build upon basic theories and methodologies of SLA in the development of research paradigms and pedagogical practices. Lynch, moreover, refers to the conceptual distinction made by Cummins (1984) between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). He explains that communicative approaches to teach the language focus on BICS, whereas formal, more grammar-oriented approaches emphasize CALP. As stated by this author, the advantage that HL learners bring to the foreign language classroom is related to BICS, and not CALP. Classrooms usually focus on conscious learning of grammatical rules and heritage learners might not have an advantage in that area. In fact, “non-speakers of the HL who are good at grammar sometimes outperform HL speakers on grammar tests and get higher grades in the language class, even though the non-speaker of the HL may be incapable of communicating the simplest idea”, (Lynch, 2003, p.9). Montrul (2008) has called for accommodating heritage language learners in addition to L2 learners in U.S. schools and universities. I argue that language teachers should not only accommodate heritage learners in their classrooms, but use the cultural and linguistic resources brought in with these learners to optimize the learning of all students present in the language classroom.

In broad terms, this study attempts to investigate the differences among language learners, their classroom discourse, and the learning that occurs by learners’ interaction
during group activities. Furthermore, this study will provide a more nuanced and informed understanding of Arabic language learners’ characteristics as well as perspectives on the language learning experience.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The primary goal of this research is to explore the role that heritage language learners can play in the foreign language classroom, mainly through interactions with peers during group tasks assigned by the teacher. From a discourse perspective, classroom talk is considered consequential to language learning and development (Thoms, 2012, p.8). Examining the actual discourse that classroom participants construct can help educators and researchers determine how language development could take place in this setting. Moreover, this study sheds light on numerous factors that influence the interaction process in the classroom, including the teacher’s pedagogical choices.

This study also intends to expose the differences in learners’ backgrounds, proficiency levels, and motivations in order to suggest pedagogies that take these differences into consideration and view these differences as resources rather than obstacles and as factors that can facilitate the language learning for all students in the foreign language classroom.
1.4 Significance of the study

The number of Arabic HLLs in Arabic foreign language classrooms at U.S colleges and universities is expected to continue growing in the near future due to the increased number of Arab-American population in the United States. According to data published by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2011, the number of Arab-Americans is estimated to be 1.8 million. The Arab-American Institute’s data show that a greater number, 3.7 million in 2012. With the recent immigration of thousands of Arabs from war-torn countries, such as Iraq and Syria, I predict that the number of Arab-American has grown within the last few years. This phenomenon means that the number of Arabic heritage language learners (HLLs) enrolling in Arabic language courses in universities across the United States is expected to increase in the coming years. In most classes, HLLs of Arabic will be studying in classrooms designed for foreign language learners (FLLs). Therefore, Arabic departments and Arabic teachers need to be aware of different issues related to this considerably recent phenomenon. This study’s finding are expected to contribute in unveiling different issues related to the language learning that occurs within the mixed Arabic classroom.

It is important to identify the individual learner’s needs and goals when planning a curriculum. Additionally, an ongoing challenge for foreign language programs and teachers is to find the best pedagogical approach to facilitate proficiency development among different types of learners. This is a particularly important challenge within the
classroom context where communication, interaction, cooperation and cultural knowledge are exchanged among different kinds of learners.

Few studies discuss topics pertaining to the interaction in the classroom between HLLs and FLLs; even fewer have investigated the factors that enhance or limit such interaction. Furthermore, there is a scarcity in research on Arabic heritage learners even though the presence of HLLs in Arabic language classroom has been steadily increasing. Additionally, little research has offered in-depth analysis of how FLLs perceive their peer's proficiency levels, and how their perceptions impact the nature of interaction and language learning – none have pertained specifically to Arabic language learners. Therefore, results from the present research are particularly unique, as they reveal the influence of proficiency differences among learners on the interaction process.

As was previously mentioned, foreign language classrooms in most colleges are likely to have both heritage language learners and foreign language learners. Curricula, however, are usually designed and planned exclusively for foreign language learners without taking into consideration the presence of heritage language learners. The aim of this study is to investigate the interaction that takes place between HLLs and FLLs in the Arabic language classroom. It also intends to explore the differences among learners. As Montrul (2010) asserts, heritage language learners process the language differently since they are primarily naturalistic learners. Montrul adds that HLLs don’t have much metalinguistic competence and awareness. This information is worth investigating further as it could guide language educators when planning classroom activities.
Research comparing HLLs and non-HLLs linguistic skills is still in its infancy stage and more research in this area is needed as the presence of heritage language learners in language classrooms continues to increase in most colleges and universities across the U.S. Moreover, providing insights on specific abilities of heritage language learners and the processes that occur among the different learners within the language classroom context is expected to provide much needed information for language instructors. In addition, understanding the non-native Arabic teacher’s beliefs and attitudes on aspects related to the teaching practices and the presence of HLLs in the classroom is an important topic to explore.

In summary, a study that sheds light on the differences between the two kinds of learners, HLLs and FLLs, will help educators adopt various pedagogical approaches that provide opportunities for interaction between the different learners, and consequently enhance language learning and development within the classroom context.

1.5 Research questions

This study explores the following research questions:

1. How do different learners (HLLs and FLLs) contribute to the teaching-learning process in the Arabic language classroom?
2. In what ways does interaction among learners influence students’ learning as perceived by language learners in the Arabic language classroom?

A. What are the language learners’ perceptions on having learners from various lingual and cultural backgrounds in the context of their classroom?

B. What are the teacher’s perceptions on having HLLs in the foreign language classroom and on the interaction between these learners and FLLs?

3. How can pedagogical choices affect classroom interaction?

4. What role does motivation play in the participation patterns of learners in the Arabic language classroom?

1.6 Theoretical framework

“In the field of language studies and in particular of language education, there has been a shift away from dominant assumptions that language could be conceptualized and taught as though it were independent of social context” (Hornberger & McKay, 2010, p.291). This study researches classroom discourse and adopts the socio-cultural theory (SCT) developed by Vygotsky and his colleagues (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural
theorists view interaction as a social practice which allows learners to negotiate and construct meaning. Classroom discourse has been defined as the oral interaction between teachers and their students and between students themselves that takes place in the classroom context (Thoms, 2012, p.8). The Socio Cultural Theory (SCT) views language as more than a formal system of linguistic properties (Thoms, 2012, p.9). Additionally, the sociocultural perspective maintains that the nature of language is fundamentally social and has its genesis in the interaction between people (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). It proposes that human thoughts arise in social interactions. Classrooms are viewed as social settings where students from different backgrounds meet and interact on a regular basis while going through the process of learning. Hence, the classroom context is made up of students, teachers, and interaction processes that occur within this context. Under the framework of the SCT, Rogoff (1990) proposes that a child’s development of skills requires that he interacts with a teacher, or more knowledgeable person. The teacher in the early home environment is usually the parent. Accordingly, children develop learning skills by interacting with their parents. This model suggests that the more a child interacts with their parents, the more skills they will develop.

Many scholars in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have discussed the notion of peer-peer interaction and the processes that take place with the presence of a more knowledgeable peer in group interaction (e.g., Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Ohta, 1995; Pica, 1994). Hellermann (2007) has also discussed the relationships that are established in the classroom among peers via interaction and their importance for language development. Adopting a cognitive view, some researchers have discussed the process of
language acquisition that results from peer-peer interaction based on Input-Interaction-Output (IIO) model (e.g., Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994). Sociocultural theorists believe that knowledge is constructed when learners interact and collaborate with more capable individuals; this occurs through the process of mediation where knowledge is shaped and advanced by the use of cultural tools such as language (e.g., Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Conversations that occur during classroom interactional tasks are important opportunities to consider when analyzing classroom discourse. Conversation, according to Ellis (1984) is the most natural form of exposure to the language being learned. He states that: “It is by negotiating the exchange of meaning through conversation that the learner typically obtains information about the target language which enables them to revise existing interlanguage system” (Ellis, 1984, p. 14). Understanding how discourse involving the learner is constructed is essential to understanding language development. Given that in second language acquisition (SLA) the task is understood as an important site for language learning (Ellis, 2000, 2003; Long, 1996), it is important for research in the field to investigate the full range of opportunities for language learning in such learner–learner task interactions (Kasper, 2004; Van Lier & Matsuo, 2000; Hellermann, 2007).

Moreover, the learner’s background and experiences, learning style, character, and motivation can be influential factors on the interaction process that takes place within the classroom setting, thus impacting the language learning and development in this context. In this study, I focus on peer interaction and the presence of more proficient
peers in the classroom. I also investigate the impact of these factors on the language learning process that takes place in the classroom context. Specifically, this research examines discourse in the Arabic language classroom from the perspective of sociocultural theory, which is adopted as the overarching framework for data analysis and interpretation.

1.7 Limitation of the study

This study is qualitative in nature, and it utilizes participant interviews and ethnographic techniques (field observations) as the main tools for data collection. The small sample size and the confined study within the same geographical area make results specific to the small population observed and interviewed. Therefore, from the interpretations, I cannot generalize results to all non-native Arabic language teachers and students of Arabic as a foreign or heritage language. Moreover, my own bias as a language teacher and being a native Arabic speaker might influence my interpretation of findings.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

In order to clarify some discussions throughout the study, some definitions of terms are provided.
‘Ammiyya: Refers to the informal dialect of Arabic which is used during informal communicative exchanges.

**Code-switching:** The practice of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of a language during conversation.

**Classroom discourse:** Classroom-based research studies define discourse as the oral interaction between teachers and their students and between students themselves that takes place in a classroom context.

**Colloquial:** A characteristic for the informal version of the language spoken in everyday conversations.

**Diglossia:** A dual linguistic context.

**Diglossic language:** The term used for a language in which the spoken version is different than the literary one.

**Discourse analysis:** This term usually refers to the analysis of episodes of talk in social context.

**Emic:** When the researcher is considered an insider of the culture being studied.

**Field:** In ethnography, this term refers to the actual context or setting being studied by the researcher, which is the classroom in this study.

**Foreign Language Learners (FLLs):** Refers to the learners of a foreign language.

**Fus-ha:** The formal version of Arabic. It is also referred to as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA).
Heritage Language Learners (HLLs): This term refers to members of linguistic minorities who are concerned about the study, maintenance, and revitalization of their minority languages.

Interaction: Based on Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT), interaction is a socially constructed behavior; in language acquisition, social interaction is context dependent.

L2 (Target language): This term refers to the foreign language a language learner aims at learning.

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA): The official and formal Arabic language. This literary version is learned and often used in writing, religious sermons, news broadcasts, and other formal linguistic situations.

Native speaker (NS): This term refers to a person who speaks the language of their parents and learns it very early in their childhood.

Non-native speaker (NNS): It refers to someone who has another native tongue than the language being used in a specific context.

Peers: Learners who jointly or collaboratively share the same goal.

Peer interaction: The process in which students interact with each other when they work on a task.

Reliability: In qualitative research indicates that a particular approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Creswell, 2009, p.232).

Validity: In qualitative research, it means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures (Creswell, 2009, p. 232).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The increased interest in Arabic language learning, along with the substantial growth in enrollment in Arabic language classrooms across U.S. colleges and universities, were the main driving factors behind this study. In addition to foreign language learners (FLLs), most Arabic classrooms include heritage language learners (HLLs), which have often been described as a unique group of learners. The primary goal of this research is to explore the role that heritage language learners play in the Arabic foreign language classroom, through classroom discourse and as perceived by other learners. In addition, the study investigates the role of interaction in language development and attempts to determine factors that influence the interaction process in the classroom. To gain a thorough understanding of the different topics included in this study, the following review of the literature is provided.

The first part of this review examines the status of Arabic language learning in the United States (U.S.). After presenting an overview of the Arabic language and its characteristics, research on heritage language learners will be reviewed. The second part of this chapter explains the overarching theory adopted as the framework for this study, the Sociocultural Theory (SCT), and reviews prominent theories on Second Language Acquisition (SLA). In addition, constructs that are found to be useful for this study’s
discussions are reviewed. Research on the role of affect in language learning is also examined in this chapter, and relevant theories on motivation are reviewed. In the remainder of the review, the role of pedagogy in enhancing language learning will be discussed. Hypotheses which address the effectiveness of various teaching methodologies will be examined and compared.

2.1 Arabic language learning

There are over 256 million people who speak Arabic in the world today. Moreover, Arabic is used as the ritual language for worshiping by more than one billion people around the world, for a combined total population of over 1.5 billion. The Arabic language was initially introduced to the United States in the 1880s and is currently reported to be the fastest growing language in the U.S. (Pew Research center, 2016 & U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Current language policies endorsed by the government, community schools, and families’ persistence on speaking the language at home all contribute to the survival of the language. In addition, the accessibility to satellite and web television has made Arabic media available in the United States and has introduced important Arabic news channels such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya. There are no official reports on the effect of Arabic television on the maintenance of the language, but it is reasonable to say that it is a contributing factor for preserving it.
As noted, Arabic is the fastest growing major language and national enrollment in Arabic has been rapidly increasing since 2002. As Husseinali (2006) reports, enrollment in Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) classes doubled after the events of September 11, 2001, and is expected to keep increasing. A recent statistic by the Modern Language Association (MLA) shows that the number of students enrolled in Arabic courses reached 32,286 in 2013, thus placing Arabic as the eighth most studied language. As pointed out by Samimy (2008), this led the MLA to remove Arabic from the list of less commonly taught languages (LCTLS). In total, the number of institutions of higher learning offering Arabic nearly tripled between 2002 and 2013, from 284 in 2002 to 628 Arabic programs offered in 2013 (MLA, 2013). This increase can most likely be attributed to the classification of Arabic as a critical language by the U.S. Department of State, which led to increased funding as well as additional career opportunities.

2.2 Arabic Language Characteristics and Diglossia

Arabic, the official language of twenty three countries in the Arab world, is known to be diglossic in nature. Diglossia is “a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language, there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety” (Ferguson, 1959, 1972).

The official form of the language is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) – also referred to as Fus-ha. According to Elmahdy et al. (2009), MSA is the form accepted
and understood by all native speakers, regardless of their dialectical variety. However, there is another form used in daily and informal conversations among people; it is referred to as the colloquial form—‘Ammiyya. Bassiouny (2009) discusses the topic of diglossia and “the tension and ambivalent feelings” that most Arabs have towards the diglossic nature of the language. She notes that, “People speak one language variety at home and learn a different one in school, write in one language and express their feelings in another” (p.9).

Spoken Arabic is a mixed form and dialects vary by region because of a dominating influence from local languages (prior to the introduction of Arabic) or from colonial languages, as explained by Abdelali (2004). It is important to note that differences between the various dialects of spoken Arabic can be significant enough to make them incomprehensible to one another when spoken by a native. Each of the dialects, however, is based on classical Arabic and contains basic Arabic vocabulary, in varying degrees, depending on the regional dialect. In addition, most Arabic dialects are grammatically structured in fairly similar ways. However, the case ending system, I’raab, which is considered to be the core grammatical feature of MSA, is not used in the colloquial forms of spoken Arabic.

Regardless of which dialect an Arab speaks, learning the Modern Standard Arabic formally, in schools, is required for a person to be considered literate; it is needed to read the Qur’an, a variety of forms of literature, media publications, and other formal scripts. MSA is also the accepted and respected form used in writing.
2.3 Who is learning Arabic?

Enrollment in Arabic classrooms has been rapidly increasing in the last decade, as previously discussed. Reported data on Arabic language learners show that most of the learners are undergraduates. In fact, recent MLA reports reveal that enrollment in graduate Arabic programs fell by 20.1% in the 2009-2013 period.

Profiles of Arabic learners could vary depending on the demographics of a given region; i.e. the population of Arab Americans. In general, the majority of students in Arabic language classrooms are FLLs while an average of 15-20% are HLLs. In a 1987 survey by Benlap, 12% of the surveyed Arabic students reported that they came from a home where at least one of the parents spoke Arabic. In the past, enrollment growth in LCTL courses was linked to the increasing number of HLLs (Benlap, 1987). This could have also applied to Arabic at that time; however, as discussed earlier, enrollment in Arabic classrooms has dramatically increased after the events of 9/11 and Arabic is no longer considered an LCTL. An additional group of Arabic learners that is often present in small numbers in Arabic language classrooms is Non-Arab Muslim learners. In this study, I refer to this group as “Other Learners”. Because of the limited scope of the study, this group of learners was not included in the discussion and analysis.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy to mention that attempts to find recent and accurate data on Arabic language learners’ profiles, in general, and HLL enrollment, in
particular, were unsuccessful. Understanding the variation in learners’ profiles, abilities, learning preferences, needs, and motivation can lead to better understanding of the complexity associated with the learning as well as the teaching process.

2.4 Defining HLLs

The term heritage speaker was first introduced in Canada in the mid-1970s but has been gaining ground in the United States since the 1990s (Montrul, 2010; Cummins, 2005). Although the term “heritage learner” has increasingly appeared in the field of language teaching and learning as well as in applied linguistics, there is still much confusion surrounding the meaning of this term. Researchers have not yet reached a consensus about a precise, scientific definition of a heritage language (HL) learner (He, 2010; Wiley & Valdes, 2000). In North America, the term heritage language has been used to refer to an immigrant, indigenous, or ancestral language that a speaker has a personal relevance and desire to (re)connect with (He, 2010; Cummins, 2005; Fishman, 2001; Wiley, 2001). Montrul defines heritage language learners as the “children of families who speak an ethnolinguistically minority language” (Montrul, 2010). They are the “native speakers, quasi-native speakers, residual speakers, bilingual speakers, and home-background speakers,” (Valdes, 1997). An HL student is the learner who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language (Comanaru & Noels, 2009; Valdes, 2001).
Campbell and Rosenthal (2000) have described heritage learners as having typically mastered nearly 90% of the phonology of the language and 80 to 90% of the grammatical rules of discourse, and possessing strong listening skills, but with varying degrees of speaking skills and limited literacy skills. It is significant to note, however, that this is not the case with every language, and specifically not with diglossic languages such as Arabic. Van Deusen–Scholl (2003) differentiated between heritage learners and learners with a heritage motivation: “Heritage learners are students who have achieved some degree of proficiency in the home language and/or have been raised with strong cultural connections as has been defined by Valdes. On the other hand, learners with a heritagemotivation are “those that seek to reconnect with their family’s heritage through language” (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003, p.222).

The most commonly agreed on definition sees the heritage learner as bilingual in English and a home language other than English with varying degrees of proficiency in the home language. With all these definitions, it is imperative that we recognize that each of these terms carries particular connotations within social, academic, and national contexts, and as confirmed by Van Deusen-Scholl (2003), “heritage is a relative term that is socially determined and constructed.” To sum up, it is apparent that all definitions of heritage learners point to the fact that the proficiency level of heritage language learners can vary widely from one learner to another.
The following section sheds light on Heritage Language Acquisition theories as articulated by a few scholars in this growing field. Due to the increase in HLL enrollment in foreign language classrooms, it would be helpful to understand the linguistic skills of this group of learners and the process through which they acquired those skills. Further discussions of SLA theories will be taken up in subsequent sections of this chapter.

2.4.1 Heritage Language Acquisition (HLA)

While many theories of SLA are present in the literature, there is a dearth of theories that explain heritage language acquisition. The field of heritage language acquisition is fairly new and emerging; therefore, many studies are still needed to better understand this phenomenon. HLA theories pertaining to Arabic HLLs are virtually non-existent. As previously discussed, Arabic is a diglossic language and HLLs are often familiar with the spoken dialect (colloquial) they are exposed to at home. Knowledge of the formal version (Fus-ha) requires formal schooling since it is the literary form of Arabic. Because of this situation, Arabic HLLs need to be categorized differently from other groups of HLLs discussed in the literature.

In the following sections, a number of HLA theories are discussed in an effort to shed some light on the phenomenon of heritage language learning.

As the number of heritage language learner increases, it is important for language educators to understand how language acquisition may have taken place in those learners’
childhoods. Usually, “their acquisition path differs from that of normally developing children brought up in a predominantly monolingual environment” (Montrul, 2010, p.10).

The process of acquiring the heritage language usually occurs in the early years for most HL speakers. As these learners continue to grow, acquiring the majority language continues to develop while heritage language acquisition deteriorates. As Lynch notes, “Acquisition of English continues fully beyond childhood, while acquisition of the HL is significantly curtailed or even stagnates toward the adolescent years” (Lynch, 2003, p.1). An interesting characteristic of early bilingual speakers is that, more often than not, they fail to demonstrate in adulthood age-appropriate levels of linguistic proficiency in the heritage language compared with monolingual norms, a phenomenon that to date has been characterized by the subsuming term “incomplete L1 acquisition” in the literature (Montrul, 2008; Rothman 2009).

2.4.2 Language Proficiency Level of HLLs

The diversity of HLLs’ experiences and learning contexts perhaps accounts for the diversity of HLL definitions that have been posited. Recently, there has been recognition in the field of language teaching of the fact that heritage language learners are “a different breed of language learners whose partial knowledge of the language presents a unique set of challenges to language practitioners” (Montrul, 2010). Heritage language speakers typically achieve a partial command of their family language. Although one can certainly find some heritage speakers with very advanced or even native-like proficiency
in the two languages, for most heritage speakers, the home language is the weaker language (Montrul, 2010). Heritage speakers are described by Montrul (2008) as being cases of attrition and incomplete acquisition in childhood, the effects of which are more adverse in adulthood. Lynch (2003) states that foreign language classrooms usually focus on conscious learning of grammatical rules, and HLLs might not have an advantage in that area. In fact, “non-speakers of the HL who are good at grammar sometimes outperform HL speakers on grammar tests and get higher grades in the language class, even though the non-speaker of the HL may be incapable of communicating the simplest idea” (Lynch, 2003, p.9).

As Montrul (2010) explains, it is clear that many adult heritage speakers may possess good speaking and listening abilities, substantial vocabulary, native-like levels of pronunciation and fluency, and familiarity with the cultural norms of the language and culture. In addition, Campbell and Rosenthal (2000) have described heritage learners as typically possessing strong listening skills, but having varying degrees of speaking skills and limited literacy skills. What is less clear and open to investigation is the nature of heritage speakers’ grammatical competence, or which specific aspects of their syntax and morphology are fully acquired and which ones remain underdeveloped due to incomplete acquisition or attrition during childhood. The presence of heritage language learners in the Arabic language classroom indicates having students with some knowledge of the target language and culture, most of the time. These students “would rather have a faster pace in class, less explanation, and might prefer different topics of conversation” (Wahba, 2006).
Many scholars have affirmed that heritage learners have relatively strong aural and oral skills but limited literacy skills, and that they usually have positive attitudes and experiences (e.g., Carreira & Kagan, 2011, p.40). Therefore, it is essential that foreign language teachers find an effective way to encompass the wealth of knowledge and experiences that many heritage learners bring with them to the foreign language classroom and use this knowledge to foster language learning and development for all language learners.

2.5 HLLs of Arabic

Research on heritage learners of Arabic is very limited. In general, the Arabic heritage learner is someone who grew up in a family where at least one of the parents used Arabic as the main language at home. Proficiency levels of Arabic heritage learners can vary widely. In addition, depending on the country of origin, the spoken dialect can be very different. Moreover, Arabs living in the United States do not master the formal version unless they learn it in schools. Therefore, and due to the diglossic nature of Arabic, HLLs who never received formal education in literary Arabic (MSA) do not have a much greater advantage over FLLs. As noted by Albirini (2014):

Heritage speakers of Arabic are mostly exposed to their parents’ variety of colloquial Arabic in the home, and some may have been exposed to the Standard variety of Arabic at some point in their education or through other communication channels. Since colloquial Arabic is generally neither written nor used in major
media channels, heritage speakers have limited access to the variety with which they are familiar, and therefore have little chance to practice it outside their homes. (p. 733).

A study conducted by Rouchdy (2002) examined Arabic HLLs’ motivations for learning the language and identified five motives: ethnic identity, religious affiliation, fulfilling a language requirement, importance of Arabic from a global perspective, and influence of parental advice. Additionally, Rouchdy (2002) predicted that Arabic would persevere in the sociolinguistic lives of Arab-Americans because of its strong ties to their ethnic identities, religious affiliations, and cultural backgrounds. It is important to note, however, that not all Arab Americans are Muslims and regardless of their religious affiliations, Arab Americans care about their heritage and the retaining of their language.

In summary, a review of the literature reveals that the few studies on Arabic HLLs mostly focus on language skills and motivation. None of the studies examine classroom discourse of Arabic HLLs and their interaction with other learners in the Arabic classroom.

2.6 HLLs in foreign language classrooms

The increased diversity among the United States population is reflected in the diverse population of students in foreign language classrooms. The number of HLLs enrolling in foreign language classrooms in higher education institutions across the
country has been consistently increasing. Although this phenomenon has created a challenge for language teachers in dealing with and teaching such a linguistically and culturally diverse population, most heritage language scholars consider it to be beneficial to the language learning that occurs within the classroom.

The implications for mixing students of diverse linguistic backgrounds have been discussed in the literature, and many scholars have identified several benefits of collaboration, specifically between heritage and non-native speaking students (Edstrom, 2007; Blake & Zyzik, 2003; Katz, 2003; Potowski, 2002). However, the mixing of students can also have disadvantages. The presence of HLLs who are native speakers can be intimidating to some non-native learners (Katz, 2003) as well as to NNS teachers (Lacorte & Canabal, 2003). In a similar manner, it is possible that some HLLs feel annoyed with developed language skills of some FLLs. Actually, although some HLLs report an advantage in terms of oral language skills and comprehension, they assert that most FLLs have a better understanding of grammar (Potowski, 2002).

HLLs who are native speakers provide unique insights into the target culture and can model authentic target language usage (Edstrom, 2007; Katz, 2003). In turn, FLLs’ familiarity with grammatical terminology and rules can be helpful for HLLs whose grammatical understanding may be more intuitive. Katz (2003) explored the attitudes of near-native Haitian and non-francophone students in mixed French classes at a North American university and found that the non-Haitian students expressed positive attitudes to the Haitians' role as "[models] of the successful language learner" and "cultural informants" (Edstrom, 2007, p.756).
Other scholars discuss the presence of HLLs in foreign language classrooms and advise that HLLs be placed appropriately based on their language proficiency. In a study that compared the skills and motivation of Japanese heritage learners (JHLs) and traditional Japanese foreign language (JFL) learners, Kondo-Brown (2005) found that learners’ behaviors and skills were distinctively different. Her finding suggests that, in an FL program at the university level, in which the incoming students include HL students with parents who speak the target language, an administrative strategy of screening such students and placing proficient HL learners in a separate track is recommended.

2.6.1 Placement issues

Differences in language skills and proficiency levels between HLLs and FLLs can pose a problem in the language classroom. Such differences in proficiency levels among learners in the same classroom can lead to students’ questioning of the appropriateness of placement procedures. Accordingly, we need to closely examine placement procedures. Sturman (1996) argues that “registration and placement procedures, and the way they are administered, are strongly associated with students’ degree of satisfaction with the schools, the teachers, and the lessons” (p. 338). Students like to feel that they are placed properly. According to Sturman (1996), “any institution would, presumably, hope to have as many of their students as possible believing that they are in the right classes” (p. 347).
The following section discusses the theoretical framework that guided this study. It also examines research on additional theories and constructs related to language learning and classroom interaction.

2.7 Sociocultural Theory (SCT)

This study investigates the process of language learning and acquisition in the Arabic language classroom by analyzing classroom discourse and exploring participants’ perceptions on the interaction dynamics in the classroom. The overarching theoretical framework adopted is the socio-cultural theory (SCT) developed by Vygotsky and his colleagues (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky’s work has inspired many researchers to explore the application of this theory to second and foreign language developmental processes and pedagogies. As stated by Lantolf and Thorne (2006), “it is a theory of mind that recognizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking” (p.1). Language development and use play a very important role in this theory, which is referred to as the theory of the development of higher mental functions.

The Socio Cultural Theory (SCT) views language as more than a formal system of linguistic properties (Thoms, 2012, p.9). Additionally, the sociocultural perspective maintains that the nature of language is fundamentally social and has its genesis in interactions between people (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). It further proposes that human thoughts arise in social interactions. Classrooms are viewed as social settings where students from different backgrounds meet and interact on a regular basis while
participating in the process of learning. Hence, the classroom context consists of students, teachers, and interaction processes that occur within this context. Under the framework of the SCT, Rogoff (1990) proposed that a child’s development of skills requires that he interact with a teacher or more knowledgeable person. The teacher in the early home environment is usually the parent. Accordingly, children develop learning skills by interacting with their parents. This model suggests that the more a child interacts with their parents, the more skills they will develop.

One of the most interesting insights of the SCT is its claim that “an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development. The construct of ZPD, as explained by Vygotsky, is concerned with the cognitive development of humans that results from social and interpersonal activity becoming the foundation for intrapersonal functioning, and that this process involves internalization (Lantolf & Thorne 2006, p.266). Thus, ZPD is a theoretical approach to development based on the close analysis of activity made possible through collaboration which provides mediation during social interaction among learners, and between learners and instructors in classroom settings. Vygotsky’s definition states that the ZPD is the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone, and what that person can accomplish when acting with support from someone else or a cultural artifact. In the ZPD, a learner performs above his or her level of individual competence with the assistance of another. This assistance is referred to as scaffolding, which is an integral part of the ZPD construct. Scaffolding takes place during collaborative interaction which serves as a mediational tool to enhance students’ development and allows for a great deal of
learning. Studies carried out by many researchers in the field of education have shown that when language learners collaborate with one another when working on assigned language learning tasks in L2 classrooms, a great deal of learning occur for all learners.

In summary, sociocultural theorists view interaction as a social practice which allows learners to negotiate and construct meaning. Classroom discourse has been defined as the “oral interaction between teachers and their students and between students themselves that takes place in the classroom context” (Thoms, 2012, p.8). Classroom-based research has focused on the topic of classroom discourse in foreign language classrooms and has paid special attention to the interaction between teachers and their students as well as the interaction among students. A literature review on this topic is provided in this section.

Next, a comprehensive definition of the term SLA, a review of relevant SLA theories, and a discussion on the sociolinguistic approach are provided.

2.8 SLA

What is SLA, and how is it defined in the literature? SLA stands for Second Language Acquisition. The term “second language acquisition” has been defined and explained by many researchers in this field. Second language acquisition (SLA) is the study of how second languages are learned, and the factors that influence the learning process. It is mainly concerned with “what is acquired (and what is not acquired) and the mechanisms which bring second language knowledge about” (Gass, 1988, p. 198). The
field of foreign and second language education is primarily concerned with theories of second language acquisition (SLA) and their important role in examining and explaining the different factors that influence second language teaching and learning.

Our competence in language learning is affected by many factors, some of which are cognitive in nature (internal) while others are socio-historical (external). Understanding the effects of these variables on an individual’s ability to learn a new language can help educators find approaches to control these variables in ways that will facilitate the learning process. It is important to note that language cannot be considered solely as a cognitive skill; as mentioned earlier, there are many variables involved in language learning and acquisition.

Reviewing the history of SLA research, we find that researchers have historically emphasized the cognitive aspect of learning and acquiring a second language. Since the mid-1990s, however, many researchers have called for considering the social aspect involved in SLA, and more research has focused on interdisciplinary, socially informed SLA. The social turn in the field of SLA was discussed by Firth and Wagner (1997) who denounced the strong tendency in SLA to conceptualize language as a cognitive phenomenon as opposed to a social one, and to conceptualize acquisition as an individual accomplishment as opposed to a social one. Firth and Wagner (1997) called for a more “holistic approach and outlook on language acquisition” (p. 296). This approach acknowledged the influence of social context, identity, task, and the setting on language use and acquisition.
In a similar manner, in his 2003 book, *The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition*, Block argues for “a broader, socially informed and more sociolinguistically oriented SLA that does not exclude the main stream psycholinguistic one, but instead takes on board the complexity of context, the multi-layered nature of language, and an expanded view of what acquisition entails.” In addition to Block, other researchers such as Lantolf (1994, 2000) and Van Lier (1996) have supported the concept of SLA as being both psycholinguistic and social in nature. An overview of influential SLA theories is provided in the next section.

### 2.8.1 Prominent theories in SLA

Vygotsky’s SCT highlights the role of social activities in language acquisition. Based on the Zone of Proximal Development concept, Vygotsky stresses that through collaboration and assistance from a more proficient person, language acquisition and development occurs; thus, personal ability develops through activity with other people.

Another commonly discussed theory in SLA is Krashen’s theory. Developed in the early 1980s, it is considered one of the most influential theories in SLA. Krashen’s theory considers the learner as an autonomous input processor. This theory is based on five hypotheses: The acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis. One of the basic assumptions of this theory is that input to the target language (i+1) leads to language acquisition. It emphasizes the role of clear input for the development to take place. Thus, within this theory, the driving force behind any kind of acquisition is the
comprehension of meaningful messages and the interaction of the linguistic information in those messages with an innate language acquisition faculty (VanPatten & Williams, 2007, p.25). Moreover, and according to Krashen, acquisition is a subconscious process taking place in a naturalistic context in which there is a focus on meaningful communication. Through this process, the learner is autonomous, and acquisition occurs naturally as a result of exposure to the target language. This theory differentiates between acquisition and learning. Learning is a conscious process, taking place in a formal context (such as a classroom) where there is a focus on formal aspects of the language (Block, 2003, p. 94). My view is that the classroom should be a place where both learning and acquisition take place. Learning grammar rules, through explicit instructions, is necessary; in addition, receiving comprehensible input in the target language is important to acquire the language and develop speaking, listening, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Acquisition, however, needs a prolonged exposure to the target language, and learners should seek opportunities to get exposure outside the classroom as well. In addition, I argue that although adult language learners can be autonomous, the impact of the social context on language acquisition is fundamental. Providing opportunities to enhance the learning and the acquisition process in the classroom should be the ultimate goal for language educators.

2.8.2 The sociolinguistic approach to SLA

A sociolinguistic approach to SLA is one that studies the relationship between such social contextual variables as interlocutor, topic, or task, and the formal features of the learner’s language or interlanguage (IL) production (Tarone, 2007, p.837). This
approach allows us to study the impact of social factors on cognitive processes since it results in the acquisition of a new linguistic system. Constructs of identity and agency are central to this approach. It is worth noting that discussions of this approach became more prominent after Firth and Wagner (1997) called for a better balance between the cognitive and the social in SLA research. The Vygotskyian theory embraces this approach and views the learner as a social being whose cognitive processing of the L2 is affected by social interactions and social relationships with others, including those others who provide L2 input and corrective feedback.

Identity is a central tenet in this approach, which proposes that language learners construct certain identities based on their perceptions of the social context. Citing Selinker and Douglas (1985), Tarone (2007) clarifies that L2 learners “set up their own internally created discourse domains, based on their perceptions of social settings that call for particular language forms and structures” (p.838). When learners are unable to acquire the language variety needed, they often switch to their first language. When language learners feel that they haven’t reached the required proficiency in the target language, they rely on their first language. The concept of identity construction and positioning during language interactions will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

2.8.3 SLA and perspectives on interaction

Recent literature in the field of language learning provides considerable evidence demonstrating the significance of interaction in the process of second language acquisition (e.g., Gass & Mackey, 2007; Long, 1996; Mackey & Goo, 2007; Richard-
As determined by these scholars, practices that promote interaction foster language development. Moreover, as Gass and Mackey (2007) suggest, “it is now commonly accepted …that there is a robust connection between interaction and learning” (p. 176). The notion of peer-peer interaction and the processes that take place with the presence of a more knowledgeable peer in group interaction has been promoted and encouraged (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Ohta, 1995; Pica, 1994).

The Interaction Hypothesis, introduced by Long (1996), is commonly discussed in the field of SLA. A brief definition of this hypothesis is offered below.

### 2.8.4 Interaction Hypothesis

As previously discussed, scholars in the field of SLA emphasize the role of interaction in language learning and maintain that practices which promote interaction foster language development among various types of learners. Interaction refers to communication between individuals, particularly when they are negotiating meaning in order to prevent a breakdown in communication (Ellis, 1999). Research on interaction is conducted within the framework of the Interactive Hypothesis, which states that conversational interaction "facilitates [language] acquisition because it connects input [what learners hear and read]; internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention; and output [what learners produce] in productive ways" (Long, 1996, pp. 451-452). Long (1996) further explains that negotiation of meaning between the learner and a more competent interlocutor facilitates language acquisition. In a similar manner, Gass and Mackey (2007), based on Long’s (1996) work, explain the main constructs of the
Interaction Hypothesis: input, interaction, feedback, and output. The importance of sufficient opportunities for language use (output) is emphasized by Swain (1995, 2005) who claims that language production “forces learners to move from comprehension to syntactic use of language.”

The role of feedback is emphasized as an important concept in the Interaction Hypothesis. Implicit feedback involves negotiation strategies such as: confirmation checks--expressions used to confirm whether an utterance has been understood correctly; clarification requests--expressions to elicit clarification from the interlocutor; and comprehension checks--expressions to verify that the interlocutor has understood (Gass & Mackey, 2007, p. 181-182).

Adopting a cognitive view, researchers have discussed the process of language acquisition that results from peer-peer interaction based on the Input-Interaction-Output (IIO) model (e.g., Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994). This view concurs with sociocultural theorists who believe that knowledge is constructed when learners interact and collaborate with more capable individuals, which occurs through the process of mediation where knowledge is shaped and advanced by the use of cultural tools such as language (e.g., Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Generally, empirical research on second language learners supports the argument that engaging in language interactions facilitates second language development and contributes to acquisition. As confirmed by Gass and Mackey (2007), many aspects of
the Interaction Hypothesis have been investigated and tested, and “links between interaction and learning have been clearly demonstrated” (p. 176).

2.8.5 Conversations and Input

Conversations that occur during interaction in the classroom provide a venue for language development, given that the target language is used. As Cazden and Beck (2003) affirm, “what counts as knowledge has shifted away from inert information passively received from books and teachers toward dynamic understanding that is collaboratively constructed in discussion among students” (p. 165). Moreover, conversation, according to Ellis (1984), is the most natural form of exposure to the language being learned. As Ellis states, “It is by negotiating the exchange of meaning through conversation that the learner typically obtains information about the target language which enables them to revise existing interlanguage system” (Ellis, 1984, p. 14). Understanding how discourse involving the learner is constructed is essential to understanding language development. Given that in second language acquisition (SLA) task is understood as an important site for language learning (Ellis, 2000, 2003; Long, 1996), it is important for research in the field to investigate the full range of opportunities for language learning in such learner–learner task interactions (Kasper, 2004; Van Lier & Matsuo, 2000; Hellermann, 2007).

The value of negotiation of meaning has also been discussed in the field of SLA. According to Long (1985, 1996) comprehensible input received through interactional modifications such as negotiating meaning and modifying output is vital to second
The concept of negotiation of meaning is based on the notion that “it is a co-operative interaction that enables interlocutors to develop mutual understanding as they work together to overcome communication breakdown” (Oliver, 2009, p. 137).

Likewise, the sociolinguistic approach to SLA emphasizes the importance of interaction in language learning. As Tarone (2007) explains, in the theoretical model proposed by Beebe and Giles (1984), it was predicted that “learners linguistic systems (their Interlanguage) would converge in form to resemble the forms produced by some interlocutors or diverge from those produced by other interlocutors, depending on issues of learner identity” (p.838). That being said, we can assume that FLLs who seek to be members of the target language’s community will benefit from interaction with native speakers; they will most likely make an effort so that their language production will resemble that of native speakers.

The role of input in language acquisition is undeniable and L2 acquisition research has been examining the role of input since the 1970s (Long, 1996). Input exposure has been discussed as a significant factor in the development of language, and it plays a central role in the linguistic development of both children and adult language learners. The Input Hypothesis was introduced by Krashen (1982, 1985), and it is an integral construct in the Interaction Hypothesis. More specifically, researchers have focused on linguistic input and NS- NNS conversations. According to Long (1996), “Conversational partners may be important as facilitators and shapers of learner output...
and as participants in a process whereby nonnative speakers (NNSs) learn at least part of a new grammar by doing conversation” (Long, 1996, p.413). It is important to note that language acquisition not only requires linguistic input, but input that is comprehensible. Thus, undoubtedly, NSs can provide opportunities for comprehensible input in the target language.

Teacher’s talk has also been discussed as one of the sources for input in the language classroom. According to Krashen (1980, 1989), articulate teacher talk is crucial to language learning within the classroom. Drawing on Krashen’s theory of comprehensible input and teacher’s talk, many researchers have investigated teacher’s discourse within the language classroom. The importance of comprehensible and clear input in teaching Arabic was discussed by Al Hawari (2013), who offers four guiding principles for Arabic language acquisition --including the clarity and frequency of input. Providing opportunities for a clear input in the Arabic language classroom becomes a necessity for learning. Clear grammar instructions can be considered as input for developing language skills. Similarly, clear utterances by interlocutors are considered a form of input that is crucial for oral skills development.

2.9 Collaboration and proficiency differences

Based on Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) work, we know that cognition and knowledge are constructed through social interaction. Collaboration among learners is a crucial element for interaction to be beneficial. In addition, grouping of students during collaborative work is of great importance, and it impacts the nature of interaction (Swain,

A few studies have examined the nature of peer-peer dialogue and its importance to L2 learning from a sociocultural theory perspective. As stated in those studies, peers can be experts and novices and therefore, they can assist each other in order to achieve a higher level of performance (e.g. Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Ohta, 2000, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). This notion can be complex, however, since not all group activities entail positive collaboration and enhanced learning. The dynamics of interaction is often influenced by the nature of collaboration and by learners’ proficiency differences. Proficiency differences have been discussed as one of the influential factors in the nature of peer-peer interaction, but little research demonstrates how learners with different proficiency levels interact with each other. However, a number of findings on this topic are presented below.

In a study by Storch (2001, 2002) which investigated the nature of interaction, it was found that not all peer groups worked collaboratively. Storch identified four patterns of pair interaction. The first was a collaborative pattern, in which both learners worked together and assisted each other. The second was demonstrated in the dominant/dominant pairs who showed an unwillingness or incapability to engage in each other's contribution. Third, dominant/passive pairs involved a dominant participant, who took control of the task with an authoritarian stance, and a passive peer, who maintained a compliant role. In a similar manner, studies by Kowal and Swain (1994, 1997) with French immersion
students demonstrated that in a highly varied grouping (different proficiency levels), “the stronger student tended to carry out most of the work, either because the weaker student was too intimidated to say anything, willing to let the stronger student do the task, or was not allowed to do any of the task” (Watanabe & Swain, 2008, p.116). Finally, the fourth is the expert-novice grouping in which the more knowledgeable learner (expert) actively encouraged the less knowledgeable learner (novice) to engage in the task. As cited by Watanabe and Swain (2008), “Storch also found that more instances of knowledge transfer took place in the pairs with a collaborative orientation (collaborative and expert/novice) than the pairs with a non-collaborative orientation (dominant/dominant and dominant/passive), and a greater number of instances in the non-collaborative pairs showed no transfer of knowledge” (p. 116). Similar to Storch’s findings, Kowal and Swain (1994, 1997) argued that extreme proficiency differences may hinder collaborative pair interaction.

The way learners perceive their peers’ proficiency levels is found to affect the dynamics of interaction as well. Watanabe and Swain (2008) investigated the role of students’ perceptions of the proficiency level of their peers on the nature of interaction, and their findings suggested that the measured proficiency difference itself did not necessarily affect the nature of peer assistance, but learners’ perceptions of each other's proficiency difference determined the nature of interaction. Based on this finding, it could be implied that FLLs’ perceptions of HLLs’ knowledge impact their decision to interact with them, thus impacting the nature of collaboration.
Interpersonal relationships among students can also impact collaboration. Although scaffolding has been suggested as an important factor in assisting lower level learners, as stated by Stone (1993), in order for scaffolding to be successful, group members need to respect and trust one another. The role of emotional engagement in the peer group and the student-teacher relations has been investigated by a number of researchers (e.g. Pietarinin et al., 2014), and it was found that most of the time, emotional engagement contributes to cognitive engagement in tasks and activities in the classroom as well as in the learning outcomes. Therefore, it can be determined that positive peer relations and social interaction with peers contribute to an increased engagement in learning and a successful academic experience.

In summary, we can safely conclude that arranging students into groups with an awareness of their proficiency levels as well as their willingness to collaborate can be crucial to the group dynamics as well as to learning and development. Generally, language teachers need to ensure that the classroom is a community of practice in which all members collaboratively work toward the same goal – language learning.

2.10 The classroom as a Community of Practice

The notion of “community of practice” was first proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) as a way to theorize and inspect social contexts. In this concept, communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, 1998, 2011). Communities of
practice are often characterized by the following features: members mutually engage in practices through interaction and negotiation of meanings; members have a “joint enterprise”-- a shared sense of direction for their mutual engagement; and members build up a shared repertoire of resources for negotiating meaning. As Lamb (2013) explains, the shared repertoire may be a linguistic resource.

One way to examine the learning process within the classroom is from a Community of Practice perspective. With the “social turn” in SLA research (Block, 2003), more scholars have called for an increasing focus on the social context where learning takes place. Although individual learners’ differences impact language acquisition, cognition and consciousness are “socially shared” or “socially distributed” (Haneda, 1997). Thus, the social context is viewed as “a complex eco-system in which human beings are agents in constant dynamic interplay with each other” (Lamb, 2013, p.32). Adopting this perspective, Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the Situated Learning Theory (SLT), which is a popular lens through which to examine the experiences of language learners. This theory places emphasis on the ways in which individual learning occurs through participation in communities (Lamb, 2013), thus leading to the development of the community of practice concept, which promotes the idea that learning happens in a particular type of community (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The community of practice’s perspective views learning as a “situated activity, and as an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1992, p.31).
As explained by Toohey and Norton (2003), social contexts are considered as complex and overlapping communities in which variously positioned participants learn specific, local, historically constructed practices involving the use of specific tools. The language classroom is considered a community of practice in which all students should be members. Members’ participation, however, can take different forms. Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss the “legitimate peripheral participation” concept which identifies members as “old-timers” and “new-comers.” In this conceptualization, members recognize and accept the positioning of the other: the apprentice (new-comer) as an outsider wanting in and the master (old-timer) as a willing guide.

Applying this concept to the language classroom, HLLs with high competency in the language can be considered the “old-timers,” and the less proficient FLLs the new-comers. As explained by Toohey and Norton (2003), the intersection can only occur “if old-timers are willing to provide insider knowledge, cultural understandings, practice, and strategies to newcomers” (p. 87). The lack of willingness on the part of some HLLs or other highly proficient FLLs can result in a dysfunctional community of practice. Moreover, learners in the language classroom have diverse backgrounds, linguistic skills, motivation, and beliefs; thus I argue that, if not monitored properly, the situation can result in a dysfunctional community of practice or even the construction of multiple communities of practice within the larger classroom community. Communities of practice can be constructed as the chosen context in response to specific social situations. It becomes important, therefore, that language teachers encourage the development of a single functional community of practice within the classroom.
Imposed or constructed identities can also have a particular effect on members’ participation choices. In her longitudinal ethnography of six English language learners in Vancouver, Toohey (2000) demonstrated how the notion of ‘community of practice’ appropriately applies to contexts of language learning. Through detailed documentation of daily interactions in classrooms, she showed how these learners were variously positioned in group interactions, according to their identities as competent or incompetent language learners that were attributed to them by their teachers and peers. Toohey, accordingly, found that students’ identities and their positioning in the group afforded them greater or lesser opportunities to interact with others and learn English.

2.11 The construct of identity in language learning

A number of scholars in the field of L2 learning have discussed how identity issues are intertwined in the learning process. Several views on identity construction in language learning are offered in the field of applied linguistics (Block, 2007; Kramsch, 2003; Norton, 2000, 2010).

It is through language interaction that particular identities are enacted and their relevance to social contexts is uncovered. The nature of identity in such interactions is often determined in reference to the social categories of the participants (e.g., Heritage Language Learner (HLL)/ native-speaker (NS), non-native speaker (NNS) or Foreign Language Learner (FLL)) and/or contextual features (e.g., classroom). The notion of identity, however, is more complex. Identities are constantly constructed and negotiated
within a particular social context, and learners commonly construct multiple identities such as FLLs, novice, expert, bicultural, and others.

The multiple identities that are often constructed in the language classroom can undeniably impact learners’, as well as teachers’, behaviors. Norton (2000) integrates the concept of language learner’s identity with the learning context and calls for examining the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which language learning and teaching takes place. It is important to understand how learners and teachers negotiate, and sometimes resist, the diverse positions those contexts offer them (Norton, 2010, p. 351).

The presence of experts in the classroom, HLLs for example, will most likely result in a feeling of injustice on the part of the novices, especially if collaboration is very limited. This particular situation will probably yield to a lower motivation to engage in language learning practices within the classroom. As explained by Norton (2010), a learner might be highly motivated to learn the language, but may have little investment in the language practices of a given classroom in which unjust or unequal conditions exist.

A discussion on how identities are enacted through language socialization is offered by Duff (2010), who discusses language socialization between the expert and the novice. According to Duff, individuals become socialized into particular identities while learning a language. In language learning, socialization between the novices (newcomers) and the experts (old timers) occurs through interaction although experts are often more proficient in the language and culture. Duff (2010) argues that through language
socialization, learners develop their communicative competency. However, Duff does not investigate the factors that can negatively influence language socialization.

2.11.1 Agency and investment

Agency is another theoretical construct frequently discussed in SLA and it reflects the view that “learners are not simply passive or complicit participants in language learning and use, but can also make informed choices, exert influence, resist (as in remaining silent), or comply” (Duff, 2012, p. 413). Adopting an SCT perspective, Ahearn (2001) defines agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p.112). Toohey and Norton (2003) state that language learning situations and the manner in which the learner position themselves within the language’s social settings are important. Situated positions and agency in negotiating entry into the target language’s social networks contribute to success in language development as, Toohey and Norton (2003) argued. Based on this notion, I believe that language educators need to provide opportunities for students to be involved in various activities related to the target language’s community. Participation in social contexts of specific communities creates possibilities for the learner to develop their language learning; through participation, they use one of the community’s tools – language (Toohey & Norton, 2003).

Norton (2000) introduced the construct of “investment” as one that is related to agency in SLA. Investment refers to the degree to which learners actively dedicate their resources (mental or material) in language learning. The investment is often “based on a kind of cost-benefit assessment,” and is linked to the learner’s desires and hopes. Interlocutors’ actions, perceptions, and language use serve to position language learners
and their investments in specific ways (Duff, 2012; Norton, 2000). Norton further notes that “The construct of investment, inspired by the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1991), signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it” (Norton, 2010, p.353). When learners invest in the target language, they expect to acquire a wide range of symbolic and material resources, which will increase the value of their cultural capital in return. The construct of investment, as explained by Norton (2010) “conceives the language learner as having a complex identity, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction” (Norton, 2010, p.354). Investment, according to Norton, should be seen within a sociological framework more than a psychological one. It refers to a connection between the learner’s commitment and desire to learn and their altering identity: “A learner may be a highly motivated language learner, but may nevertheless have little investment in the language practices of a given classroom or community which may be racist, sexist, elitist or homophobic” (p.354). In other words, when the learner perceives prejudice, their investment in learning the language will most likely be negatively influenced.

The construct of “investment” has been developed by Norton (2010) as a complementary construct to motivation. Since the integrative orientation to motivation accepts the notion that language learners have sincere interest in the people and culture of the target language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), this interest often results in a desire to invest in language learning, according to Norton. Next, a more comprehensive discussion on the role of affect in language learning is provided.
2.12 Affect and motivation in language learning

2.12.1 Affective variables

Affective variables and learner’s characteristics are discussed by scholars in the field of SLA and language education as being fundamental in the process of language learning. Lightbown and Spada (2001), for example, discuss the characteristics associated with success in language learning and group them into five categories: motivation, personality, aptitude, intelligence, and learner preferences. The term affect refers to certain aspects of feelings, emotions, moods or attitudes which determine behavior (Arnold & Brown, 1999). The affective side of learning is not in conflict with the cognitive side, and when both are used in the learning process, a firmer foundation is constructed, as Arnold and Brown (1999) assert. Understanding the role of affect in language learning is important for creating a more productive language experience for students.

Arnold and Brown (1999) identify affective variables that pertain to the learner as an individual, and others that focus on the learner as a participant in a socio-cultural situation, a learner who unavoidably relates to others. Anxiety, inhibition, self-esteem, extroversion-introversion, learning style, and motivation are discussed as individual affective variables linked to the learner’s personality whereas empathy, the process of putting yourself in someone else’s shoes, is a relational affective variable. An additional discussion of these factors follows next.
2.12.1 Inhibition. Learning a language entails making mistakes at times. Having an increased awareness of mistakes could result in inhibition. As Arnold and Brown (1999) advise, “When learning, we have to be able to gamble a bit, to be able to try out hunches about the language and to take a reasonable risk about being wrong” (p. 10).

2.12.2 Extroversion-introversion. Research on extroversion-introversion does not provide solid evidence as to whether these variables are directly related to success in language learning. However, introverts are perceived as reserved and quiet people while extroverts are outspoken and less inhibited. Based on this knowledge, language teachers need to realize that some classroom activities might be more suitable for one type of learner but less so for the others.

2.12.3 Self-esteem/self-efficacy. This concept refers to one’s evaluation of their own worth, and this affective variable is required for a successful cognitive and affective activity, as explained by Arnold & Brown (1999). The terms self-esteem and self-efficacy are used interchangeably in the literature. Self-efficacy is a cognitive concept related to motivation; it refers to learners’ opinions about their ability to carry out a task and deal with learning challenges (Arnold & Brown, 1999; Ehrman, 1996; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). As discussed by researchers, learners need to believe that they have control over the learning process, in addition to feeling a sense of self-effectiveness, in order to make the needed effort in language learning. This concept emphasizes the role of teachers in the enhancement of self-efficacy by assigning tasks through which students feel a sense of control and are able to succeed. It includes
“giving students a degree of choice in classroom activities” (Arnold & Brown, 1999, p.17).

In regard to affective variables that are related to socio-cultural settings, empathy and classroom transactions have been identified. According to Arnold & Brown (1999), “in the special society established in the classroom, the affective dimension of the relationships among the learner, the teacher and the other learners can greatly influence the direction and the outcome of the experience” (p. 19). Empathy, which reflects an appreciation of another’s identity and culture, is a crucial factor in the harmonious coexistence of different individuals in society and is essential to a collaborative classroom. Empathy can be exhibited in collaboration among peers in the classroom, and more specifically, in the willingness of a more proficient learner to help a less proficient one. I argue that empathy is a very important factor in creating a cooperative community in the classroom, one that leads to a constructive learning environment.

2.12.2 Motivation in L2 learning

The role of motivation in language learning is undeniably critical. Dornyei (2002a) defined motivation as: “why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity [and] how hard they are going to pursue it” (p.8). Gardner and Lambert (1972) have reported that motivation has a significant effect on SLA and have distinguished language learning motivation from other types of motivation due to the social and psychological dimensions associated with this type of learning. Language learners do not just acquire knowledge of the language, but are expected to identify with
the target language community’s speech as well as culture. Hence, attitudes toward a target language community are speculated to have a direct influence on L2 learning behavior. They identified two kinds of motivations: Integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation refers to a learner’s interest and desire to integrate into the target language and culture while instrumental reflects “the practical value and advantages of learning a new language” (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, p.132). In a schematic model proposed by Gardner (1979), attitudes were identified as an influencing factor on motivation; thus, they can impact achievements. The model is considered to be a dynamic one where “attitudes and motivation influenced language achievement, which in turn had an influence on subsequent attitudes and motivation” (Gardner, 2001, p. 4). Attitudes toward the learning situation include “attitudes toward any aspect of the situation in which the language is learned.”

Lightbown and Spada (2001) define motivation in second language learning in terms of two factors: learners’ communicative needs and their attitudes toward the target language’s community. If learners desire to communicate in the target language, then they will perceive a communicative value in this aspect of the language and accordingly be motivated to achieve proficiency in it. In a similar manner, if they have a favorable attitude toward the speakers of the language, then they will desire more contact with them.

Upon examining motivations of HL and non-HL groups, Comanaru and Noels (2009) found that the HL groups did differ from the non-HL group. Relative to the non-HL group, the HL groups in their study felt much more strongly that they were learning
Chinese because it was a central part of who they were. Moreover, they felt more pressure to learn Chinese than the non-HL group, either because of pressures from others or because of a self-imposed feeling that they ought to learn the language. In a study carried out by Husseinali (2006), where he attempted to examine learners of Arabic to determine their main motivations for studying the language, significant differences were found between heritage and non-heritage learners concerning instrumental and identification orientations. Seventy four percent of heritage learners agreed that they were learning Arabic to be able to relate to their Islamic identity and 66% agreed that they were learning Arabic because of their own Arabic culture (Husseinali, 2006, p.404). To conclude, many studies on heritage learners’ motivations indicate that connectedness to the culture and family, in addition to identity issues, are the motivating factors for these learners.

Language learners arrive to the language classroom with a complex set of motivations, which can be diverse and variable, especially with a diverse population of learners in the classroom. Some aspects of the motivation may change over time as a result of events or experiences in the language learning process. Personal emotions, for instance, are considered to play an influential role in the fluctuation of motivation during different processes. In addition, contextual factors are perceived to be in dynamic interplay with motivation.
Following Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) work, a number of scholars have widened the research on motivation and examined what Dornyei (2005) referred to as the cognitive-situated period, paying closer attention to the motivation displayed in L2 instructional contexts. When examining motivation throughout the learning process, and how it influences a learner’s engagement in learning within the context of a classroom, it is imperative that other motivational factors be considered. Dornyei (1994) discussed L2 motivation based on three levels: language level, learner level, and the learning situation. Adopting this framework, researchers (e.g., Dornyei, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997) have integrated cognitive motivation concepts (self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and attributions), thus complementing the socio-contextual framework. The role of integrative and instrumental motivation in L2 learning continues to be considered as important since it plays an essential role in affecting a learner’s decision to study a language. However, consideration of the context and the learning situation is necessary when examining motivation’s role in language acquisition. This concept is referred to as the situated analysis of motivation, and it takes into account the fluctuating nature of motivation during the learning process. In recent years, scholars have begun to analyze the situated motivation by taking a time-based perspective along with process-oriented approaches (e.g., Dornyei, 2002; Dornyei & Otto, 1998; Shoaib & Dornyei, 2005; Ushioda, 1996, 2001; Ushioda & Dornyei, 2012; Williams & Burden, 1997). Making this connection helps “to clarify the conceptual distinction between motivation to engage in L2 learning (choices, reasons, goals, decisions), and motivation during engagement (how one feels, behaves, and responds during the process of learning)” (Ushioda & Dornyei, 2012, p. 59).
Various internal and contextual motivational factors influence the different phases of the process of learning. The authors identify factors such as sense of self-efficacy and positive teacher feedback as enhancing while factors such as competitive pressures and other distracting influences are categorized as inhibiting.

The field of motivational psychology has moved toward a more dynamic contextual paradigm in analyzing motivation, and consequently the field of L2 motivation has witnessed a shift toward a socio-dynamic phase, as reported by Ushioda and Dornyei (2012). This phase is characterized by “a focus on the situated complexity of the L2 motivation process and its organic development in interaction with a multiplicity of internal, social, and contextual factors” (p. 398).

Research on classroom discourse and learners’ engagement in interactional activities has mostly focused on conversation analysis and learners’ behaviors during the task. Little research has discussed the motivational factors that influence learners’ participation behaviors. Examining the role of motivation in learners’ participation decisions within the classroom context, Ushioda and Dornyei’s (2012) framework is adopted as the guiding principle for this analysis. This framework is referred to as the dynamic system framework; it entails an integration of internal motivational factors along with other contextual factors that shape the process of SLA. It further considers the role of human agency and intentionality that are necessary to the interaction between learners and the context (Sealey & Carter, 2004; Ushioda & Dornyei, 2012).
2.13 Exploring learners’ and teacher’s beliefs

Learners’ beliefs

Perceptions and beliefs are two terms interchangeably used in the literature. Horwitz (1988) defined beliefs as: “student opinions on a variety of issues and controversies related to language learning” (Horwitz, 1988, p. 284). Learner perceptions have been commonly associated with two issues in the literature: perceptions of the learners themselves, and perceptions of the learning situation. Learners’ perceptions of themselves have often been defined as how students understand and make sense of themselves and their own learning (Liskin-Gasparro, 1998; Williams and Burden, 1999). This concept has been related in the literature to the notion of self-efficacy, or “the judgments [students] hold about their capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to master academic tasks” (Mills et al., 2007, p. 417).

Learner perceptions of the learning situation have included how students experience and understand aspects of the classroom such as instructor behaviors (Brown, 2009; Wesely, 2012). Exploring the language proficiency perceptions of language learners on the language proficiency of the “other learner,” Watanabe and Swain (2008) have concluded that perceptions affect the nature of peer interaction.

Comparing learners’ and teachers’ perceptions on issues related to the learning situation is crucial to understanding students’ concerns; it can also assist in creating successful learning experiences for students.
**Teacher’s beliefs**

In order to fully understand teaching, it is necessary to understand what language teachers think, know, believe, and do (Borg, 2003; Bullock, 2011). Moreover, the outcome of the learning process is greatly influenced by teacher beliefs, as argued by Arnold and Brown (1999). Research has revealed that the teacher plays a substantial role in the constitution of classroom practices (Vargheses, Morgan, Johnston & Johnston, 2005). Teachers’ pedagogical choices are often impacted by their beliefs as well as the curricular requirements. However, various factors impact a teacher’s instructional choices and teachers’ beliefs are not always reflected in their teaching practices due to different realities, as confirmed in the literature. Fang (1996), for instance, draws on several studies to conclude that inconsistency between beliefs and practices is to be expected because of the complexities of classroom life.

**Students vs. teacher’s beliefs**

A few studies have specifically compared individual teacher’s perceptions of effective teaching, and some have further examined and compared students’ perspectives on the topic. There appears to be a consensus among scholars that a conflict between teachers’ and students’ beliefs can adversely influence the learning process. For instance, Horwitz (1990), Kern (1995), and Schulz (1996) have argued that mismatches between FL students’ and teachers’ expectations can negatively affect students’ satisfaction with the language class and potentially lead to the discontinuation of study (Brown, 2009, p. 46). Additionally, there is agreement among scholars who have investigated this issue
that foreign language teachers need to understand their students’ perspectives and actively involve them in classroom discussions about the rationale behind instructional choices (Brown, 2009). A teacher’s perceptions of effective teaching practices may conflict with those of some students. Students have different learning styles as well as goals.

2.14 Pedagogical issues

2.14.1 Native speaker (NS) vs. non-native speaker (NNS) teachers

The effectiveness of native speaker (NS) teachers vs. non-native speaker (NNS) ones is a subject that has been discussed and debated by numerous scholars in language education (e.g., Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999; Llurda, 2005; Ustunluoglu, 2007). In general, the nativeness of the language teacher is a controversial issue, especially when it entails teaching HLLs. A study by Beaudrie (2009) examined Spanish HLLs’ preferences and found that most students did not seem to have a strong preference for a specific background of the teacher whereas Hancock (2002) found that Spanish HLLs had a preference for native Spanish teachers.

A number of studies have investigated students’ perceptions on the issue of teacher’s nativeness and further discussed favorable characteristics of NS and NNS teachers. In a study which investigated students’ perceptions of native and non-native teachers of English, Ustunluoglu (2007) found that there is a “meaningful difference” between native and non-native teachers from the students’ perspectives. In addition, his study suggested that “non-native teachers fulfil in-class teaching and in-class management roles better than native teachers do while native teachers fulfil in-class
communicative skills and present more favorable qualities” (p.73). Similarly, a study by Medgyes (1994) has shown that NS teachers are preferred for pronunciation, speaking, vocabulary skills, and cultural issues while NNS teachers are preferred for grammar. Tang (1997) argued that NNS teachers can predict potential difficulties for language learners and help them learn more effectively based on personal experience.

An interesting finding by Medgyes (1994) was that NNS teachers often suffer from an “inferiority complex” as a result of not being able to measure up to the linguistic standards of a NS – particularly, the native accent. Based on this concept, I further argue that this condition could be amplified when a NNS teacher is teaching NS learners (HLLs). In fact, this situation can cause feelings of uneasiness or even anxiety, and could lead to the teacher’s avoidance of using the target language when possible. To conclude, whether the teacher is an NS or an NNS, the need to provide opportunities for clear and frequent input in the target language is critical.

2.14.2 Toward a communicative classroom

The role of communication in language acquisition is vital, and communicative competency in the target language is the ultimate goal for language learners. As stated in the standards for foreign language learning precis, concentrating on the how (grammar) to say what (vocabulary) has become something of the past. “While these components of language are indeed crucial, the current organizing principle for foreign language study is communication, which also highlights the why, the whom, and the when” (ACTFL, 2006). Therefore, while grammar and vocabulary are needed tools for communication, it
is learning how to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of other languages that is the final goal of today’s foreign language classroom. Moreover, it is widely documented that via communicating, students get to discover the rules of the language; therefore, giving students the chance to interact and communicate in the language classroom is an effective way for learners to master the foreign language rule system and facilitate the acquisition of the target language. On this topic, Ellis (1984) states that communicative data are primary because the learner reveals the state of his creative rule system most systematically in communicative speech (p. 4).

Creating a productive and interactive linguistic environment in the classroom is important for enhancing language acquisition. The role of instructional methods and materials has shown to enhance, or limit, learners’ interaction in the language classroom. Accordingly, much research has supported the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task Based Learning (TBL) (e.g. Lee, 2000; Littlewood, 1981; Savingnon, 1991; Skehan, 1998).

Overt interaction (Long, 1981), and the emphasis on the role of learners’ participation (Hatch, 1978) provides the foundation and the rationale for CLT, as explained by Breen (2001). CLT emphasizes “overt learner participation in the interaction afforded by the classroom and its activities” (Breen, 2001, p. 113). Communicative language teaching, which emerged in the 1970s, involves affective aspects which are important in language learning. As mentioned by Arnold and Brown (1999), “communicative language teaching appealed to those who sought a more humanistic approach to teaching, one in which the interactive process of communication
received priority” (p. 6). Adopting a focus on both form and meaning, language teachers are encouraged to create communicative activities that would parallel grammar lessons; through these activities, students can focus on grammar forms, meaning, and oral output. Task-based approaches to language teaching have also been advocated by scholars in the field of language teaching and learning. It is an approach in which learners are given tasks to complete, and it assumes that transacting tasks in this method will engage a naturalistic venue for acquisition (Skehan, 1998).

In summary, this review of the literature provides background information for several topics discussed in this dissertation. As revealed in the review, most of the literature is not focused on Arabic language teaching and learning per se, but can be utilized to inform discussions on this topic. It is important to note that research on Arabic language learning is limited, and more studies are needed to shed light on several issues related to this area.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study mainly explores learner-learner interaction patterns in an Arabic language classroom, with a focus on Heritage Language Learner (HLL)-Foreign Language Learner (FLL) interactions, in an attempt to determine if and how this interaction contributes to the language learning process that goes on within the Arabic language classroom at the university level. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the role of Heritage Language Learners (HLLs) during class activities and understand whether these learners’ lingual and cultural background influence their proficiency level and their interaction behavior in their heritage language classroom. In addition to investigating learner-learner interaction, the study examines the patterns of interaction that occur between the teacher and the two types of language learners and explores whether HLLs unique characteristics influence this pattern of interaction.

The findings of the study are analyzed and discussed based on classroom discourse observations and one-on-one interviews conducted with a number of learners as well as the teacher.

In this chapter, I discuss the systematic approach employed in carrying out this research. The chapter begins by restating the research questions that inspired the study; it
then provides a detailed description of the data sources and data collection methods and further elaborates on analyzing and managing the collected data.

3.2 Research questions

The research questions addressed in the study are as follows:

1. How do different learners (HLLs and FLLs) contribute to the teaching-learning process in the Arabic language classroom?

2. In what ways does interaction among learners influence students’ learning as perceived by language learners in the Arabic language classroom?
   A. What are the language learners’ perceptions on having learners from various lingual and cultural backgrounds in the context of their classroom?
   B. What are the teacher’s perceptions on having HLLs in the foreign language classroom and on the interaction between these learners and FLLs?

3. How can pedagogical choices affect classroom interaction?

4. What role does motivation play in the participation patterns of learners in the Arabic language classroom?
Table 1 presents a summary of the research process followed to answer the above research questions.

Table 1. Summary of the Research Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Sources for Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do different learners (HLLs and FLLs) contribute to the teaching-learning process in the Arabic language classroom?</td>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
<td>March-April 2013</td>
<td>• Field-notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Video-tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
<td>• Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Audio-tapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In what ways does interaction among learners influence students’ learning as perceived by language learners in the Arabic language classroom?</td>
<td>Student interviews</td>
<td>April 2013</td>
<td>• Transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. What are the language learners’ perceptions on having learners from various lingual and cultural backgrounds in the context of their classroom?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. What are the teacher’s perceptions on having HLLs in the foreign language classroom and on the interaction between these learners and FLLs?</td>
<td>Teacher interview</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
<td>• Transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How can pedagogical choices affect classroom interaction?</td>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
<td>March-April 2013</td>
<td>• Field-notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Video-tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher interview</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
<td>• Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Audio-tapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What role does motivation play in the participation patterns of learners in the Arabic language classroom?</td>
<td>Student Interviews</td>
<td>March-April 2013</td>
<td>• Transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Field-notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Memos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Research design

In order to find answers to the above research questions, a qualitative research design was selected to generate data rich in detail and rooted in context. Qualitative research is often adopted to answer the "how" and "why" questions pertaining to human behavior, beliefs, and experiences. Qualitative research entails “an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). In a similar way, Merriam (2009) discusses the purpose for conducting qualitative research and states that "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 13).

The application of qualitative research methods in education is contemporary compared to that of the traditional quantitative methods. As Creswell (2008) explains, the use of qualitative research in education is somewhat recent; historically, the traditional quantitative research methods were more common; however, "By the late 1960s, philosophers of education called for an alternative to the traditional quantitative approach (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1988)” (Creswell, 2008, p. 49). In their view, the qualitative approach does not solely depend on the researcher's views of education but more on participants' views. Citing the works of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Creswell further explains that naturalistic inquiry or constructivism were the approaches employed to remedy the limitation of the traditionally utilized quantitative approach. In addition to an
emphasis on participants' views, this methodology highlighted the importance of the setting or context where participants voiced their opinions. It further stressed “the meaning people personally held about educational issues” (p. 50). Thus, for this study, the qualitative approach was adopted. Classroom observation was the method of choice to generate data showing how students interact with each other and with their teacher during classroom activities. Through classroom observations, I was able to observe the participants in a naturalistic setting-- the classroom context. Additionally, interviews enabled me to become acquainted with participants' views on the issues being explored.

In order to understand why students display certain patterns of interactions and what views they have on the process of learning the target language and interacting with peers and the instructor within the classroom context, it was important to conduct interviews with a number of students and with the instructor. Interviews can provide an in-depth understanding of an individual's beliefs and perceptions about a specific phenomenon.

There are a number of attributes that characterize qualitative research. Creswell (2009) lists a number of characteristics that typically identify qualitative research and analysis, including:

**Natural Setting:** Data is collected in the field and at the site where participants experience the issue. In the first phase of the study, participants were observed within their Arabic classroom where they normally and naturally take part in the interaction that goes on within this context.
**Multiple sources of data:** Qualitative researchers do not rely on a single data source but gather multiple forms of data such as observations, interviews, documents and other sources. Observations, interviews, field-notes, and audio and video recorded data were used for this study.

**Researcher as key instrument:** Qualitative researchers collect data themselves by observing, interviewing and examining documents. In this study, I collected all the data using various qualitative techniques.

**Interpretive:** Researchers interpret what they see, hear, and understand based on their own background and experiences. In addition, this process involves interpretations of the participants themselves. During the data collection stage, my memos reflected my own interpretations of events and behaviors.

**Participants' meanings:** The researcher focuses on understanding the meanings participants convey about the issue. This was mainly practiced through interviews conducted with participants in the second phase of the research. Participants were given the chance to express their own understanding of the issue being investigated.

**Inductive data analysis:** The researcher uses data to build themes, patterns, or categories: it is a bottom-up approach. This approach is followed in the data analysis stage of my research.

Data was analyzed and coded, and certain themes emerged as a result.

In summary, classroom observations and participant interviews were the primary sources of data. It is important to note, however, that, interview data offered a lot more
information due to the limitation of the classroom’s observation data. The study is presented in a qualitative case study framework.

**3.3.1 Case study approach.** For this research, the case study methodology is selected to study and understand a phenomenon that is increasingly occurring in different college classrooms across the nation. The presence of HLLs in foreign language classrooms has become a phenomenon which needs to be investigated thoroughly. The main purpose of a case study is to understand something that is distinctive and can provide information about a specific occurrence or phenomenon. It is an ideal methodology when an in-depth understanding of a topic is desired (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991). As Merriam (2002) defines it, “The case study is an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community…this approach seeks to describe the phenomenon in depth” (p. 8).

Moreover, the case study methodology is suitable to study a particular phenomenon within its context. As cited by Merriam (1998), Miles and Huberman (1994) think of a case as a "phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p.27).

The classroom context is a bounded space where students' learning occurs. Although it is not the only avenue for learning, activities that happen within this context often contribute to the learning process. Elements and activities present within the classroom context are basic determinants of the learning process. The Arabic language classroom chosen for this study consists of a diverse population of learners (see table 3.2). In order to gain an insight into what activities occur and how students interact with each other and with their teacher, it was important to conduct a number of classroom
observations. Observations, however, provide data on behaviors and activities; they do not provide a deep understanding of why these behaviors or activities take place. Therefore, the case study approach is selected as it allows the researcher to obtain a better insight into why people behave the way they do. As advocated by Merriam (1998), "The decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (p. 28). Furthermore, "it is an end-product of field-oriented research" as defined by Wolcott (1992).

Scholars classify case studies according to their specific features (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Merriam characterizes case studies as being: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (p.29); Yin identifies them as explanatory, descriptive, and exploratory. They are also referred to as intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Stake, 1995).

This dissertation consists of multiple case studies investigating the same phenomenon i.e. the presence of Arabic Heritage Language Learners in a language classroom designed for Foreign Language Learners and the influence of this presence on the interaction process and the learning that occurs within the bounded classroom context. The focus of this study is not a single student/instructor. I am interested in understanding the views of different language learners on the presence of Heritage Language Learners (HLLs) in the same classroom and whether this presence influences the interaction process or the learning that takes place within the classroom context.
According to Denzin & Lincoln (2008), “A number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition,” (p.123). The authors identify this type as a "multiple case study" or a "collective case study", which is often selected because of its ability to offer a better understanding, and may be a “better theorizing about a still larger collection of cases”. Thus, the case studies presented in this study can be classified as exploratory or heuristic since the same phenomenon is investigated across the different cases.

3.3.2 Classroom Observation. Observations are often used as one form of data collection in qualitative research, in general, and educational qualitative research in particular. Observations allow for detailed description of the context being studied and can help us “get around conventional thinking” (Becker, 1998, p. 83). The roles of the researcher can vary from a participant-observer to just an observer. In this study, I selected the observer role and was very cautious about detaching myself from activities going on in the classroom.

Observing students' interactions within the Arabic language classroom was the first stage of the research. Since the classroom has various types of language learners, it was important to observe how the students behave and participate in classroom activities. Observations can lead to detecting certain behaviors and patterns of interaction as “observing humans in natural settings assists in understanding the complexity of human behavior and interrelationships among groups” (Lichtman, 2006, p.139).
Four classroom meetings were audio and video taped to record what was happening and what was being said during the process of interaction when students were working together on assigned communicative tasks. Field notes were also recorded while conducting classroom observations. Field notes and transcripts were then indexed in order to develop significant categories and themes that can help answer the research questions.

3.3.3 Interviews. Besides exploring classroom interaction behavior, the study attempted to discover the language learning experiences of various learners, perceptions of the interaction process that takes place among students during classroom activities, perspectives on the role of HLLs during classroom activities, and pedagogical choices of the teacher. Furthermore, the study endeavors to shed light on motivational factors which impacted participants' language learning and development and which might have influenced their interaction behavior.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted, which is a common format of data collection in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews in which the respondents have to answer preset open-ended questions. In this research, the interviews were guided by a list of questions (see Appendix C) but the order and exact wording of the questions were not always strictly followed. There was some room for spontaneous elaborations on some topics. Four selected students were interviewed and each interview lasted about 25-30 minutes. The classroom teacher was also interviewed at a later stage of this study. All interviews were audio-recorded and
later transcribed. The purpose of student interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of their language learning experiences, their views on the interactive tasks assigned within the context of the classroom, their opinions on the presence of heritage learners in the foreign language classroom, and their perception of the language learning and development that occurs through interactions with classmates who have varying backgrounds and experiences and how these differences might impact the learning process within the classroom context. The purpose for interviewing the classroom's teacher was to explore his views on teaching Arabic as a foreign language to a group of students which includes a number of HLLs, his strategy for dealing with diverse learners, and his perception about the interaction process that takes place within the classroom context.

Combining classroom observations with interviews allowed me to gain a better understanding of students' beliefs and perceptions on factors impacting their Arabic language learning experience. Both the students and the classroom teacher provided valuable information and opinions on classroom activities, the presence of different types of learners (HLLs and FLLs) in their classroom, and determinants of interaction patterns that occurred in the classroom.

### 3.4 Research setting

An intermediate-level Arabic language classroom was chosen as the site for the study. This course is the third in a sequence of Modern Standard Arabic courses offered at a large and well-known mid-western university. It is usually taken by undergraduate
students who are fulfilling their GEC (General Education Curriculum) foreign language requirement or planning to minor or major in Arabic. Students enrolled in this course should have completed the two previous courses in the sequence, but can be enrolled based on a placement exam according to the course's online description. Students enrolled in this course were expected to have learned the basic elements of the language, including rudimentary skills in writing, listening, speaking and some grammar. Additionally, they should have developed the ability to use Arabic functionally and communicatively in context (as described in the course description). The objectives of the course are focused on developing and expanding these abilities, and continuing to learn more grammatical concepts and rules such as the verb forms, measure system, and case system. Clearly, many grammatical concepts in Arabic differ from those in English. The approach followed, as described in the syllabus, is based on activities geared toward developing the functional and basic skills. The materials required are a textbook and a dictionary. As listed in the weekly schedule, the instructor is supposed to cover at least one chapter within a two-week period. The same textbook is used in the previous courses; for this course, chapters 14-20 are to be covered, which concludes the entire textbook. Each chapter covers a new grammar concept, new vocabulary, and various activities focused on the newly learned material.

The course is tailored towards foreign language learners as the course's syllabus clearly implies. For example, the **Expected Learning Outcomes** are:

1. Students employ communicative skills (e.g. speaking, listening, reading, and/or writing) in a language other than their native language.
2. Students describe and analyze the cultural contexts and manifestations of the people who speak the language that they are studying.

3. Students compare and contrast the cultures and communities of the language that they are studying with their own.

The class met four days a week and each classroom meeting lasted about 50 minutes. Eighteen students were enrolled in this course. The students’ population was ethnically and culturally diverse. The course's instructor was a doctoral student in the Arabic department and teaching this class was a part of his Graduate teaching assistant (GTA) assignment. He is a Caucasian male, in his late twenties-early thirties and a non-native speaker of Arabic. I have known the teacher for few years as he was a colleague when I taught Arabic within the same program. We have developed a professional relationship and maintained it ever since, which helped in gaining access to this research site.

3.5 Participants

3.5.1 Phase 1. In the first phase of the study, all members of the classroom were considered to be participants. After obtaining each participant's consent to be a part of the study and their permission to be observed and video-taped during classroom activities, four classroom meetings were observed and data was recorded.

The classroom was made up of eighteen students and the instructor. There were a total of four Heritage Language Learners (HLLs- 1 male and 3 females), eleven Foreign
language Learners (FLLs- 2 males and 9 females), and three learners who are classified as others (1 male and 2 females). These students were studying Arabic for a religious purpose; they have had some exposure to the standard form of Arabic (Fus-ha) as it is the language of the Qur'an- Islam's holy book. A limited discussion on this group is presented in different parts of this dissertation.

Table 2 offers a representation of students' population and displays the number of learners according to their gender and their language learning classification.

Table 2. *Student Classification*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner Classification</th>
<th>HLL Male</th>
<th>HLL Female</th>
<th>FLL Male</th>
<th>FLL Female</th>
<th>Other (2 Females &amp; 1 Male)</th>
<th>Total no. of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Learners</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5.2 Phase 2. In the second phase of the study, four students were recruited to participate in one-on-one interviews. Additionally, the classroom’s instructor was interviewed. The participants' private information is kept confidential and their real identities are kept anonymous; they are all given pseudonyms when referred to in the write-up of the study.
As stated earlier, a total of four students, and the instructor, participated in this phase of the study. After classroom observations, I contacted all HLLs (a total of 4) and randomly selected three FLLs and invited them to participate in interviews. Students were contacted via emails. Two FLLs replied to my email expressing their willingness to participate in the second phase of the study. After a couple of attempts, I was able to recruit two HLLs and obtain their approval to be interviewed. Table 3 provides information on members who participated in this phase.

Table 3. Participants in phase 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Major / Minor</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zain</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>HLL</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joelle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>HLL</td>
<td>International Studies/ Arabic</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>FLL</td>
<td>Psychology/ Political science</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlyn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>FLL</td>
<td>Arabic/ Public Affairs</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>PhD student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

There are three major sources of data for a qualitative research study: interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam, 2002, p.12). In the present study, I administered a short survey which enabled me to collect basic background and demographic
information on students as well as language learning experiences and perceived proficiency and learning expectations. I also conducted observations on the classroom discourse and the interaction patterns that took place within the classroom context. Additionally, and in order to gain a deeper comprehension of the processes that occur during speech exchanges and interactions among peers on an individual level, I interviewed four students to capture their own perceptions on issues related to their language learning experiences, and to gain an understanding on factors that determine their individual interaction behavior within the classroom. Basically, four instruments were used, and the rationale for using these instruments is presented below.

3.6.1 Background questionnaire

All students in the selected Arabic classroom were asked to complete a short questionnaire which was designed to elicit background information. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect students’ demographic information, language background, previous language learning experiences, and perceptions on their own proficiency levels. Basically, the questionnaire contains questions that can elicit the following information: (see Appendix A)

- Previous exposure to languages
- Family literacy practices during childhood
- Evaluations of own proficiency level in the target language
- Desired proficiency in Arabic
- Reasons for their decision to study Arabic
As Vygotsky (1978) asserts, human behaviors are determined by their social, cultural, and historical contexts. Students’ demographic and background information is used to assist in data analysis and interpretation. The information collected was also utilized to select certain participants for interviews.

3.6.2 Classroom observations

Traditional observations were initially conducted by anthropologists who would go to a certain location, immerse themselves in the setting and study the people they were interested in (Lichtman, 2006). As Lichtman goes on to explain, ethnography was initially used in education in the late 1980s and has gone through modifications in terms of the length of the observations; thus, “shorter observation times became more widely used,” (p. 139). Currently, it is widely known that field observation is one of the major sources of data collection for qualitative research in education. “Borrowing from the ethnographer, qualitative researchers worked to adapt this tradition to the study of schools and education” (Lichtman, 2006, p.139). Observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account obtained in an interview (Merriam, 2002, p. 13). Furthermore, it gives the researcher a good perspective on the situation, activity, or the event being studied. For my study, it was imperative to observe students in their Arabic language classroom since it is the natural setting for learning the language. As Lichtman (2006) underscores, “Observing humans
in natural settings assists in understanding the complexity of human behavior and interrelationships among groups” (p.139).

After arranging the observation schedule with the instructor, I always arrived at the classroom a few minutes early to set up my equipment (video camera and audio recorder). I would then position myself on either side of the classroom in an attempt to reduce any anxiety or intimidation that might result from my presence in the classroom. I assumed the role of a non-participant observer and did not interfere in any activities or conversations that took place. I observed the entire classroom meeting (a total of four sessions) which typically lasted about 48 minutes. I began my observations by scanning the room in order to get a sense of the classroom setting (e.g., chair arrangement, board, and teacher’s desk). I had initially planned to focus on interactions that occur between Heritage Language Learners (HLLs) and Foreign Language Learners (FLLs), but did not have a definite idea of who the HLLs were; therefore, I attempted to gain an understanding of all interactions, including student-student interactions and teacher-student interactions. At times, many things were happening simultaneously, so I relied on the video-taping to capture things I was not able to observe. During the observations, I had a notebook in which I wrote field notes and documented events that caught my attention, including the verbal and non-verbal behavior of some students. I focused on conversations and interactions. For example, I noted who initiated a question or answer, who participated in a discussion, and what patterns took place during any of those activities. In addition, I wrote analytic memos of events being observed in the field. These were my tentative interpretations of the events and behaviors that I was observing.
3.6.3 Audio/video recordings of classroom activities

This method of data collection allows the researcher to record exactly what is being done and said in the classroom, especially during communicative group activities. Videotaping “produces a rich source of data about what is going on in the classroom,” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 150). A video recorder was used to record students’ behaviors and an audio-recorder to record students’ talk during group activities. Due to technical difficulties, I was not able to video-tape my first observation. However, I was able to audio-record the classroom meeting, take field notes, and write memos which were kind of reflective summaries of events and behaviors being observed. For my second and third observations, I video-taped, audio-recorded, and wrote field-notes and memos. The fourth observation did not yield much data. For this classroom meeting, the teacher had planned for students to practice their final oral skit and had given them the option of getting into their previously formed groups and go elsewhere. There were a total of five groups and each group went to a different location which precluded video or audio recording. However, I briefly visited some of the groups and was able to write my own observation notes and memos. Thus, I have video-recordings of two sessions, audio-records of three sessions, and field-notes and memos of four classroom meetings or sessions. All recordings were later transcribed and used as documentation for the events being studied. As a researcher, this gave me the opportunity to review the recordings and analyze events that I did not notice while conducting my classroom observations.
3.6.4 Students/Teacher interviews

The final step in data the collection for this study was student and teacher interviews. Interviews were semi-structured and guided by a list of questions (see Appendix D). Four selected students and the classroom teacher were interviewed. Each interview took between 30-40 minutes on average. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The purpose of the student interviews is to gain a deep understanding of their language learning experiences, their views on the interactive tasks assigned in the classroom, their opinion about the presence of heritage learners in the foreign language classroom, and their perception on the language learning and development that occurs in the classroom context. The purpose of the teacher's interview is to explore his perception of various students' interactions within his classroom and on having heritage language learners in the same classroom with foreign language learners. In addition, the interview attempted to gain an understanding of his pedagogical choices in teaching Arabic to college-level students.

3.7 Data collection procedures

Data collection in this study focused on gathering information about students' language learning that takes place within a classroom that contains different types of learners; the study investigates the presence of Heritage Language Learners (HLLs) who often share a language classroom with Foreign Language Learners (FLLs). Learners' backgrounds and abilities may vary in this situation. Such variance usually influences classroom discourse and might influence the learning process as well. As previously
mentioned, data sources included background questionnaires, audio and video-recordings from classroom observations, field notes from classroom observations, and audio-recorded interviews with four students (2 HLLs and 2 FLLs) and the classroom teacher.

Before submitting my application to the IRB office, I contacted the potential classroom instructor to ask for his permission to conduct this study on his class. We arranged to meet and discuss my study. The instructor agreed on having his classroom as the site for this research and expressed his willingness to provide the information needed. As soon as I received the approval from the IRB office, I emailed all students in the classroom, introduced myself, and briefly explained my study. I informed students that I would be visiting their classroom soon to discuss my study in person and get their written permission (consent) to be observed. So, during my first visit, I handed consent forms (see Appendix B) and background questionnaires (see Appendix A) to all students. Students were given time to consider their participation and fill in the forms if they agreed to participate.

The questionnaire was designed to collect basic demographic information about students in addition to their language learning background, and perceived proficiency level in the Arabic language among other basic information (see appendix A).

Two days later, I visited the classroom again and collected the forms. All students agreed to be observed during classroom activities and they all filled out the background questionnaire. Four classroom observations were to be conducted. The initial plan was to audio and video record all of them. However, only two out of the four were video-recorded. For technical difficulties, I was not able to video-record the first one, and
relied on the audio-taping and the field notes I’ve recorded. For the fourth intended observation, the students were asked by the instructor to practice an oral skit that they were going to perform as a part of their final exam. Students were supposed to organize their own group for the skit. Thus, they got in their groups, and went to different places in the building to work on it. For that period, I recorded my field-notes and memos.

During the same time frame, a semi-purposeful sampling method was used to select students to be interviewed. After an initial analysis of the information collected from the background questionnaire, I learned that there were a total of four HLLs in the class. I decided to contact all of them and ask for their consent to participate in the second phase of the study which entails individual interviews. I randomly selected three FLLs and contacted them to ask for interviews. The recruitment letter for this phase was sent via email. I later received positive responses from two HLLs and two FLLs. Individual interviews were then arranged. Participants were asked to sign another consent form for this phase of the study (see appendix C). Interviews ran between 30-40 minutes on average and were audio-recorded. They were later transcribed and then indexed. In addition to student interviews, the classroom teacher, who also signed a consent form agreeing to voluntary participation, was later interviewed.

3.7.1 Data Collection Timeline. Classroom observations and student interview data were collected during spring semester, 2013. Four classroom observations took place over a four week period (March-April). I communicated with students who agreed to participate
in the second phase of the study during the last week of observations and interviews were completed right after the last observation (see Table1). After transcribing and initially analyzing the collected data, I found it beneficial to interview the classroom teacher to determine his insight into the presence of HLLs in his classroom as well as the interaction that takes place within the classroom context. I was also curious to know if the presence of HLLs in the classroom had any influence on his pedagogical choices. Thus, I contacted the teacher and he agreed to be interviewed. That interview took place approximately one year after the initial observations and student interviews. Table 4 summarizes the data collection timeline.
Table 4. Data Collection Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Step</th>
<th>Research Procedure</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>IRB Approval</td>
<td>Mid-March, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Initial Classroom Visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consent for classroom observation</td>
<td>March 20, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background Questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Phase One- Classroom Observations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom observation #1</td>
<td>March 22, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom observation #2</td>
<td>March 27, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom observation #3</td>
<td>April 12, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom observation #4</td>
<td>April 17, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Phase Two- Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with Sofi (FLL)</td>
<td>April 18, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with Caitlyn (FLL)</td>
<td>April 19, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with Joelle (HLL)</td>
<td>April 20, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with Zain (HLL)</td>
<td>April 22, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with Robert (Teacher)</td>
<td>March 5, 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.8 Validity and reliability of the study

3.8.1 Validity. Validity is a major concern in qualitative research. As Maxwell (2005) cautions, “The validity of your results (in qualitative research) is not guaranteed by following some prescribed procedure” (p.105). Citing Brinberg and McGrath (1985), he compares validity to a commodity “that can be purchased with techniques” (p.13). He rather explains, “It depends on the relationship of your conclusions to reality, and there are no methods that can completely assure that you have captured this” (Maxwell, 2005, p.105). However, this author affirms that validity threats can be reduced through evidence rather than methods since methods are only the means to obtain the evidence which helps in minimizing any threats to validity. In order to minimize validity threats and instill trustworthiness in my research findings, I have attempted to collect and use verifiable and trustworthy data as a form of evidence used in my conclusion. I further followed standard techniques used in qualitative research in order to increase validity. These included a detailed description of the context (classroom), systematic observations, collecting video and audio-taped material, documenting field notes and memos, practicing triangulation, conducting member checks, and applying reflexivity to eliminate personal biases.

**Triangulation.** Another necessary method to ensure validity is triangulation, which is “the process of using multiple methods, data collection strategies, and data sources to obtain a more complete picture of what is being studied and to cross-check
information” (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012, p.393). Most qualitative research scholars agree that “multiple sources bring more credibility to an investigation” (Lichtman, 2006, p.195). My triangulation strategy for this study was to use different methods to collect data; data was collected from classroom observations and individual interviews. Observations are mainly useful to describe behaviors and events, audio/video-taping assures that the researcher does not miss a particular event, and interviews provide detailed information from participants themselves and allow the researcher to obtain direct and clear perspectives from the participants.

Multiple sources of data were also used to confirm emerging findings. Data sources included field-notes, analytic memos, audio and video-recordings, and interview transcripts. Moreover, in order to gain a better understanding of the interaction that occurs between HLLs and FLLs in the classroom context, the teacher’s perspective was obtained through an interview as well.

**Member Checks.** An additional frequently used method to ensure validity in a qualitative study is performing member checks. It is a strategy in which data and interpretations are tested by members (participants) from whom the data was obtained. This strategy is also referred to as “respondent validation” (Merriam, 2009). In this study, participants had the chance to read their interview transcripts and verify their responses. In order to assure credibility of my interview data, I contacted all five interviewees via an email; an attachment of their interview transcript was sent and participants were asked to review it for accuracy. Four out of the five participants replied and confirmed that the
transcripts were accurate and reflected what they said during their interview. The fifth participant never responded although I made several attempts to contact her. Member checks also involve “soliciting feedback” on emerging findings from some of the participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). It is “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (Maxwell, 2005, p.111). Thus, after completing the first draft of data analysis and interpretation, copies are sent to participants to confirm its accuracy. This technique was used in this qualitative research to support both the validity and reliability of the research conclusions.

Reflexivity.

Emic-Etic Perspective

In qualitative research where field observations are utilized as one source of data collection, the researcher’s access to the field and interpretation of events and behaviors can be influenced by whether their approach is that of “an emic” or “an etic”. Xia (2011) attributes the emic and etic approaches to the linguistic anthropologist Kenneth Pike (1954, 1967). This author further explains that “emic” approach “seeks to examine the native principles of classification and conceptualization from within each cultural system” (Xia, 2011, p.77). In other words, an emic inquiry is culturally specific with the mentality of an insider’s beliefs, thoughts and attitudes. As Jingfeng (2011) explains,
indigenous knowledge and explanations are crucial to an emic analysis. On the other hand, an etic-oriented researcher’s observations are often collected according to externally derived criteria and usually without intentionally learning the perspectives of those studied (Xia, 2011, p.77).

In this study, I adopt an “emic” approach; I was observing students' behavior and interaction patterns in the classroom with an insider's perspective. I once taught Arabic as a foreign language for three years at the university level, and I have unintentionally developed some observations and assumptions of my own. In addition, being a native Arabic speaker, and having children who are considered heritage learners of the language place me in the “emic” position. The researcher's pre-assumptions can constitute a major threat to the validity of the conclusions. Conducting this research, I've realized this significant potential threat to validity and have dealt with it cautiously and continuously. I have recognized that I had a few assumptions on the skills and behaviors of HLLs and FLLs. In order to minimize and even eliminate this threat, I carefully and objectively recorded all of my observations, strove for neutrality in my interview questions, and provided a good thick description of the field (events and patterns occurring during activities in the classroom).

Collecting good data from interviews, using proper tools to ensure the accuracy and truthfulness of data, and minimizing the influence of my emic position are all techniques that can aid in ruling out any threats to validity of the research conclusion.
3.8.2 Reliability

According to Golafshani (2003), “Reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor, and quality in qualitative paradigm” (p. 604). The significance of reliability in qualitative research is based on the fact that the researcher’s methodology should be consistent with various qualitative researchers’ approaches and the methods used in data collection should be dependable. In order to ensure reliability of this qualitative study, proper and detailed documentation was utilized throughout the data collection process.

The questionnaire used to collect students’ background data is consistent with most questionnaires used by numerous qualitative researchers who collect background information on language learners. Besides, during classroom observations, I jotted down all the events occurring in the setting and wrote memos on my own observations in addition to interpretations of those events. At the same time, an audio-recorder and a video camera were used to capture all of the events that were taking place in the classroom; although the audio-recordings were not very helpful, video-taping was a reliable approach to confirm the precision and consistency of my field-notes collected during the observations. Additionally, interview data was audio-recorded and transcribed carefully and accurately to document all questions and responses. After the interview data was transcribed, I implemented the member checking method to determine their accuracy; each participant was emailed a copy of their transcribed interview in order to read and confirm the accuracy of what I have transcribed. i.e. whether my transcripts truthfully and accurately reflected what they have said during the interview. Four out of
the five participants contacted replied and approved the transcript. Member checking is one of the most important steps to establish credibility for research data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.314).

In brief, and as Merriam (1998) affirms, the purpose of qualitative research is not to reproduce or generalize findings but to produce conclusions consistent with the collected data. Accordingly, all the data collection procedures applied in this study were geared toward increasing the reliability and dependability of my data.

3.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis is considered to be a significant step in qualitative research, and it entails several common stages. The approach utilized in analyzing my qualitative data is mainly guided by both Creswell’s (2008) discussion on qualitative data analysis and Merriam’s (1998) thorough discussion on managing and analyzing qualitative data. My analysis was “inductive in form, going from the particular (detailed data) to the general codes and themes” (Creswell, 2008, p.244). Throughout the analysis stage, there was an inductive, constant, and comparative data analysis approach until patterns emerged (Merriam, 1998). The strategy followed in analyzing interview data was narrative in nature.

There are certain steps suggested for analyzing qualitative data, and Creswell (2008) identifies six, which are in line with the process followed for this study’s data analysis.
The first step is collecting the data. It is usually followed by transcribing data in preparation for analysis. After collecting data, it is important to organize the data carefully since “organization of data is critical in qualitative research because of the large amount of information gathered during a study” (Creswell, 2008, p. 245). Hence, it is important to organize collected data whether they are questionnaires, observation notes, audiotapes, videotapes or interview data. Thus, I started this process of organization by gathering everything I had collected during the study. Interview audiotapes, field notes from classroom observations, and video tapes of the classroom’s sessions were grouped and stored in a safe place. Following this step, interview audiotapes were transcribed, and the transcripts were grouped with notes I had jotted down during the interviews. The interviews’ textual data were kept in a folder. Field notes from classroom observations were also reviewed and confirmed with the video recording of the sessions. Interview transcripts and field notes were later printed to prepare for a thorough analysis of this data. Having hard copies of textual data in order to analyze it was helpful for me as I could write my own notes, underline, and color code.

The fourth step was to examine the text thoroughly and try to gain a general impression of the contents. Data interpretation was actually taking place throughout the data collection process. It was unintentionally and concurrently occurring during that stage. I was constantly analyzing events and behaviors as I was observing and listening to my participants’ responses during interviews. This is a common approach in studies that are qualitative in nature as scholars confirm (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1998). Data analysis continued when organizing and reviewing all printed textual data. This step
provided a general impression and was suggested by Creswell as a form of exploring the “general sense of the data”. To make sense of the data is significant for the researcher in order to analyze it correctly and later identify certain concepts or themes. Looking through the data, at first, has created a sense of frustration worrying that my data would not yield to any significant themes. Reading my textual data several times, I was taking notes and recording them on the margins first. Reading through data carefully, and reading it for several times are important steps in qualitative research; I grouped similar responses or sentences together which eventually led to developing certain categories or themes. This approach is identified by Creswell (2008) as the coding process which is “an inductive process of narrowing data into a few themes.” Merriam (2009) recommends a similar approach to analyzing qualitative data and advises that categories constructed should be responsive to the purpose of the research, mutually exclusive, sensitive to the data, exhaustive, and conceptually congruent. After developing the themes or codes, I determined the codes to be described in my research writing, and attempted to examine how these emergent themes are related to my research questions.
Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, research findings from the participants’ interviews are presented in the form of case studies. Yin (1994) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p.13). Thus, the classroom itself will not be the boundary for analyzing and interpreting data, as interview data with each of the five participants reflect language learning experiences, learning needs and perceptions on various topics related to the participants’ Arabic language learning. The case studies tend to be descriptive and narrative in nature; aspects of this type of a case study are described by Merriam (1998) as having the ability to “illustrate complexities of a situation, show the influence of the personalities on the issue, and spell out differences of opinions on the issue” (pp.31-32). The participants in this research narrated their experiences in language learning, and expressed their opinions on several issues related to their Arabic language learning in the Arabic classroom. The narrative data is described and interpreted to gain a better understanding of issues investigated and to answer the research questions.

In order to clearly depict the context of this study, I begin by providing an overall description of the classroom. This will be followed by five participant case studies and a table which provides a summary of the findings. Each case study is organized into
various categories. These include the following: each participant’s background, motivation, perceptions of the participant’s own as well as others’ proficiency in Arabic, attitude toward interaction and collaboration within the classroom, and articulations of the participant’s learning needs and goals.

4.1 A Description of the Arabic Classroom

The classroom chosen for this study is an intermediate-level Arabic language classroom, the third in a sequence of Modern Standard Arabic courses offered at this large and well-known mid-western university. Typical students enrolled in this course are undergraduate students fulfilling their GEC (General Education Curriculum) foreign language requirement or planning to minor or major in Arabic or other related majors. Most of the enrolled students have completed the two previous courses in the sequence. Students enrolled in this course were expected to have learned the basic elements of the language; i.e., they have already learned and developed skills in writing, listening, speaking and some grammar. Additionally, they should have developed the ability to use Arabic functionally and communicatively in context, according to the course description. The objectives of the course are focused on developing and expanding these abilities, and continuing to learn more grammatical concepts and rules such as verb forms, measure and case systems. The approach followed, as described in the syllabus, is based on activities geared toward developing the functional and basic skills. The materials required are listed as a textbook and a dictionary.
The Textbook

The textbook used for the course is part one of a three part series entitled Al Kitaab fii Ta’llum al-Arabiyya with DVDs by Kristen Brustad, Abbas Al-Tonsi, and Mahmoud Al-Batal. The book is divided into twenty chapters to be covered in the sequence of the three courses. In other words, the same textbook is required for the previous two courses in the sequence where chapters one through thirteen get covered. In this course, chapters fourteen through twenty should be covered which would conclude the entire textbook. Each chapter covers a new grammar concept, new vocabulary, and various activities focused on the new learned material.

The classroom context

The class met four days a week and each classroom meeting lasted about 50 minutes. Eighteen students were enrolled in this course. Out of the eighteen students, four were Heritage Language Learners (HLLs), eleven were Foreign Language Learners (FLLs), and three were a special type of learners -- learning the language for a religious purpose (Non-Arab Muslim learners). They are described as “Others” (see Table2). Because of the limited scope of the study, there will not be a great focus on these learners. The course's instructor was a soft-spoken doctoral student in the Arabic department and teaching this class was part of his Graduate teaching assistant (GTA) assignment. He was a Caucasian male, in his early thirties and a non-native speaker of Arabic.
The classroom is medium in size and considered to be a standard classroom according to the university’s classroom description web page; it has thirty eight student seats arranged in typical rows. It has a chalkboard, a projector, and a PC with DVD.

Each class meeting would typically begin with the instructor coming in and waiting for all students to enter the classroom. Then, the instructor would initiate the class with an ice-breaker activity (Simon Says) or a conversation about students’ activities over the past few days. This usually entailed using the target language (Arabic). The instructor would switch to using English and tell students about materials to be covered in the following weeks. It was obvious that the instructor relied largely on the textbook for classroom activities. Most of the activities that took place during my observations were based on exercises in the textbook; those varied from grammar exercises to fill-in the blank vocabulary ones. The instructor would ask students to work on the activities in groups. What usually happened was that students would turn to a classmate sitting next to them or behind them. It was clear that students used English to communicate while working on the activities, and the instructor did not make it mandatory to use Arabic in the classroom. It was hard to listen to students’ utterances within each group or pair.

During group tasks, I’ve noticed that a couple of students (a FLLs) would turn to ask another (a HLL) about the meaning of a word in Arabic. The instructor used the chalkboard often to explain grammatical concepts most of the time, and vocabulary words in a few instances. A few students interacted with the instructor through asking questions about his instructions.
Overall, it seemed that interaction within the classroom was slow and quiet, except when someone would ask the teacher or another student to confirm a meaning of a word or a verb tense, for example. Absence rate was somewhat high during the times I was present in the classroom to observe - four on average.

4.2 Participant Case Studies

4.2.1 Caitlyn

Demographics and background

Caitlyn is a 19 years old Caucasian female student majoring in Arabic and Public Affairs. She ranked as a sophomore at the time of data collection for this study. Caitlyn is considered to be a Foreign Language Learner (FLL) since her family roots are not Arabic and she has never lived in an Arabic country. Her first language is English and that was the only language spoken at home.

She started learning Arabic as a foreign language during her sophomore year in high-school. She was fifteen years old at the time. Caitlyn decided to continue learning the language throughout her high-school years and college. However, she rarely got a chance to use the language outside of her classroom context during her years of learning.

Motivation for learning Arabic

To graduate with honors in high school, Caitlyn had to study two foreign languages as she stated. She was learning Spanish and decided to learn Arabic for her second foreign language requirement. Her high school Arabic teacher was a native
Egyptian and exposed students to the Egyptian dialect every once in a while. Caitlyn’s interest in Arabic grew as she really liked her teacher.

*C: I also knew the teacher and liked her and I was taking Spanish and needed to take another language to graduate with honors. So, instead of French, I took Arabic.*

In addition to the curiosity and the teacher’s character, the political situation had an influence on Caitlyn’s decision to study Arabic.

*C: when the Arab Spring happened, I became really interested in the politics of everything in the Middle East. So I decided to pursue it in college during my junior year of high-school.*

Although her primary motivation was an interest in Arabic, her purpose for learning the language is to work in Foreign Policy.

**Self-assessment of Arabic language competency**

As she indicated in the questionnaire, Caitlyn understands Arabic but can speak with a great difficulty. She rated her listening skills as poor; her speaking skills as fair; her reading, writing, and grammar skills as good. During the interview, she confirmed her strengths and weaknesses in the language skills:

*C: My strengths are probably reading and writing; and my weaknesses are listening comprehension and speaking; i.e communication. I am grammar happy; it is my strongest point. It is logical. Arabic grammar has a very logical base, so it is pretty easy for me to understand.*
When she discussed her perceived proficiency level in listening and speaking, she was referring to the Formal version of Arabic (Fus-ha). When I asked her about her proficiency level in the colloquial version (3ammiya), she replied:

C: I don’t know enough dialect so I cannot measure my learning there, but in the Fus-ha, listening and speaking are my biggest weaknesses.

The Arabic language is very different from English (Differences in letters, sentence structure, grammar rules, etc.). In general, Caitlyn’s biggest challenge was to understand the Arabic language’s structure, and finding resources for Arabic foreign language learners in the United States as she stated. On a personal level, she expressed that the separation between native speakers of Arabic and foreign language learners who had never spoken the language was one of the major challenges she experienced.

C: there has been a definite separation between the native speakers and people who have never spoke Arabic before; in the classroom, native speakers tend to work together. I think there is an opportunity for that resource for students to work together with other students who understand the language from being around it at home from their family versus students who are understanding it for the first time. I don’t know why there is a separation between the native-speakers and the non-native speakers.

Caitlyn’s statement shows that she values the presence of native speakers, or HLLs, and she perceives it to be a resource that should be utilized. She actually categorized it as a challenge which indicated her frustration with the situation. She added
that she had seen this separation in all the Arabic language classes she attended at this university. However, she explained that she got more comfortable asking native speakers (HLLs) for help in her previous class. It is not clear what factors had affected her comfort level within the previous classroom.

*C: Last semester, I became more comfortable discussing and asking the native speakers for help, especially on speaking exercises- just because they understood it more than we did.*

Based on the above statement, it is reasonable to conclude that she believes Heritage Language Learners, or native speakers, to be more proficient in the speaking exercises and that they are capable of assisting other learners in such activities.

**Peers’ proficiency levels**

In most classrooms, proficiency levels of students can vary to some degree. This variation can be noticed in foreign language classrooms, especially when learners’ backgrounds vary. When I asked Caitlyn if it was common to see different proficiency levels among students working in groups, her answer was confirmatory. She said that she has often seen big differences in the proficiency levels among students in the Arabic language classrooms she has attended at this university.

*C: Proficiency level differences do exist. I might excel at grammar and reading and writing but when I try to speak, it doesn't seem like that at all.*
Caitlyn’s answer confirms that there are some students (most likely heritage learners) who can speak the language well, while she (a foreign language learner) is good at other skills. Discussing this issue, in particular, Caitlyn seemed frustrated; her following answer shows that she disliked or disapproved the way students were placed in Arabic language classrooms.

*C: I came in since my freshman year, so last semester I was in 1102 and even in this class as well everyone is at a different level. I feel that this university doesn't really test. I never took a comprehension test. They just asked me if I was a native speaker and how far I got in the book and then there are native speakers who can speak Arabic very well but they don't know the grammar at all. There are also non-native speakers who know the grammar and can speak. So, different levels are all over the place.*

As a foreign language learner of Arabic, Caitlyn has clearly experienced having Heritage Language Learners in her classrooms, and has understood that Heritage Language Learners are not always proficient in the different language skills. It was important to understand how a foreign language learner deals with variations of proficiency levels among peers in the classroom; so, I asked Caitlyn how she would usually deal with having students with higher proficiency levels during a group activity, and she honestly stated that those students usually “end up doing most of the work. Most of those students work on their own and then give the answers; there are few students who will try to assist the less proficient, but that is not the typical case.”

In an attempt to clearly understand what Caitlin meant by a “high-proficiency level learner”, I asked her if she was referring to Heritage learners, native speakers, or
foreign language learners; she said that as a foreign language learner herself, she cannot recognize the proficiency level in all skills. She knows that when she listens to someone speaking the language very well, she cannot be sure that they are correct. She said that the teacher is the one who can tell. From her response, I can sense that she has some uncertainties in recognizing proficiency levels among various students, including herself. This is most likely attributed to her delayed understanding that even if a Heritage Language Learner can speak the colloquial well, they might not be proficient in the formal version (Fus-ha), and they might have difficulties in learning grammar.

I wanted to know from Caitlin if she has always had HLLs in Arabic classrooms she’s taken previously, and she affirmed that. She obviously considers HLLs as proficient in speaking but has doubts about their grammar proficiency.

C: In high school we had 11 students in the class; 2 or 3 were Syrians. It was the same thing where they excelled in speaking and colloquial but not as much in grammar.

**Attitude toward peer interaction and group work**

Bringing up the discussion on group work in the classroom, Caitlyn said that they do some group work, but that shows how we work with native and non-native speakers. Again, she brought up the separation topic. She said that within the groups in which she participated, they often used English to discuss their tasks, and thus, she finds it better to work alone. Trying to get a better insight into her attitude on that topic, I asked her if she perceives any benefit in group work, but her answer was negative. She attributed her attitude to her own disappointing experiences in many group work activities she had during learning Arabic at this university.
She believes that group members often do not have equal interest in the learning and thus, they do not contribute equally to the group work. If they “put in the same effort, it will be helpful,” she replied.

When asked to clarify whether she meant group activities focused on speaking or other skills, she explained that group activities focused on speaking exercises can be helpful, but in grammar it is a different story. She said that she always worked with the same person who excelled at some grammar aspects, while Caitlin excelled at others. They developed a system where they split up the work instead of working together on the same things. Caitlyn’s response shows that the nature of tasks they had to do in their group work activities did not necessarily require a lot of oral communication in the target language. She and her partner found a system to complete the work efficiently and they did not perceive any added value to interacting and learning much from each other; that pertained to grammar exercises mostly.

I asked Caitlyn how the presence of heritage learners in the group affected the group work, and the first thing she said was: “I don’t know. I haven’t worked in a group that was mixed a long time ago.” Caitlyn’s experience in interacting with Heritage Language Learners in this classroom context was obviously minimal. So, I asked her to think of previous learning experiences and she said that “there was some kind of cooperation among group members.”

C: Yes; there was cooperation. And it's always interesting because you definitely learn who knows the best about which areas. So if you need to know some vocabulary words you go to the native speakers because they probably know the vocab. They'll come to you for grammar. So, in a blended group, there's some sharing.
When asked about interaction patterns in the group and if they were often dominated by the more proficient student, Caitlyn replied by saying that the personality of the learner plays a greater role in that situation. “There is usually a leader in the group and that person is not necessarily the most proficient”, she said. “However, when it comes to actually doing the work and coming up with answers, the most proficient takes the lead”. She believes that in an ideal group, there should be a creative process and different ideas from members, but that hasn’t been the case. Elaborating on this topic, Caitlyn added that she considers proficiency and confidence to be important factors which play a role in contributing to the group work. In addition, “caring and willing to contribute are important.”

She explained that since this class is a GEC (General Education Curriculum) requirement, there are some students who just want to pass the class and they don’t care enough to help.

*C: it is not only the proficiency that plays a role in the dynamics of the group, but also how much other students care and want to contribute.*

I wanted to know if Caitlyn would try to interact with Heritage learners in her classroom, and she explained that she didn’t really do that. She mentioned that half of the class knew each other from the preceding course and the other half was where you see that heritage learners pair up together. Again, she asserted that it is a split class.

I asked Caitlin if she has had any learning experience outside the classroom. She told me that in high school they focused more on culture unlike the classes she’s attended.
at this university. She told me how they had food days where the heritage learners would bring food. She also got close to those learners and their families who were more helpful in teaching her about the culture.

I wanted to know how Caitlyn felt about having heritage language learners in the foreign language classroom, and she indicated that it could be a positive thing.

_C: I don't have any negative feelings about it. I think it can be really helpful. I think having small and short discussions in the colloquial can be really helpful and the addition of new vocab; there is always been a situation when Steven, the teacher, might not know a certain colloquial word, and a native speaker would know it. It is beneficial and there is a lot of potential for it to be very beneficial._

**Learning needs and aspirations**

Discussing important aspects of learning the Arabic language, Caitlyn’s response was focused on application of the learned language in real life situations. It is worthwhile noting that Arabic is a diglossic language, and the formal Arabic (Fus-ha) is the language taught in classrooms. It is not the version spoken by people in the Arab world.

_C: I think anyone who is very serious about learning a language, wants to use it for application, especially in Arabic; the standard Arabic that we studied (formal) isn’t as applicable as colloquial. I just wish that the curriculum wasn’t so modeled after other languages because I think there should be a colloquial aspect and greater focus on how you can apply Arabic._

Arabic has four basic dialects spoken across different regions in the Arab world (Levantine, Egyptian, North African, and Gulf/Iraqi). When asked if she has a preference to a specific dialect, Caitlin expressed her interest in the Egyptian dialect. She attributed
that to having had an Egyptian teacher in high school. With the unstable political situation in many Arab countries at the time of the interview, Caitlyn said that she was not sure where she would go.

In addition to applying the learned language and being able to communicate, Caitlyn’s response included cultural aspects. She believes that culture is an important aspect when learning a language.

_C: Understanding the culture is important in understanding and learning the language._

It was clear that Caitlyn is interested in learning about the Arabic culture. She has mentioned earlier that during her high school, in her Arabic language class, they had different events which introduced students to the culture such as food days and movie watching. She was excited telling me how she got to meet parents and grandparents of heritage Language Learners where she got to learn about the culture from the older generation.

Understanding and attending to students’ needs is essential to provide a good teaching/learning experience where students feel comfortable, encouraged and valued. Thus, I wanted to learn more about what Caitlyn would desire to see in the Arabic language classroom, and what would contribute to a better learning experience in her opinion.

_C: I think there needs to be a really good standard for proficiency. I think that makes a difference in the classroom if everyone is kind of at the same level. And then, I think the struggle this semester was that I felt like it’s an Arabic class being taught in English_
versus an Arabic class being taught in Arabic; because if Arabic was used then you'll be forced to speak it.

She continued to explain that learning to speak the language is very important and having to speak it in the classroom would facilitate that learning. She actually feels that her speaking ability has deteriorated since high school and the classes she’s attended at this university contributed to that.

C: Again, speaking as much as possible. May be also like the reiteration of some topics. Like we have topics listed for the final and we learned it two months ago. I even forgot about them; we haven't used them since we learned it. Like connecting things learned to new things and revisiting learned concepts. In language things pile up.

Caitlyn prioritizes speaking the language (Arabic) as the most important skill she would like to learn.

Summary

Caitlyn, an Arabic foreign language learner, is someone motivated to learn the language and obviously has a passion to learn about the culture and be able to communicate in Arabic. Her experience in learning could have been better as she indicated. She values the presence of Heritage Language Learners and believes that this group can be a great resource in the classroom; however, interaction among students has been a challenge in her experience.
4.2.2 Sofi

**Demographics and background**

Sofi is a 19 years old Caucasian female who is studying Arabic as a foreign language. Her family is originally from the United States and English is her first and native language. She is a sophomore majoring in Psychology and minoring in Political Science. As indicated in her background questionnaire, she is considering Arabic as a second minor. Sofi had no exposure to the Arabic language before attending college. She started learning Arabic during her freshman year, at the age of eighteen, and has been learning it for almost two years. Prior to this course, she had taken the two precedent courses in the sequence of Arabic language courses at this university. Sofi studied other languages at a younger age; her foreign language experience includes learning French in grade school as well as high school and studying Italian for one year.

**Motivation for Learning Arabic**

Sofi has chosen to learn Arabic because she is fascinated with the language and the culture surrounding it, as stated in her questionnaire. Thus, her motivation is classified as an intrinsic motivation. When she started college and had to choose a foreign language to study as part of the GEC requirement, she decided to study Arabic. During her interview, she stated that Arabic is an important language to know, especially at this time. Recent events involving the Arab world and including the terror attacks on 9/11 have obviously influenced Sofi’s attitude toward the language and had probably made her curious about the language, the culture and the people in the Arab world. She feels that
there is a lack of knowledge about the Arabic language and the culture. After enrolling in her first Arabic class at this university, she enjoyed the language and decided to continue learning it. According to her, ideally, she would like to be fluent in Arabic someday.

**Self-assessment of Arabic language competency**

When asked to evaluate her own strengths and weaknesses as a foreign language learner of Arabic, Sofi stated that she was good at reading, but not at speaking or having a conversation in the target language. She believed that when she read out loud, she was able to make it sound as it was supposed to. She attributed her weakness to the lack of practice outside the classroom, as well as within the classroom.

*S: I'm not so good at speaking or having a conversation. I think that is primarily because outside the classroom, or even in the classroom, I'm not talking. I'm just looking at what's in the book.*

Most learners face challenges during their learning process. Discussing this topic with Sofi, she indicated that her biggest challenge is oral communication in Arabic. In addition, when writing, she feels that she is not so good at following proper grammar rules in details.

**Peers’ proficiency levels**

In Sofi’s opinion, students’ levels should not vary to a big degree. It is always helpful, according to her, to have one slightly higher level student, and one heritage language learner, in a group of three as she explained. Sofi is most likely referring to a
FLL with a high proficiency since she specifically added that it is also important to have one HLL. Teachers know the levels of their students and it is important that they group them together in a way that can enhance the learning process.

During our discussion, Sofi elaborated on the skills of heritage language learners. She stated that even if the HLL did not know important rules and specific details of the language, he or she is still able to speak some colloquial and certainly has the background knowledge of the language and the culture.

**Attitude toward peer interaction and group work**

When asked about group work in the current Arabic class, she said that there wasn’t much group work. “We do have group work but not to an extensive amount,” she said. Sofi believes that group work is “good for some parts” and that students need to have group work. However, her concern was “when students’ proficiency levels vary within the group, it might end up having a negative impact on the less proficient student”. She further explained her point by saying the following:

*S: I think you definitely need to have group work; but sometimes, when you have a higher level person, the lower level person is going to be kind of pushed out of the group work; they're going to participate less in terms of speaking out or participating. This happened to me before where I've had a couple of people where they were way up; I had no idea so I would just sit back.*

Sofi obviously had a negative experience in group work where she felt that she was left out since her proficiency level was not even close to the other students. I wanted to know if having varying proficiency levels among peers was a common thing in her experience
and she confirmed that it definitely was. She added that students often deal with this issue by “going on their own level”. She felt that her classmates were usually nice and they tried to help.

*S: Mostly, people are nice and they try to help. I’ve never had any issue where people are not taking their time to help*

I asked Sofi to elaborate more on a statement she had said earlier- feeling pushed out of the group at times. Her reply was that when something “is really hard, people don’t spend much time trying to explain it since they know we’re not going to get it anyways”. It was important to know which learners Sofi was referring to. When asked if the higher proficiency learners she mentioned were foreign language learners or heritage language learners, she said that they were all foreign language learners. Sofi’s statements indicate that she considers herself to be a low-proficient Arabic language learner.

To get a better understanding of her perception on group work, I asked Sofi if she had worked in groups with heritage language learners and how she would describe her experience with them; she said that she did and simply felt that they understand the language better.

*S: I’ve actually found that they were a little bit more helpful because they understand it more because they’re not just learning it; they understand it.*

Sofi believes that HLLs can explain things better as “they know why it is this way, while FLLs know it is just this way.” She feels that their (referring to HLLs) exposure to the language gave them the advantage of understanding the language in context as opposed
to FLLs who just learn the rules and cannot always comprehend the pragmatics of the language.

*S:* If they’re native speakers they explain it to you as this is what we do when we’re in this situation; not necessarily in terms of culture but may be past exposure or something. They can make more sense of it.

She continued to express her opinion on native speaker’s proficiency in the language, and talked about her experience having native teachers of Arabic. She said that she has previously had two native Arabic teachers, a Syrian and an Egyptian and felt that they were the best Arabic teachers she has ever had as they were able to explain things better, in her opinion. She obviously has a preference for native Arabic teachers.

*S:* They understand and they can teach it to you. I do really think that I would learn it better from someone who is not a foreign language learner like I am.

It was important to know if Sofi thought that a native Arabic teacher would be more effective teaching all the skills. She explained that “in terms of learning grammar and getting intense with it, the current teacher (who is a non-native speaker) does a good job... but in terms of speaking, listening and writing, reading and interpreting it's better when they're native speakers”.

She added that learning about cultural aspects from a native Arabic teacher would be more effective.

Getting back to the subject of having HLLs in groups, I asked Sofi if she felt that the effectiveness of group work was different when it included HLLs. Sofi believes that
the student’s personality and their knowledge level play a role in their contribution to the group. She firmly believes that heritage learners have “root-base knowledge” of the language since they grow up in a home which most likely used the language. That gives HLLs the exposure that a foreign language learner lacks, and thus, a better knowledge of the language. Sofi finds it “easier to learn with them” and as she explained, she would often make an effort to talk to HLLs in the class.

Sofi realizes that practice is essential for improving oral skills in the target language (Arabic), and she is aware that she needs to make an extra effort to practice speaking outside the classroom, as she asserted. Continuing our conversation about oral skills, she told me about a major assignment that is required in this Arabic classroom: an oral skit prepared by students (in groups) and presented toward the end of the semester. Students are asked to form a group and work together on writing and acting out an Oral Skit. Sofi hoped that she could get in a group that included HLLs, but two of her FLLs friends asked her to join their group, and she just joined them. She indicated that she prefers to work with HLLs. Sofi stated that, in general, when she is working with a group whose members are all foreign language learners, and they get stuck finding the right vocabulary, they ask HLLs for help. Sofi feels that you can always get help from HLLs when it pertains to vocabulary.

After discussing specific topics, I asked Sofi about her opinion on having Arabic language classrooms with heritage learners enrolled along with foreign language learners. Her first quick response was that “it’s really good.” She explained that it is good to have
different kinds of learners in the classroom, but she is concerned about the noticeably
different proficiency levels among students within the same classroom. She believes that
this difference could negatively influence the learning of other students in the class.

*S: I think it's really good. It's a good way to expose yourself to different types of learners. But if they are much more advanced than you, it's not going to be good for them. They're not going to learn as much or the teacher could skip your level and go to theirs. But if they are at a similar level, they should be in the same class.*

In addition, she feels that having HLLs with an advanced level of proficiency in the
classroom could be intimidating to other students (FLLs).

In summary, she feels positive about group work in the language classroom context, but
she strongly believes that teachers should pair-up students in the groups based on their
proficiency levels in order to facilitate the learning.

*S: I think definitely teachers should try to pair up students because they know their levels and they can figure out. When it's a group of three, may be a higher level and a bit lower level but not terribly lower and, may be a heritage speaker.*

The above statement expresses her perception of an ideal group formation.

**Learning needs and aspirations**

It is important to understand what language learners desire to learn in their
language classroom, and what they expect when enrolling in a class to learn a specific
language. To Sofi, a foreign language learner of Arabic, learning how to speak is very
important. She suggested that the Arabic courses at this university should seriously focus
on that when designing the curriculum. She feels that there should be activities that include repetition as it is important to repeat new learned things in the language so you can get them; “Because here, it seems that you learn one thing and you move on and don't keep referring back to the previous one.”

It is clear that Sofi places a great deal of emphasis on learning the language. She is enthusiastic about her learning and wishes that the pace and the activities used in the classroom can be more repetitive so students can effectively learn in their Arabic language classroom. Being more specific about important language aspects when learning a foreign language, Sofi believes that “Being able to speak and communicate” is the most important.

*S: My main goal would be being able to have a conversation with a native speaker.*

To achieve her goal, Sofi plans on learning the Egyptian dialect in one of the colloquial classes offered at this university. Before enrolling in the colloquial class, however, she needs to complete this last Arabic language class as required by the Arabic department. Travelling abroad is also one of her goals to “grasp the language” as she explained.

In addition to being able to speak, Sofi would like to be more competent in the details of the Arabic language grammar rules and how the words are structured. She is fascinated with the system of root letters that make up words; although she finds it challenging, she believes it is very interesting.
Another aspect of the language that Sofi feels is very important to learn is the culture. Learning about the Arabic culture is also important, “especially that the Arabic language is really rooted in the culture” as she asserted.

Ending our discussion, Sofi again expressed her desire to learn how to speak and understand spoken Arabic when she hears it.

S: In classrooms, there should be a lot more communication. Everyone needs to be speaking and listening constantly. Because, even if you’re learning grammar, you can still incorporate that into talking.

Summary

Sofi is a FLL who decided to study Arabic as she became curious and fascinated with Arabic language and culture following numerous discussions on Arabs and the Middle East after September 11th and the Arab Spring. Her primary goal was to improve her communication skills in the target language and be able to carry conversations with Native Speakers (NSs). Sofi supports group work and interaction in the classroom and believes that there should be more communicative activities in the classroom. In her perception, the NNS teacher did very well instructing grammar concepts, but NSs could explain the language better. She believes that HLLs are considered a valuable resource and their presence can be beneficial to other learners as long as their proficiency levels are not significantly higher than other learners in the classroom.
4.2.3 Zain

*Demographics and Background*

Zain is a 20 yrs. old male majoring in Political Science and is in his sophomore year. Zain is considered to be a Heritage Language Learner. He was born in the United States to a family who emigrated from Egypt a couple of years before his birth.

Discussing his exposure to Arabic at a young age, Zain stated that his parents used Arabic at home to communicate with each other most of the time, but tried to use English to speak to their children. In addition, Zain mentioned that his family subscribed to commercial Arabic TV channels, available through one of the Satellite dish companies, about ten years ago; that available medium allowed more exposure to Arabic at home. He explained, however, that as a young child, he did not sit down to watch Arabic programs, but passively listened and watched sometimes. Zain continued to explain that, hearing his parents speak at home, he was able to understand them most of the time. He also remembered using English to respond to his parents and other family members when they would speak to him in Arabic. Zain acknowledged that he tried to use Arabic with them at times, but very cautiously since he was not very confident of his Arabic speaking skills. That exposure was mostly limited to the colloquial version, he added. Zain began to learn the formal language at the age of fourteen when his parents enrolled him in a Sunday school program at one of the community centers in town. At that time, he got to learn the alphabets and very basic writing skills. He was enrolled in that community school for almost two years and was not very excited about it then, as he stated.
Motivation for learning Arabic

Zain’s main motivation for learning Arabic in college is his interest in his Arabic culture, as indicated in his questionnaire. It is his family’s culture as he noted, and learning the language helps him connect to the culture. This was not always the case, as he explained. Growing up, his interest in learning about the Arabic language and culture was not really there. He often felt ashamed and embarrassed when his parents used Arabic in public. He didn’t mind it at home, and it was “kind of interesting there but wished it was kept at home.” He didn’t think that sharing his bicultural and bilingual characteristics with his friends would be something they were interested in. When his parents enrolled him in the Sunday school at a young age, he was not interested or motivated to learn Arabic. His attendance at the Sunday school was not regular and he missed many Sundays; it was not a positive experience overall and his exposure to the formal version of Arabic (Fus-ha) was very limited, as he elucidated.

His interest in learning Arabic was sparked by a visit to Egypt when he was a teenager. When he was about sixteen years old, he traveled with the family and spent the whole summer there. His curiosity about the language and the culture developed and he later considered studying Arabic in college to learn the language formally.

Z: After I came back from Egypt, there was much more interest in the language and the culture around the language that sparked my curiosity.

Zain went on to say that the foreign language requirement in college has greatly contributed to his decision to learn Arabic. He expressed that without having that
requirement, he was not sure he would have seriously pursued studying Arabic. He thought of it as a great opportunity for foreign language credit at first; he later felt that it was satisfying his interest and curiosity. Asking him to clarify what he meant by curiosity, he replied:

_Curiosity in terms of where I came from and where my family came from; also as you learn the language you find that it is a very rich language; rich in both its history and vocabulary; the meanings and the variety of words that you can use._

**Self-assessment of Arabic competency**

Assessing his own competency on specific skills (in the questionnaire), Zain reported that his listening and speaking skills are good, his reading and writing skills are fair, and his grammar is good. He would like to improve at reading and writing, and believes that by adding a daily practice regimen, he can accomplish that, as he stated. Generally, Zain feels that he understands and speaks Arabic comfortably, but with a little difficulty. Growing up at a home where Arabic was mostly used, Zain’s skills in listening and comprehending the language were developed. That exposure during childhood has definitely contributed to his competency in listening and speaking. However, Arabs in different Arabic countries use the colloquial and not the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) when they speak. Learning the MSA requires formal education in the language. That explains his assessment of reading and writing as fair. There were many challenges learning the formal Arabic in college, as Zain asserted: “A lot of challenges came with the grammar rules and the formalities of the language.”
When asked to further explain, Zain said that learning about his heritage was the main reason which sparked the interest in learning Arabic formally in college; however, he soon realized that there is a big difference between formal Arabic and the colloquial that he had a greater exposure to while growing up.

Z: *I was interested in learning Arabic to connect more with my heritage. At least that was what sparked my interest, but from there on...you learn that there is a big difference between the formal Arabic and the colloquial.*

Being a heritage language learner, Zain believes that he has both strengths and weaknesses. One of the positive things or strengths, he initially perceived, was the confidence he felt when deciding to learn the language.

Z: *I think being able to walk into the classroom with that confidence and comfort is a lot different than someone who was never exposed to the language. They could be more intimidated with the language. I don’t think I was as intimidated as I should have been.*

He soon discovered that the same confidence would be a weakness. He explained that mixing up colloquial with formal vocabulary occurred often. This error occurred when he felt unable to express a thought using the formal version (*Fus-ha*). He had to rely on his previous knowledge of the Arabic he learned at home.

Another challenge he faced was the application of formal Arabic. At times, he came to question the need to learn the formal Arabic if it was not the same version used when communicating with family members, for example.

Z: *That was not what was used at home or when you talk to family members overseas. So I always questioned, what is the relevance if this is not what I use in a day to day basis?*
An additional challenge that Zain faced was “meeting the expectations” placed on him by other learners in the classroom for being a Heritage Language Learner. He explained that during a group activity, for example, he was often the person looked to for answers. And most of the time, other learners would favor his answer over another’s (usually a foreign language learner) even though he was not always certain that he had the right answer. However, that happened more often in the beginner level courses, as he clarified. Many students enrolled with him in the current intermediate level course, and happened to be in the same beginner course, have come to realize that he might not be familiar with some concepts and he could sometimes be in the same situation as that of a foreign language learner. He continued to explain that students (FLLs) had always placed more expectations on him when the work required vocabulary knowledge, and it was ok with him.

Z: It was more in the beginner level than the intermediate classes. I had many students who were in the same classes before, so I guess there was recognition that I might be unfamiliar with many of the concepts just like they were. So that made it more like a group interaction. Sometimes I would help them with certain things, especially with conversational elements of the discussion or the project, whereas, I would often look for help from other group members when it came to grammar or conjugation.

Zain continued to explain how he found Arabic grammar concepts challenging. He told me that he felt comfortable with listening skills, but when he had to write what he heard, he experienced difficulty.
It was important to understand Zain’s perception on important aspects of learning the language. His response to that question was: “it was about identity and history”. He felt that learning the formal language and gaining knowledge about different dialects existing in the Arab World helped him understand the history of his heritage and allowed him to construct his own identity.

**Peers’ proficiency levels**

Varying proficiency levels among students were recognized by Zain; this fact was more apparent in earlier Arabic classes, as he told me.

*Z: Yes; more so in the earlier classes (beginner levels). There was more variety of students and some were struggling more; me as a heritage learner I often had wider vocabulary early on. It wasn’t always right, but generally it connects. I would use a word I’ve learned in the Egyptian dialect, and someone would correct me because it reminds them of the formal version of it.*

He believed that having both FLLs and HLLs in the Arabic classroom can be effective for learners. He referred back to the vocabulary exercise example (mentioned earlier) and felt that the cooperation among different students could be positive and constructive.

*Z: That is helpful for both me and other students. It helps us to continue to interact and help one another.*

So, in general, Zain believes that having different types of learners in the Arabic classroom is positive and can be “fruitful…depending on the way the class is designed.”
He was referring to the nature of the activities assigned within the classroom, and the mix of the group members. When asked to be more specific about the benefit that he, as a heritage language learner, would get from such a mix, he replied:

\[ Z: \text{The interaction is very important one; also the questions that people would have towards me were always very encouraging; there was a lot of curiosity being shown towards the language and the culture behind the language which when I was able to answer would make me feel proud of my familiarity with the language and the culture.} \]

He also believes that “FLLs like having someone that feeds into their curiosity and provides answers to them (referring to HLLs)”, as he explained. He didn’t discuss any benefit related to the language skills, but mentioned pride and confidence as the benefits for such an interaction.

\textit{Attitude toward peer interaction and group work}

It is assumed that group activities are utilized frequently in many language classrooms and considered to be learning opportunities within the classroom setting. Bringing the topic of group work within the Arabic language classroom, Zain stated that he has had many group activities in previous Arabic classes but not much in the current class. He believes that group work is helpful, especially when it entails conversations. It can be of a great benefit to all students (both HLLs and FLLs).

When asked about patterns of interaction within the group, Zain explained that it always depended on the student’s character and confidence. However, HLLs would
usually take the initiative during the activity, but that didn’t mean they were always the most proficient. That was mostly true when it came to grammar exercises.

Z: It varied depending on who was in the group. If there is a heritage learner, I remember there was a student who wouldn’t let go of what she learned in the household (colloquial), she wouldn’t absorb or wasn’t willing to learn what is being taught in the classroom. I and she would take the initiative but it won’t be right most of the time. Other students, foreign language learners, who put a lot of work in learning the language, would often take the initiative.

Students’ contribution to the group work varied depending on the task assigned by the teacher, as Zain explained. “If the task required more interaction, then students would have to participate.” On the other hand, if it was an exercise they had to solve (usually grammar or vocabulary) then some students would just sit and watch waiting for others to come up with the answers. Zain expressed that, from his experience, most HLLs would be willing to contribute to the group work, but not necessarily to “a large degree”. As to the formation of groups within the classroom, it was mostly determined by the seating assignment, and occasionally the teacher would pair up students.

**Learning needs and aspirations**

In order to create a better learning experience for all learners in the classroom, he suggests that Arabic teachers be more creative and go beyond the textbook. In addition, a conscious design of the group interaction is very important, as he stated. From this statement, we can deduct that Zain believes that students can learn from a more proficient peer and this kind of interaction can facilitate their learning. Proficiency, as he perceives
can be in any language skill, or even in cultural knowledge. So, choosing students (group members) and interactive activities are very important, according to Zain.

*Z: A conscious design of group interaction- is a very important element. Also, extending beyond the book and being creative in terms of the group interaction task. That was always very helpful when the assignments are out of the book which can be dry. We had an instructor who was creative and had us do discussion like playing roles as ordering coffee at a coffee shop or had us listen to a certain conversation or a song and try to pick up the words. This allowed interaction among all students.*

I asked Zain if his expectations of the Arabic classroom were met, and he asserted that he had high expectation from the basic language courses. He wanted to learn how to read newspapers, poetry or contemporary Arabic literature.

*Z: The writing and the reading mostly; being able to read the newspaper or poetry or contemporary Arabic literature; may be this is more advanced but I guess that was something I was hoping to walk away with; when I look back, there was a lot more to learn.*

In other words, Zain admits that he expected his Arabic skills, specifically reading and writing, to improve dramatically after finishing the required Arabic language courses, but he later realized that his expectations were not realistic after all. He clearly understands that it takes a lot more work to enhance those skills.
Summary

Zain is a HLL who was interested in becoming literate in Arabic to reconnect with his heritage and be able to read different texts. He had a good proficiency in speaking the Egyptian dialect as a result of home exposure to the language. He was aiming at improving his writing and reading skills. Zain encouraged collaboration and interaction among different learners in the classroom and was willing to help when he could. It was mostly in the vocabulary exercises. He felt that there were proficiency differences among students and that interaction depended greatly on an individual’s character and on the group make up.

4.2.4 Joelle

Demographics/ Background

Joelle is a 20 yrs. old female majoring in International Studies and minoring in Arabic. In this study, Joelle is classified as an Arabic Heritage Language Learner since her father’s grandparents emigrated from Lebanon and settled in Cleveland, Ohio. Thus, she is considered to be a third generation American who has Lebanese roots. The language spoken at home by her immediate family was English. Arabic was also used at home, as indicated in her background questionnaire, but was mostly used in food-related conversations and by her grandmother who used some Arabic words around the children sometimes. Growing up, she was also exposed to Arabic through media used within the home, and that was mostly in the form of music.
Joelle’s grandmother (first generation) spoke Arabic, in addition to English, as it was the language mostly spoken at her home back then; however, the grandmother and her siblings didn’t teach their children to speak Arabic since they felt outside of the group growing up themselves and wanted their kids to fit in the common culture and avoid the unease they felt. Joelle seemed to be upset that her grandparents didn’t teach her father any Arabic; “they wanted them (their kids) to be as American as possible which is so frustrating because now I am so proud of it and I wish it was part of my growing up.” She said that her father and his sisters still used some Arabic phrases occasionally, and her family always ate traditional Lebanese food in all family gatherings. Growing up, Joelle was exposed to Lebanese food, music, and family traditions. Her grandmother and another friend established a Lebanese Syrian American association in high school where they planned a high ball (cotillion) every year and all students with a Lebanese/Syrian roots would attend, dance and eat traditional Lebanese food. That tradition was carried on through generations- her aunts, her cousin and her.

Joelle began to learn Arabic, both written and spoken, at the age of fourteen. It was during the summer of her freshman high school year. After that summer, she studied Arabic independently with tutors throughout high school and was able to get credit for the foreign language requirement. When she started college, however, she had to start back from level 1as she didn’t do very well in the placement test.

**Motivation for learning Arabic**
Joelle explained that she has been interested in learning Arabic since she was little (10 years old), and the reason was always her family roots. She thought it was important to learn the language and always asked her dad about it, but he didn’t take her seriously.

J: I think the fact that my family's background, that's what it is, was very important. My dad always jokes and says that he kicks himself because when I was little, I grew up in NY until I was 10 yrs. old and then I moved to Cleveland. I always told him that I really wanted to learn Arabic and he really regrets that he didn't get on the boat faster when I was younger because I really had interest in it. So I always had it in the back of my mind because I was really proud of being Middle Eastern and I love the food, the celebrations and the weddings.

Joelle’s statements clearly indicate her pride in her Arabic/Lebanese roots. As a result, she cherished her family’s traditions and got interested in learning the language at a very young age.

When the 9/11 terrorist attack happened back in 2001, Joelle was living in New York with her family; she was young but told me there were lots of discussions (in a negative way) about Middle Eastern people; she felt that it was a part of her heritage and she knew a lot of great things about it, and felt the need to do something in order to eliminate misconceptions and stereotypes about Arabs, so she became interested in politics.

J: right after 9/11, I was living in NY and the kind of conversations people were having about Middle Eastern people and what that meant for me and the things I knew about my background and things I thought were really great...that got me more involved in politics and I decided to be an International Studies major in college and Arabic seems the perfect partner with that. Not only because it was great in politics and I'm interested in
but also because it was part of my heritage and my background and made my grandmother very happy. So it was all those things together.

She continued to explain how she decided to study Arabic formally because she felt the need to defend her heritage and speak up about it. She believes that learning Arabic would also be a benefit for her future career since it is her culture and she understands it better than others who don’t have any Arabic cultural background and “were ignorant about it”, as she stated. It is clear that Joelle has a passion for her Arabic roots and feels that having a successful career in Politics requires a good and positive understanding of people and their culture.

J: I always knew that Arabic was something they needed people for jobs. But I knew that there were things about my culture that I understood about my culture that other people missed or were ignorant about. So I got excited about the idea that there was so much more that I could learn and be a part of this new horizon of bridging gaps between people and help them understand each other and I saw an opportunity for being a part of the future.

Self-assessment of Arabic competency

Joelle has formally studied Arabic for a total of four years, but she did not use Arabic outside of the classroom. She rated her competency as “understand and can speak with a great difficulty”. In terms of specific language skills, she rated her listening, speaking, and grammar as fair, and reading and writing as good. The language skill that she would still like to improve at was speaking and having the ability to carry on a conversation. She believes that immersion by traveling abroad would be the only way to
improve her language skills, especially speaking. She decided to learn Arabic because she is interested in International Relations and Middle Eastern politics, so spending time in an Arabic country has great benefits; however, with the instable situation in the Middle East, she has not been able to travel.

Joelle thinks that she has many weaknesses as a language learner; she confessed to having a difficulty learning Arabic vocabulary in *Fus-ha* (MSA). Initially, she had more confidence in her ability to remember words as she could remember music easily. Most songs, however, use the colloquial version of Arabic, which she had some exposure to as she indicated earlier. She found grammar to be easier than vocabulary.

She felt that her Lebanese cultural background was an advantage, and she knew vocabulary related to food, but they were more in the Lebanese dialect. She has also expressed that there haven’t been any discussions on culture in most of the Arabic classes she had taken at this university. She wished there were more activities that entail culture. She clearly feels that her cultural knowledge is a strength that can support her learning of the language.

*J: I feel we haven’t actually talked much about the culture in Arabic class. That’s something I’d be very interested in; like watching Middle Eastern films and getting to hear people talk I would really enjoy that. So whenever we had times like that, I really interested in that and I’m very alert to it and I learn more but I think it also helped that I have a bit of understanding of that of my own.*
She told me that they had this kind of activities in the “emergent camp” she attended during her high school years. She learned a lot from listening to songs. She also remembered that in the first Arabic class at this university, they had the opportunity to get extra credit by watching Arabic films, and she enjoyed that activity a lot.

**Peers’ Proficiency levels**

Joelle believes that there have been noticeable differences in proficiency levels among students in the Arabic classroom. She attributed that to many reasons:

*J: There are a lot of people who come in with fluency in colloquial heritage language learners, people who pick up the phone and talk to their mom in Arabic. But I think the higher the level, the less advantage these people have. There are also students that I know in class who love foreign languages (FLLs). They speak Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, etc. That’s just their thing and they really get it.*

Based on her experience in Arabic classrooms, she has been in classes with HLLs who were almost native speakers of Arabic, and also FLLs who were really good at learning languages. She obviously felt that both groups of learners had a higher proficiency in the language than she did.

The discussion geared toward HLLs and Joelle stated that there has always been a mix of learners in the Arabic classrooms she has attended at this university. Joelle admitted that she did not feel strongly about the presence of HLLs who are competent in their speaking skill, especially in the beginning level classes. As she explained, it was intimidating at first. However, she explained how her perception changed after a while.
when she realized that those HLLs who could speak the colloquial might not be competent in all language skills.

Elaborating on language skills and competencies of HLLs, Joelle stated that HLLs can contribute to the group work with vocabulary mostly.

J: *I think vocabulary is the big easy thing for them; that’s what they bring to the table. I think you draw less blanks when it comes to this. But when it’s about sentence structure and grammar, FLLs tend to do better.*

In general, Joelle felt intimidated by the presence of HLLs who are fluent in speaking the language; she felt that their proficiency in oral skills were much higher than those of other learners, but their grammatical knowledge was often lower than many FLLs.

J: *I don't feel strongly about that. Especially in the beginning levels; it could be kind of intimidating for people because they feel that they are at a serious disadvantage, which I definitely was thinking at a point. But, I soon realized that things we are learning are usually things most Heritage speakers haven’t learned yet; like most people who can speak can't read or write. They just talk with their parents at home. The grammatical stuff, that's all new. So I think the plain field is even except for the vocab they already have.*

It was interesting to hear Joelle refer to this type as “Heritage Speakers”. Obviously, she did not consider herself as a Heritage learner thinking that you have to speak it well and be able to communicate in order to be considered a Heritage Language Learner.

*Attitude toward interaction and group work*
Group work is considered to be an important activity which allows for learner-learner interaction within the context of the classroom. Discussing the frequency of group activities within the current Arabic classroom, Joelle indicated that there was a good amount of group work; she certainly felt that it was more frequent compared to other non-language classes. However, she felt that group activities seemed to gradually decrease with higher level Arabic courses.

I asked Joelle how she identified herself (HLL or FLL) when she worked within a group; she explained that being familiar with the culture was her only proficiency as a Heritage Learner and that was not going to contribute to the group work.

*J: I don't think it changes my input to the group; unless if we're working on culture or food topics.*

She mentioned that there hasn’t been any group work that entailed cultural aspects.

In terms of the group dynamics, Joelle believes that the most knowledgeable student usually takes the initiative in leading the group activity, and the rest of the students who have already realized various proficiencies let it be that way and trust the other student. She was referring to groups which consisted of FLLs. When asked about groups that had HLLs, Joelle explained that other students had placed trust in those learners’ knowledge of the language.

*J: I think people respect the knowledge of the heritage leaner; they feel like they know what they're talking about. I know I'm not ready to tell somebody (HLL) they're wrong*
because they're probably right. Generally, when they know these students can speak to their parents in colloquial, they kind of trust their knowledge.

This happened most of the time, as Joelle elaborated, “unless if somebody is confident enough in their grammatical skill,” referring to FLLs.

Continuing her discussion on group work, Joelle said that not everyone contributed to the group work; there were some students who “would rather not contribute….they just sit and watch.” She gave her own contribution as an example and explained how group members would have to be patient and wait for her contribution, since she was not confident enough in her own skills.

The “Oral Skit” assignment was the main group activity that required students to express ideas and thoughts in Arabic. Chatting about that specific group activity, Joelle explained that group members chose each other based on their friendship and familiarity with one another.

Joelle believes that group work is a good activity to have in a language classroom. It was clear that Joelle preferred to work with people she knew and felt comfortable with. Her response to the question concerning group work was as follows:

_J: Now that we all know each other in class, it's a little bit better; but I think that group work always gets a little dicey because You want to work with people you're comfortable with which doesn't necessarily mean people that you'll do the best work with or learn the most with. I think with language courses, it's a better environment to do it because you're exchanging ideas about how you feel things would be best said. I generally like it in language. It's a good idea. Like the oral skit, it's a cool thing._
She stated that working within a group and communicating in the target language is hard, but interesting.

When she was asked to further discuss the presence of heritage learners, she said:

*J:* Usually in the classroom always. In group work, I find that generally the people with heritage background always tend to find each other because they know they can speak together and don't want to waste time with other people. In my initial class, I did a lot of group work with heritage speakers.

She continued to talk about the time when she worked in a group that included a male Heritage “speaker” and another female who was a foreign language learner. She explained that it was really helpful to work with someone who is somewhat proficient in the colloquial.

*J:* I did work a lot of group work with a guy who was a heritage speaker and a girl that wasn’t. We did pretty good and helped each other a lot. He relied more on things he knew (colloquial) whereas we had our best bet on Fus-ha; the kind of stuff that he skipped over. That worked out pretty well.

In terms of seeking interactions with HLLs, who speak the language, Joelle said that she felt that there was no time to do that but she occasionally asked heritage speakers how to say something in colloquial.

*J:* I wait until after class and ask how to say something. I don't have certain people that I would go to for things. I am really interested in the colloquial. I wish there is more focus on that. In previous classes I had friends who were HLLs and I've gotten close with.
Joelle acknowledged that there were some advantages for having HLLs in the foreign language classroom. She believes that they bring a unique dynamics to the group and can contribute by bringing some of their cultural background to the classroom. Their presence can actually make up for not having a native Arabic teacher who can naturally bring in some of the culture’s traits to the classroom and provide some exposure to the culture, as she explained. The differences in skills and backgrounds are positive additions to the classroom environment.

*J: There are sort of different strengths and people pick up things differently...that results in different and interesting dynamics. That also helps with the cultural aspect to have people like that because naturally they talk about their families and background. I haven’t had any Middle Eastern teachers since I've been at this university- I've been here for two years. So it's nice to have those people in the class and make up for that.*

**Learning needs and aspirations**

Joelle is most concerned about learning how to speak Arabic and be able to carry a conversation using Arabic. She was obviously frustrated for having some HLLs who can understand and speak the language a lot better than most FLLs in the classroom. She wishes that the curriculum included more listening and speaking activities and provided resources, such as movies, to help student with their comprehension and oral skills in the language.

*J: when you’re in class, you sometimes feel intimidated and everybody thinks in a different rate about language and there are those heritage speakers who when you’re talking and the teacher asks a question they’re ready to talk; that makes it really hard on*
other students. I think that watching films and things like that has not been a big part of my experience; that would help and that sort of thing lacks.

Her statement indicates that she feels that her low proficiency in listening and speaking gets in the way of participating and answering questions in the classroom. Again, she perceives speaking as the most important and desired skill that language learners seek; learning the culture comes second, as she explained:

J: I think that learning any language, the point is, unless if you just wanted to read documents, is being able to speak. Having speaking time, although it's something that makes people nervous and uncomfortable to do but I think that speaking is the most important aspect. Being able to speak comfortably and think on your feet about what you’re going to say. And then, broadening any words you know with the culture; with any language, the cultural aspect is important because when you learn a language you want to travel and having no knowledge of that, the culture, seems to negate the whole experience.

Having a discussion on the different dialects spoken in the Arab World, Joelle expressed that she was interested in learning to speak the Lebanese dialect since it is the dialect spoken by her grandparents and other older family members. She continued to express her perception on a good learning environment and added that the amount of homework that needs to be completed was overwhelming and took a lot of time; she felt that if the time was spent on other language activities (media exposure) it would have been more beneficial.
J: I also found that there is so much homework that it's hard; I feel that this hurts me; so more talking, more language, letting people have more time to look at words and think of the concepts. I know that homework helps but a lot of times it is overwhelming.

At the end, Joelle re-emphasized her desire to learn how to speak the colloquial Arabic and be able to watch films in class, discuss them, and comprehend materials presented with the help of the teacher.

Summary

Joelle is a HLL who is a third generation Lebanese. She felt pride in her roots and was interested in learning Arabic at a young age. Her interest grew as a result of September 11 attacks since she felt that the U.S. population developed many misconceptions about Arabs and their culture. Even though Joelle began to study Arabic during her high school years, she continued to face difficulties in learning the language in college and perceived her proficiency to be lower than most of her peers. She affiliated herself with the Arabic (Lebanese) culture, but identified herself as a FLL when it pertained to language skills. She was not fond of the presence of HLLs who had a high proficiency in the target language and felt that their presence could be intimidating. In summary, Joelle struggled with her identity in the Arabic classroom and her participation in group activities was limited.
4.2.5 Steven

This participant has a different role than the ones presented in the previous cases. Previously discussed cases included beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of learners in the Arabic language classroom. Steven is the teacher of the Arabic classroom, where this study took place.

In this section, I’ll portray Steven’s background, and present his beliefs and attitudes on issues related to Arabic language teaching and learning and Arabic language learners in his classroom.

**Demographics and background**

Steven is a white Caucasian male in his early thirties. English is his native language and he grew up with English being the only language spoken at home. French, which he studied in high school and college, was the first foreign language he has ever learned. After obtaining his undergraduate degree in college, he spent some time in West Africa as a part of a PeaceCorp assignment, and there he learned to speak Pulaar, the West African language. He considers Pulaar to be his best second language, after English since he used it for almost three years while living in West Africa, as he declared. A trip to Mauritania sparked his interest in Arabic, and he started learning the language, informally, at the age of twenty four. Two years later, he decided to study Arabic formally (in college) and has been studying it for about eight years now, and teaching it for about six years. Steven is considered to be a non-native Arabic teacher, and a graduate student of Arabic.
Arabic language experience

At the time of the study, Steven was a PhD student, majoring in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, with a focus on Arabic language and culture. It is important to note that the formal version of Arabic, *Fus-ha*, is the language taught in schools and it is different than the spoken language used by people in the Arab world on a daily basis (see definition for colloquial). As stated earlier, Steven has been studying Arabic for about eight years and considers himself to be proficient in it as a foreign language, but still needs to learn it further as he explained. "I studied it for 8 years now, and been teaching it for 5 or 6 years. I am still a student of it though."

Steven visited Tunisia once and spent two weeks there, and that was before he started learning Arabic formally. He also visited Mauritania few times between 2002 and 2012, and spent a total of 12 months in that African/Arabic country, where Arabic is the formal language, and *Hassaniyya* is the local and oral form of Arabic used by the majority of people. Steven faced many challenges related to communication while living in Mauritania, as he explained. He had learned the formal version of Arabic (MSA) in college, and it was different than the dialect people use in the street. He had difficulties catching up with the pragmatics of the language, and getting accustomed to the cultural patterns of communication in that country. Spending several months in Mauritania has helped him learn and understand, the colloquial form used there (*Hassaniyya*) which he believes is close to the formal language (*Fus-ha*).

Motivation for learning Arabic
Steven believes that there was a growing interest in Arabic around 2004 as a result of the Iraqi war. USA’s involvement in that war has resulted in many people wanting to learn the language, as he affirmed. He was interested too, and thought that it would be a great opportunity to find a job teaching the language, in addition to “fostering cross-cultural understanding”, as he indicated.

Teacher training experience

Prior to teaching Arabic as a GTA assignment, Steven had to enroll in a two-week training workshop for GTAs. The workshop was organized by the College of Humanities Foreign Language Center and its goal was to prepare GTAs for their foreign language teaching assignment. Theoretical and practical instructions were provided by a team of expert faculty members from different foreign language departments at the university. In that workshop, he was exposed to different pedagogical approaches and instructional materials applied in teaching foreign languages. He also had the opportunity to practice teaching with other peers participating in the workshop, which was a part of a required assignment during the workshop. Steven stated that the workshop was helpful in preparing him to become a teacher.

Since that workshop (2008), Steven has not attended any other Teacher Training activities.
Steven’s classification of learners in the Arabic language classroom

Steven has been teaching Arabic as a foreign language at this large mid-western university for almost six years. It was important to ask him about the different types of students he has encountered during his teaching experience at this university, and he explained that he has seen two basic groups of students and he classified them as:

1. Foreign language learners. They are American students whose native language is English. These students are subdivided into two categories. The first consists of students associated with the Army (ROTC), and the second has students interested in government jobs such as intelligence and security, diplomatic relations, and others.

2. The second group entails students from non-American origins who have connection to the Arabic language either by having Arabic roots or through their religious affiliation (Islam).

Students in this category, as Steven explained are “in general, either wanting to recapture connection or deepen understanding of the language because it has importance to them- to capture their sense of heritage, I guess, or as an easy GEC credit; to fulfil this requirement with something they already have grounding in.”

In addition to the two basic groups, he implied that there are also students who enroll in the Arabic classroom with a unique desire to learn the language. According to Steven, all the Arabic classes he has taught included several students from the second group (students with affiliation to the language) - on an average, there were six out of fifteen.
Perceptions of HLLs enrolled in the Arabic classroom

As an instructor, Steven admitted that he has, generally, had imprecise assumptions on the proficiency level of the HLLs and the reasons for which they enroll in the Arabic language course. He often thought that they were taking the class as an easy way to fulfill the GEC requirement. He explained that due to an inadequate placement strategy, he has had some students whose level in Arabic was high enough to make them just sit there and watch, looking for an easy “A”. The presence of HLLs had often made him somewhat uncomfortable; he would automatically question their motivation and their proficiency level, as indicated in the following statement:

S: Unconsciously, when I see Arabic names, I think maybe these people should be teaching me instead me teaching them. They might be new comers or been here for generations- I don’t know.

However, with experience, he realized that many HLLs do not have enough knowledge of the language, and after a couple of weeks, he would determine their proficiency level; it “shows in their homework assignments and exams,” he uttered. He also found out that some of them enroll in the class in order to “reconnect with their heritage” and just for an easy grade as he would initially speculate.

Beliefs on FLLs vs. HLLs language skills

Based on his teaching experience, Steven has provided his own assessment of the language skills of the different types of learners in the Arabic language classroom. In
general, he believes that HLLs have a higher proficiency level in vocabulary than most FLLs do while FLLs often do better in grammar, as he came to realize.

*HLLs do much better in vocabulary than they do with grammar, and it’s kind of the opposite with FLLs. FLLs find grammar easier to learn- you know there are rules so they feel more comfortable with that.*

In a group work that requires mostly vocabulary skills, especially in beginner level classes, HLLs who are fluent in speaking the language (Arabic), perform much better than FLLs, according to Steven.

*S: If the HLL is fluent in speaking, then... they definitely have an advantage. To a point where it's almost a joke to have them take the exams- usually they get them all correct.*

In his opinion, those students have probably had some previous knowledge of the formal Arabic language (*Fus-ha*), and they should be in a higher level course. But having HLLs with a noticeably high proficiency is not always the typical case; he stated that he has only encountered a handful such cases during his teaching career at this university, and that was most likely a result of inaccurate placement strategy followed by the department, as he clarified.

Steven continued to explain that HLLs who have never studied the language formally, can usually face difficulties in the classroom, as he has encountered. Even if those learners have an oral proficiency in the colloquial form, learning the written form of the formal language (*Fus-ha*) can be a challenge and it requires some work on their end.

*S: You can have someone who can speak alright but don't know the alphabets; so they take the first level (1101) to learn the alphabet and learn to write, but they already have
the oral component. In other aspects, I've seen heritage learners struggle in the beginning levels. They take it because they thought it would be an easy course to fulfil the GEC requirement, and then find it to be more than that, and actually what they hear at home can hurt them because it's different than the standard Arabic.

He believes that, sometimes, what they have learned from listening at home (colloquial) can be a disadvantage when it comes to learning the alphabets and the written form of the language. But he still perceives that HLLs have stronger vocabulary and listening skills than FLLs.

S: In terms of listening exercises for example, the chapter stories that come with the book, they (HLLs) listen to it and understand it completely while other students (FLLs) might struggle with it.

Familiarity with the Arabic culture is another advantage that HLLs have over FLLs. “They come from different regions and….they can give their own input or perspective on this”.

To sum it up, Steven believes that an oral proficiency in the colloquial form of Arabic ('Ammiya), can be an advantage for HLLs in oral and listening activities, but not necessarily in written activities or grammar. Foreign Language Learners, who gradually learn all components of the language, typically do better in grammar, which involves learning the specific rules of the language.

Attitude toward group work and students’ interaction
Interaction among students within the classroom context is an important component in foreign language classrooms. It was important to understand Steven’s perception on group work and students’ interaction. Our discussion was mainly focused on the interaction between HLLs and FLLs. Steven explained that he does not always follow the same strategy in composing the group for a certain activity.

_S: I try to put in a balance. Students tend to sit in the same place, so sometimes the student next to you, or using numbers to randomize it, or sometimes I determine before class who I want the groups to be. Mix things up. If you have a self-forming group that tends to be less effective, I try to put them with other people to make sure they get more._

In other words, Steven does not always assign members into the group, but tries to intervene at times. So one group could constitute of FLLs only, HLLs only, or it could have a mixture of both types of learners.

On the interaction pattern within the group, and whether one type of learners have an advantage over the other, Steven stated that if a HLL is a member of a group with FLLs, and that HLL is fluent in speaking Arabic, then he or she would have an advantage over the others within the group. HLLs tend to have an advantage when it comes to vocabulary, according to Steven.

In terms of HLLs contribution during a group activity, Steven explained that it often “depends on the group’s dynamic”. He tries to have a mix of learners within the group so that students with a lower proficiency don’t feel any resentment working with higher proficiency students.

_S: It depends on the group dynamic. That’s why I try to mix people up. Like some of the FLLs are like “Ah?” in terms of their ability (lower proficiency) and may be they're a bit._
envious. Others may be a bit resentful. I can’t think of specific incident now. But theoretically, there could be a possibility of a little resentment.

That was usually the case when it related to vocabulary or speaking activities, and there were HLLs within a group whose some members were lower proficiency FLLs, Steven continued to state. Having gaps in the proficiency level among students could be intimidating to the lower proficiency students. By saying higher proficiency learners, Steven did not only refer to HLLs. He clarified that: even when there are FLLs with much higher proficiency than others within the group, this could happen.

S: I definitely know that I've had a couple of students (FLLs) who were very conscious about their difficulty in speaking the language and put up lots of resistance in participating in any speaking activity. This was not just because there were HLLs but also other learners they perceive as having a higher or more advanced level. I recall one student telling me about this.

Differences in the proficiency level among students within the same classroom can negatively affect some students’ motivation to learn the language, Stevens believed. But that also depended on the student’s personality, as he elaborated.

S: You know When people come to the language they usually have some kind of excitement about it that can quickly wear off by the third semester…People are self-conscious about their level. You try to tell them to relax, but...there are other FLLs who no matter who is speaking to them, would still try to use the language and improve. They will practice, even if they make lots of mistakes and may sound foolish. They are OK with that. But for others who are self-conscious, they are shy and less confident.
Steven stated that he often noticed that FLLs who are not shy and self-conscious about their Arabic language ability would often seek out interaction with HLLs within their classroom. However, that is not often the typical case.

*S: Sometimes they (FLLs) would seek out HLLs or look for encounters where they would speak Arabic. I don't find that to be the majority of cases unfortunately.*

I asked Steven if he tried to intervene and encourage FLLs to seek out HLLs and not be shy about trying to interact, and his response was that he considered it to be a kind of “negative reinforcement”

Stevens believed that having a small number of students in the language classroom creates a better environment for interaction among students. He talked about a previous class he taught, where there were only eleven students, and interaction was more apparent there. Students “would try to incorporate each other” and that created a sense of enjoyment among them, as he perceives.

One problem that often occurred when there was a group activity, as Stevens continuously noticed, was the use of English among learners. Instead of using the target language, Arabic, students tended to use their native language to communicate.

*S: The problem that I find, however, is the presence of English. In a social interaction, the presence of English is the biggest drawback of the group work and I haven't been able to control that.*

**Students’ motivation and participation**
Stevens believes that a language learner’s motivation directly influences their “investment” in learning the language. This certainly applies to HLLs who enroll in the Arabic language classrooms. As a teacher of a classroom containing both FLLs and HLLs, he always tried to figure out the reasons for HLLs enrollment. As discussed earlier, his initial perception was that they were taking the class as a GEC requirement believing that it would be an easy “A”. If this is the case, then he did not try to push these students to participate if they did not show their desire to do so; “Because if someone is trying to have the GEC requirement out of the way, then I leave it the way it is.”

HLLs who came to the classroom with a motivation to learn and reconnect with their heritage language, were usually among the best students in the class, as Steven explained; “they can be the strongest students in class.” That applied to both performance and participation, in his opinion. This kind of students positively influenced his willingness to help them learn the language.

*S: If it is a situation where you have motivation, like someone says they're good in Arabic but they don't know grammar very well, and when you get to "I’rab", if they are hard-working students then I appreciate their presence in the class.

So, as clear in the above statement, if he finds out that the HLL is willing to work hard and learn the grammar rules, such as the case ending system (I’rab), then he is more comfortable and willing to help that student. In addition, he would consider asking that student to assist other learners in group activities that involve vocabulary and oral skills.

*S: I would try to work with that student and have them help in explaining things.
Steven continued to discuss the case of HLLs whose motivation is to get the GEC credit only; as he incorporated during his teaching career, those students do not do well when it comes to learning grammar, and they almost fail the class because of that. Their attitude, in this case, might be a disadvantage for them.

*S: If their motivation is to fulfil a requirement, then the attitude (a disadvantage). They haven't shown hostility, but in terms of body language. You feel like they don't want to be there. If they're not taking the time to do the assigned work, like in grammar, they often struggle and particularly in passing the class. I've had heritage learners on the verge of failing, going into exams, because they were not doing the work or not going to class.

His last statement indicates that he perceives students’ attendance as an indicator of their motivation to learn the language. In general, Steven perceives motivation to be an essential factor in learning as well as teaching.

**Presence of HLLs in the Arabic language classroom**

Steven considers himself to be a student of Arabic- always trying to learn the language better. When he sees Arabic names in the class roster, his first reaction is that “these students can probably teach me.” It is apparent that the presence of HLLs in his classroom generated some discomfort, especially being uncertain of their proficiency level. Having HLLs in the classroom “can be a good thing, but it can also backfire- in terms of proficiency level”, as he uttered.

*S: They can be helpful in essence. They can develop friendship with these people. Someone might have a role model in the classroom- someone has the language they want
to have. They can provide that role model aspect, but at the same time, they can undermine in other ways. That's generally my assessment.

Steven’s only resentment to this setting is the presence of HLLs with a noticeably higher proficiency than most learners in the classroom as he explained. In such a situation, the result can be “a hostile and intimidating learning environment.”

S: Most FLLs are shy and don’t want to say something and feel embarrassed in front of other people. They could feel intimidated in that setting. FLLs can be “envious” or “may be a bit resentful”. I’ve had a couple of students who were very conscious about their difficulty in speaking the language and put lots of resistance in participating in any speaking activity. This was not just because there were HLLs but also other learners they perceive as having a higher or more advanced level.

In terms of the commonality of having HLLs in the Arabic language classroom, Steven has stated that there has always been a number of HLLs in the courses he has taught; continuing to express his belief about that presence, he said:

S: As an instructor, you have to get used to that situation, but....if you take Spanish or French do you have other native Spanish or French speakers in the classroom? No, that's not generally what happens. At the same time, though, it can help create a community having someone to talk to who's not only the instructor and they're not a total stranger. It can help generate, in the ideal sense, a language community.

When learning French and Spanish in college, Steven implied that he did not encounter HLLs who were proficient in speaking the language.

Generally, Steven believes that the presence of HLLs in the Arabic language classroom can be a positive ingredient added to creating a good learning environment within the classroom.
In terms of what creates a good environment for learning foreign languages, it can be very helpful mostly. But I won’t say that it is the most crucial ingredient for creating a good environment. Like other things are more important. Like class size for example has a greater influence on that... As an instructor, you have to get used to that situation, but in terms....if you take Spanish or French do you have other native Spanish or French speakers in the classroom? No, that’s not generally what happens. At the same time, though, it can help create a community having someone to talk to who’s not only the instructor and they’re not a total stranger. It can help generate, in the ideal sense, a language community.

Summing up his attitude on having HLLs in the foreign language classroom, Steven acknowledged that their presence can be a valuable factor fostering the learning environment within the classroom.

S: I would say it has much more positive aspects that come with it (Having HLLs in the class). It gives FLLs an opportunity to interact with people from the country. If you grew up in rural areas of the state, you might not have had that access until now. That’s a valuable thing because it can help to counteract stereotyping... I would say the good outweighs the bad by a lot.

**Steven’s teaching strategy**

In a continued discussion on college-level foreign language classrooms that consist of students who are considered Foreign Language Learners (FLLs) and others who are Heritage Language Learners (HLLs), it was imperative to know what Steven’s strategy is in dealing with such a setting. As he explained earlier, it is not just the cultural background of the learner that can influence the learning environment in the classroom,
but it is often the big gap in the proficiency level among learners within the same classroom.

Basically, Steven followed the standard curriculum set by the Arabic department; the curriculum is based on a textbook series titled “Al Kitaab Fii Taallum al- Arabiyya”. The first part of the series has twenty chapters, and they are covered during the three courses, 1011, 1012, and 1013. In each course, a set number of chapters are supposed to be covered.

*S: The language program here is based on a textbook series; the course is built on what chapters you need to cover each period; subsequent matter, from point A to point B. Within that, you have to address all the components to language learning- the speaking, listening, reading, writing aspects.*

Discussing his choice of pedagogy, Steven stated that he based his pedagogical choices on the goals of the lesson.

*S: It depends on the goal of the lesson; each chapter has specific goals for students to achieve. When it comes to grammar, I find it mostly effective to explain the grammar rules to students; I think it gives better results than having them read it on their own and try to figure it out. I explain, and give them examples and give them homework exercises and then feedback. This is what I find the most effective and most FLLs students respond well to it. Not so much the heritage learners.*

His belief is that grammar should be taught and explained by the teacher, and he often found this method to be effective with FLLs, but not so much with HLLs. When it pertained to vocabulary, Steven admitted that he encountered difficulty choosing the most effective method.
S: When it comes to vocabulary acquisition, this is where I've been trying to find a way to improve my methods in it. I generally consider it to be the students' responsibility to learn vocabulary and discover themselves how they understand things— try mix and match approaches to learn and retain it— not direct matching— To push the students to use the words, create their own contexts and discover for themselves the meanings and how to use words.

Apparently, Steven considers that learning vocabulary is mostly the student’s responsibility and it is difficult to teach this component of the language within the classroom context. He explained that he would put students in group and “give them conversation prompts” to focus on. He does not use this approach often during the term, as he stated. “I use activities like that may be a couple of times during the term.”

On the interaction that took place during group activities, Steven left it up to the students in terms of their contribution to the group. He felt that some students were shy and found it very hard to produce orally in the target language. For that reason, he believes that “leaving it right there” was the best approach fearing that pushing the students can be “a negative re-enforcement” and it might discourage them from learning the language.

S: As a teacher, you want to make sure of what the students are comfortable with and that is not hurting their progress, whether they would be overly exuberant or reserved or passive. You have to adjust your strategy depending on different groups.
Steven added that having smaller classroom, or a small number of students within the classroom, makes it easier for group activities and more interaction among students, as he has experienced.

Inquiring about the role of HLLs in group activities and whether he perceived it to be helpful in facilitating the interaction when the activity involved vocabulary or cultural aspects of the language, Steven clarified his belief which was not pushing any student to do more than what they wanted to do.

*S: I wouldn't feel comfortable suggesting that any student play a role, like tell them take on the responsibility themselves; I wouldn't say like be my assistant teacher for the purpose of the classroom. I wouldn't want to show any form of favoritism in that regard or to place any extra burden upon them.*

Overall, Steven’s teaching strategy is mainly focused on covering the material assigned by the department for each specific course. He mostly relies on the textbook and the activities presented in it. He stated that teaching grammar is largely based on instructions given to students, while vocabulary acquisition is mainly the students’ responsibility. He firmly believes that pushing students to do activities they’re not ready to do voluntarily would be a kind of “negative re-enforcement” and he chooses not to follow that approach in his teaching.

In this section, I have portrayed the case of the Arabic classroom’s instructor, Steven, who is a non-native Arabic teacher. This instructor shared his beliefs and attitudes on various topics related to teaching Arabic classrooms made of a diverse body of learners- mainly HLLs and FLLs.
Summary

Steven, the classroom teacher, is a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) and a NNS of Arabic. He received limited training in teaching foreign languages and had been teaching Arabic at the university level for five years. He acknowledged that he often had predisposed assumptions about HLLs motivations and proficiency levels, and felt somewhat anxious when having HLLs in his classroom. Steven believed that a HLLs motivation impacted their investment in the learning as well as their participation in classroom activities. Furthermore, he perceived the proficiency level of the student to be a greater factor than their background (FLLs/HLLs) in determining the interaction pattern within the classroom. His pedagogical choices were greatly focused on the assigned textbook. He believed that grammar instructions should be transferred from the teacher to the students and admitted to encountering some difficulties in designing communicative activities to teach vocabulary.

To conclude, although he was not very comfortable with the presence of proficient HLLs, he believed that HLLs could be a valuable resource in the classroom if they chose to participate and interact with peers.

Chapter summary

This chapter presents findings from participants’ interviews in the form of narrative case studies. A total of four Arabic learners and one instructor were interviewed for this study. In terms of student participants, each case study introduces language
background, motivation to study Arabic, perceptions on own proficiency level, and attitude toward group work and the presence of HLLs in the Arabic language classroom. Narrating their language learning experience, participants discussed their beliefs on classroom interaction and its benefit; they also evaluated their own proficiency level in the different language skills and expressed their desires in learning specific language skills based on their perceived importance.

In addition to the students, the instructor’s beliefs and perceptions on various topics related to factors influencing the learning and teaching process that take place within his Arabic language classroom - such as the presence of HLLs in the foreign language classroom and learners’ interaction and contribution during group activities - were also presented. Table 5 summarizes findings from the above case studies.
Table 5. *Summary of findings*

| Caitlyn                      | Developed an interest in Arabic during high school  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FLL, Female, 19 yrs. old</td>
<td>Instrumental/Integrative motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major: Arabic/Public Affairs</td>
<td>Studied Arabic for 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good proficiency in grammar and reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor speaking and listening skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive attitude toward group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believes HLL to be good at vocabulary, speaking and comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Places importance on oral skills and cultural awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sofi</th>
<th>Developed an interest in Arabic after 9/11 terror attack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FLL, Female, 19 yrs. old</td>
<td>Fascinated with the Arabic language and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major: Psychology/Political Science</td>
<td>Integrative Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Studied Arabic for 1.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor speaking and comprehension skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair reading and poor grammar proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A somewhat positive attitude toward group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believes HLL to be good at vocabulary, speaking and comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Places importance on oral skills and cultural awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zain</th>
<th>Developed an interest in studying Arabic as a teenager after visiting Egypt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HLL, Male, 20 yrs. old</td>
<td>Connection and curiosity toward the Arabic language and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major: Political Science</td>
<td>Good speaking (colloquial) and comprehension skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair writing and grammar skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A positive attitude toward group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believes that cooperation among learners to be helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Places importance on communicating and reading Arabic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Continued...*
| **Joelle** | |  |
| --- | --- |  |
| HLL, Female, 20 yrs. old | |  |
| Major: International Studies/Arabic | |  |
|  | Developed an interest in studying Arabic at a young age (10 yrs. old) |  |
|  | Connection and passion for Arabic language and culture |  |
|  | Good reading and writing skills |  |
|  | Fair listening, speaking and grammar |  |
|  | A neutral attitude toward group work |  |
|  | Trusts the overall knowledge of HL “speakers” |  |
|  | Places an importance on oral communication and cultural skills |  |

| **Steven** | |  |
| --- | --- |  |
| Non-native Arabic Instructor | |  |
| Male- early thirties | |  |
| Graduate student: | |  |
| Major: Near Eastern Studies and Cultures | |  |
| Minor: Arabic Language and Culture | |  |
|  | Believes that HLLs strength in oral and listening skills are much greater than those of FLLs |  |
|  | FLLs generally perform better in grammar |  |
|  | HLLs participation in class activities is highly influenced by their enrollment/learning motivation |  |
|  | The presence of proficient HLLs can be intimidating to FLLs within the classroom |  |
|  | The presence of HLLs, in general, can create a good learning environment and has more advantages than disadvantages |  |
|  | Pedagogical choices highly depend on the textbook |  |
|  | Encourages interaction but does not mandate it |  |
Chapter 5: Cross-Case Analysis

In the findings chapter, narrative case studies of five participants were presented. This chapter offers a cross-case analysis that compares and contrasts these participants’ beliefs, views, and perceptions on various topics related to their Arabic language learning in order to find commonalities and/or conflicts among them. The cross-case analysis utilizes the comparative case study approach, through which I extend my interpretation of the findings. Drawing connections among the participants’ responses can help to identify patterns that can improve college-level Arabic language teaching and learning. The overarching themes that emerged from the data include motivation, identity, perceived Arabic language proficiency, attitudes toward diversity, group work and collaboration, and learning preferences and concerns. Each of these themes is discussed separately in the following sections, and emergent sub-themes are also identified.

5.1 Motivational Factors

The role of motivation in learning languages has been investigated and discussed by many scholars in the fields of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Heritage Language Acquisition (HLA). Research has shown, among other things, that a student’s motivation to learn a language influences his or her language acquisition (e.g., Bernaus & Gardner 2008; Engin 2009; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Factors that influence a
student’s decision to learn a language vary among different learners. This section consists of a comparative analysis of the motivational factors that inspired each participant to study Arabic as a foreign language (FL) or a heritage language (HL).

5.1.1 FLLs’ Responses

Before analyzing FLLs responses, I first discuss the larger sociopolitical context that is believed to have had a significant impact on theses learner’s motivation to study Arabic.

Stigmatization of Arabs

The larger sociopolitical context around the world and in the United States in particular has had a significant impact on FLLs’ motivation to study Arabic, as the student participants indicated in the interviews. After the horrific attacks that were perpetrated on the United States on September 11th, 2001, an extremist Islamic group took responsibility for the attacks. As a result, Arabs in general, and Muslims in particular, were linked to terrorism in the minds of most Americans. This belief led to a hostile sociopolitical situation and to a general sense of resentment and distrust toward Muslims, especially those of Arab descent, among the U.S. population. Consequently, Arabic as a language, Arabs as the people speaking that language, and Islam as a religion came to connote something negative, something to be feared and shunned.

Following 9/11, media coverage of the attacks and heated debates about terrorism, Islam, war, and Arabs became commonplace both globally and domestically. Soon after, the U.S. involvement in Iraq also contributed to aroused media attention and social
unrest. In various news reports, representations of Arabs in the media were mostly negative and had an impact on the stereotyping and stigmatizing of this population and the language that defines it.

Arabs and their culture, religion, and ideology have drawn the attention of politicians, media personnel, and individual citizens in the United States. While the general climate in the U.S. exuded hostility and resentment toward Arabs, it also created an atmosphere of curiosity and sparked the desire to know more about Arabs and their culture. As both of the FLLs in my study indicated, the tense sociopolitical climate greatly contributed to their interest in wanting to learn Arabic. This interest was further fueled by exciting and dramatic political events unfolding in the Middle East around 2011, which were dubbed the “Arab Spring” by many political analysts and news correspondents. Sofi and Caitlyn (FLLs) indicated that their wish to learn about the people, culture, and ideologies of the Middle East in addition to learning the Arabic language grew especially after the Arab Spring.

In their narratives, Sofi and Caitlyn (FLLs) talked about the motivational factors that influenced their choice to study Arabic in college. In general, learners’ attitudes toward a language are the initial motivational factors that drive them to pursue learning that language. Caitlyn and Sofi indicated that they chose to study Arabic because of their growing interest in Arabic language and culture as a result of continuous reports and discussions about the Arab Spring. Both learners expressed their passion and fascination with Arabic. When asked about their motivation to learn Arabic, this is how they responded:
S: I always wanted to learn Arabic. I think it is really an important language that we need to know, especially during this period or this time in general.

C: I studied Arabic in high school to fulfill the foreign language requirement and I just became interested in the language and the culture. And when the Arab Spring happened, I became really interested in the politics of everything in the Middle East.

A critical motivational factor, in addition to some individuals’ interest in learning the Arabic language due to their own curiosity and desire, is the U.S. State Department’s identification of Arabic, after the terrorist events on September 11th, 2001, as a critical language. Accordingly, the U.S. Department of State has taken a number of initiatives to encourage American students to pursue learning Arabic. Both FLLs in the study pointed out that knowing Arabic would be helpful in securing a career in diplomacy and politics, where they can contribute to developing a better understanding between the U.S. and the Middle East. Hence, their motivation could be described as being a combination of integrative and instrumental (discussed in Chapter 2).

5.1.2 The Teacher’s Response

The primary motivational factor that led the teacher, Steven, to choose to learn Arabic was an instrumental one. An FLL himself, Steven stated that the increased need for Arabic teachers after the September 11th attacks was the main factor that impacted his choice to study Arabic. He believed that being proficient in Arabic would open a wide variety of career opportunities, especially in teaching positions. However, and just like...
Sofi and Caitlyn, he also expressed an interest in the language and a desire to foster cross-cultural communication between the Arab world and the United States.

5.1.3 HLLs’ Responses

Zain and Joelle (HLLs) stated that an interest in their family’s culture and the need to connect with their heritage were the primary reasons that led them to enroll in the Arabic language classroom while in college.

Although her primary reason was a pride in her Lebanese/Arab roots, Joelle (HLL) stated that the sociopolitical climate and the stigmatization of Arabs within the context of the United States provoked her to study Arabic and work in a field that will allow her to “defend her people” against the current hostile and prejudiced climate among the U.S. population. She felt the need to learn the language and aspire to work in a field that will enable her to foster positive awareness about Arabs and the Arab world.

J: I was always proud of being Middle Eastern...as I got older, and right after 9/11 and the kinds of conversations people were having about Middle Eastern people and what that meant for me and the things I knew about my background and things I thought were really great...that got me involved in politics and I decided to be an International Studies major in college and Arabic seemed to be the perfect partner with that. Not only because it was great for politics, but also because it was part of my heritage and background and made my grandmother very happy...I understood things about my culture that others missed or were ignorant about...I wanted to learn to be a part of this new horizon of bridging gaps between people and help them understand each other.
Similarly, an interest in politics and a potential job in the diplomatic field that can help build better relations between the U.S. and the Middle East were secondary motivational factors that led Zain to choose to study Arabic in college. Being bilingual and proficient in Arabic could help in securing career opportunities, as Zain believes.

In summary, findings reveal that all learners’ decisions to study Arabic were impacted by the sociopolitical climate and the growing hostility and stigmatization of Arabs in the United States. FLLs’ primary motivation, however, was their interest in the Arabic language and curiosity about the language and the culture. On the other hand, HLLs’ initial motivation was the need to reconnect with their roots and do something – by working in a diplomatic field – to eliminate stereotypes about Arabs. This feeling of obligation toward one’s heritage can be considered as an identity issue. By learning the language, HLLs (re)construct their Arab identity. According to Norton (2000), identity refers to the way(s) through which the person perceives his or her relationship to the world, and how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how that person understands possibilities for the future.

Graph 5.1 below describes Arabic language learners’ motivational factors.
5.2 Identity Issues

Identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated to a significant extent through language and discourse (Gee, 1996; MacLure, 1993). As discussed by Norton (2010), the poststructuralist theory of language, defined as discourse, establishes a connection between language and identity; identities are continuously negotiated and constructed based on the social setting. As Norton (2010) explains, “Our gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, among other characteristics, are all implicated in this negotiation of identity” (p.350). As Hornberger and McKay (2010) explain, “language is
theorized not only as a linguistic system, but as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated” (p. 351).

Understanding what identities Arabic language learners and the teacher have constructed within the Arabic classroom context is essential for understanding the discourse that takes place within the classroom. From an SCT perspective, learning takes place within social contexts, where learners are active agents in their own learning. Thus, the concept of identity construction in language learning has been increasingly discussed in the literature, which is attributed to the growing interest in the sociocultural context in which language learning occurs. Leeman (2015) reports that “since the mid1990s, there has been a blossoming of the study of identity in language learning, thanks in part to a broader social turn in applied linguistics theory and research, and the concomitant increased interest in the sociocultural context in which language learning and use take place” (p. 102).

Furthermore, people continually negotiate and renegotiate their identity in relation to others and to their social context, as Hornberger and McKay (2010) assert. Identities can shift and get reconstructed as a result of many factors. Relations of power, for instance, are known to play a role in the identity construction of individuals within a specific context (Norton, 2010). Relations of power are not fixed; they are determined by the social context. Speakers of a minority and stigmatized language, for example, often feel inferior within the mainstream social context. However, within the classroom context where their native language is the target language, they are unlikely to feel the unequal relations of power they experience outside the classroom. On the contrary, these learners
are more likely to feel that they have the upper hand during activities that entail skills with which they have some proficiency. That being said, it is not surprising to find that language learners construct different identities within different contexts. Based on the participants’ responses and classroom observations, a closer look at their identity construction is provided in this section.

5.2.1 FLLs’ Responses

Both FLLs who participated in this research, Sofi and Caitlyn, presented themselves as highly motivated learners of Arabic and described themselves as individuals who have great interest in learning the Arabic language and culture. Hence, their constructed identity would be recognized as minority members of the target language (Arabic) community who have an interest in establishing intercommunication and understanding with people of the language (Arabs). Both Sofi and Caitlyn were determined to learn the language and were invested in their learning. Norton (2010) discusses the construct of investment and explains that investment “conceives the language learner as having a complex identity, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction” (p. 354). Investment, according to Norton, should be seen within a sociological framework more than a psychological one. This notion applies to the Arabic language classroom, where both Sofi and Caitlyn were among the minority group of the target language, but highly invested in learning the language. However, both FLLs portrayed the identity of novices (Duff, 2010) when referring to the more proficient peers in the classroom.
5.2.2 The Teacher’s Response

In order to gain a better understanding of the teaching and learning that takes place within the classroom context, it is important to gain insight into the teacher’s identity that plays out in the classroom. As Varghese et al. (2005) state, “Language teacher identity is an emerging subject of interest in research on language teacher education and teacher development”. Being a non-native speaker of Arabic, Steven is naturally holding the identity of a NNS of the language. Additionally, the identity of a teacher was designated to him by the institution which assigned him the teaching role. Being a NNS teacher in a class which included a number of HLLs and other students who had a certain degree of familiarity with the language, Steven at times constructed and projected a learner’s identity, in addition to the teacher’s identity. This was demonstrated by his statement, “I am still a student of the language,” and also when he expressed his subconsciously formed initial opinion of HLLs as being proficient. As he said, “they can probably teach me.” In terms of power relations, Steven felt that HLLs had more power for being part of the target language community. Apparently, as the NNS teacher, he seemed to have trouble constructing a specific identity within the context of the classroom.

5.2.3 HLLs’ Responses

The role of ethnicity in identity construction is imperative. However, it is important to realize that “ethnic identities shift across interactional contexts in relation to the local ideological divisions that are created between groups” (Reyes, 2010, p. 400).
Zain, a HLL whose parents were immigrants from Egypt and spoke Arabic at home, had a continually shifting identity growing up in the United States. At a younger age, he just wanted to fit in the mainstream culture, as he indicated in the following statement:

*Z: When Arabic was spoken in public by my parents, I was sort of ashamed; felt embarrassed. It wasn’t something I would share with my friends or [anything that] my friends showed interest in. It was something I preferred; it was kept at home.*

As he got older, and after a visit to Egypt, Zain became more interested in learning his heritage language; he explained that he wanted to learn the language formally to satisfy his interest and curiosity about his family’s language and culture, reflecting a growth in his identity development. He was also interested in learning the history of the Arab world where his family came from. As Zain felt, being proficient in Arabic was part of the process of constructing his identity. Since he had a decent exposure to the language at a younger age, Zain’s proficiency in listening, comprehension, and speaking was moderately higher than that of the FLLs in his Arabic language class. This advantage resulted in constructing the identity of a learner with a membership in the target language’s community, thereby affording him a more powerful position in the classroom. Thus, this HLL held the position of an expert in the language classroom (Duff, 2010).

Joelle, the second HLL participant, was interested in learning the language of her family’s Middle Eastern ancestors and felt pride in having Lebanese roots. Joelle’s ethnic identity is somewhat more complex than that of Zain; her mother had no Arabic roots, and her father never learned to speak Arabic at home. She fit in perfectly within the
mainstream culture and her Arabic identity was minimal, both inside and outside her home. She indicated that hearing her grandmother speak Arabic words and participating in many Lebanese cultural events had built her interest in Arabic and at a young age; so she felt the connection to that part of her heritage and wanted to learn the language. An interesting finding was that Joelle, who is not a native speaker of Arabic, identified herself as a HLL when it came to cultural knowledge and connection to her Lebanese roots, but referred to other HLLs as “they” when discussing language skills, especially speaking skills. Joelle was not competent in speaking Arabic and felt that she would be considered as a FLL in terms of her language skills. The cultural aspect of the language was not part of this classroom’s pedagogical practices; thus, Joelle’s identity as a novice language learner was in line with that of the other FLLs in the classroom. There were no opportunities for Joelle to demonstrate her cultural competence, and she did not feel that her heritage knowledge gave her an upper hand in the classroom.

For both HLLs, choosing to learn Arabic was part of constructing their Arab identity.

To conclude, identity issues are complex; but they play an important role in language learning. As Norton and Toohey (2004) state, “Language learning engages the identities of language learners in diverse and complex ways.” It is therefore important to understand the construction and shifting of identities within social contexts, as these identities emerge through discourse.
5.3 Self-Assessment of Arabic Language Competency

This section compares the participants’ responses when they were asked to evaluate their language skills. The variations of linguistic skills among language learners are discussed by researchers in linguistics and language education. Many studies have confirmed that HLLs have certain competencies which are often different than those of FLLs (see Chapter 2). The way(s) learners perceive their own skills is an important topic to examine, and how these perceptions might influence their interaction patterns in the classroom can be enlightening. The concept of self-assessment (SA) has been widely discussed in second language and educational research. de Saint Leger (2009) reports that self-assessment is a process used in various educational settings, intended to encourage learners to take control of their own learning and participate more dynamically in class activities. Self-assessment as discussed within the scope of this study is based on the participants’ perceptions of their own proficiency in Arabic.

The concept of self-assessment is in line with the SCT which considers learners to be active agents in their own learning. Thus, self-assessment enables students to recognize their own proficiency level and realize their strengths and weaknesses in various language skills and in relation to others and to objectives set for them in a specific setting. Moreover, it allows learners to set goals for themselves and take control of their own learning. One of the advantages of evaluating one’s own competency in a skill is that in this way, “learners are better able to set realistic goals and direct their own learning (Bullock, 2011, p. 114). Students’ abilities in learning languages vary depending on their exposure, investment in learning, cognition, and other variables. How students
value their skills may affect the way(s) in which they choose to interact within a group or participate in classroom activities. Self-assessment can also impact a learner’s confidence in his/her own skills. When students perceive their performance to be below that of their peers, they might get discouraged and choose to refrain from fully interacting with their peers in group activities.

When asked to assess their own competency level – in listening and comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar skills in the Arabic language – FLL and HLL participants had varying responses. These responses are compared in order to examine specific patterns discussed in the literature. Santos and Silva (2015) state that “research about heritage and non-heritage language learners has shown that these two groups may differ not only with regard to their learning needs, but also how they perceive and perform linguistic tasks” (p. 64). Comparing the participants’ responses on this issue will yield findings that can help to confirm or disconfirm the claims of prior research.

5.3.1 FLLs’ Responses

Both FLLs rated their listening and speaking skills as poor to fair. Caitlyn stated that she understands Arabic, but can speak with great difficulty. She rated her listening skills as poor, but said she feels that her reading, writing, and grammar skills are good. She actually considers reading and writing to be her strengths in the language, while listening and speaking are her weaknesses. She believes that Arabic grammar “has a very logical base” and thus it is easy to learn. Sofi has similarly stated that oral communication in Arabic is her biggest weakness. She has difficulty speaking the language and has
attributed that to a lack of practice inside and outside the classroom. She feels that she is good at reading, and considers it to be her biggest strength; she has some difficulty in writing and applying the proper grammatical rules to her writing and rated her writing and grammar skills as poor to fair.

5.3.2 The Teacher’s Response

In general, the teacher, a non-native speaker of Arabic, considers himself to still be a learner even after eight years of studying Arabic. His biggest challenge was communicating with people while living in Mauritania. He stated that his familiarity with *Fus-ha*, and not *‘Ammiyah* (colloquial), posed a big challenge for him when he tried to speak with the locals.

In terms of the teacher’s assessment of Arabic learners, he believes that HLLs do much better in listening, speaking, and vocabulary than in grammar. On the contrary, FLLs do better in grammar; they find it easier to learn grammatical rules than to learn vocabulary or speak the language. This perception is in line with previous research on perceptions of non-heritage language learners (NHLLs) and language instructors on HLLs’ skills. A study by Santos and Silva (2015) found that “[e]very group (HLLs, NHLLs, and instructors) judged HLLs’ listening abilities as their strongest, followed by speaking, writing and reading” (p. 67).

It was noted that higher proficiency in speaking skills among some HLLs in the classroom had caused intimidation and thus a degree of anxiety to the less proficient learners in that skill- whether FLLs or HLLs). This remark was not surprising as speaking
is a skill usually displayed in public; when it was exhibited within the classroom context, it had clearly caused some students, and the non-native teacher to feel apprehensive. Researchers have found that anxiety is associated with speaking more than any other language skill (Horwitz, 1998; Horwitz & Cope, 1986).

5.3.3 HLLs’ Responses

Zain, a HLL who can speak the Egyptian dialect, stated that his listening, comprehension, and speaking skills in Arabic are good. As Zain shared earlier, both of his parents used Arabic at home; in addition, Arabic media was frequently utilized at his home, and he was sent to a weekend community school at a young age. Unlike Zain, Joelle, who is third-generation Lebanese, stated that she has difficulty in listening, comprehension, and speaking skills.

Differences in speaking proficiencies among Arabic heritage speakers have been discussed and confirmed by previous research (e.g., Albirini & Benmamoun, 2014; Albirini, Benmamoun & Saadah, 2011). Joelle’s exposure to Arabic at home was limited to few colloquial words (in Lebanese dialect) that she heard from her grandmother, and they were mostly related to food and traditional celebrations. Consequently, Joelle had difficulty learning vocabulary in Standard Arabic. Being a third-generation Lebanese child whose parents never learned Arabic or used it to communicate, Joelle’s exposure to Arabic at a young age was extremely limited. Similarly, Zain commented on the challenge he faced when learning new vocabulary in *Fus-ha*. He was challenged with the differences between the two versions of the language (*colloquial vs. Fus-ha*), especially
in beginner classes; he mixed up colloquial with formal vocabulary words and was challenged when trying to express ideas using *Fus-ha*. This is a common challenge for Arabic Heritage learners due to the diglossic nature of Arabic.

Concerning his reading and writing skills, Zain reported them as fair; he believes that he needs to practice more in order to improve these skills and explains that he is committed to be more proficient in the formal language. His statements indicate that his familiarity with colloquial Arabic was not sufficient for proficiency in reading and writing. It further shows that he always struggled to attain proficiency in skills that require formal education. Reading and writing are considered to be literacy skills that require formal schooling. This is certainly the case for Arabic, a diglossic language, in which the formal version (*Fus-ha*) requires formal education and cannot be acquired from exposure, alone. Joelle, on the other hand, rated her reading and writing skills as good.

Reporting on his competency in Arabic grammar, Zain explained that he considers himself to be good at grammar, but said he faced difficulty learning it in school. Unlike Zain, and similar to the other FLL who participated in this study, Joelle perceives grammar to be easier than vocabulary and rated her own grammar competency as fair. Early research on Arabic heritage learners has discussed the visible “variability in the language proficiencies of Arabic heritage speakers, both as individuals and as groups” (Albirini & Benmamoun, 2014; Albirini, Benmamoun, & Saadah, 2011).

Self-assessment, as presented in this section, reflected the learners’ opinions on various language skills. Their responses confirm previous research on the variation in language skills between FLLs and HLLs. However, the way learners perceive their
competency is a cognitive concept referred to as “self-efficacy,” and it plays a particular role in language learning and acquisition. Self-efficacy is a cognitive concept related to motivation; it refers to learners’ opinions about their ability to carry out a task and deal with learning challenges (Arnold & Brown, 1999; Ehrman, 1996; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). As discussed in prior research, learners need to believe that they have control over the learning process, in addition to feeling a sense of self-effectiveness, in order to make the needed effort in language learning.

5.4 Perceived Proficiency Differences

Group interaction provides an opportunity for knowledge and cognition to be socially constructed within the classroom context as theorized by the SCT. Consequently, group activities are often adopted by language educators as a pedagogical practice in the classroom. Many scholars have examined and discussed the nature of interaction during group work (e.g., Ohta, 2001; Storch, 2001, 2002; Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Wanatabe & Swain, 2008). From the perspective of Sociocultural Theory, peer interaction is essential for L2 learning, since more proficient peers can provide scaffolding to those who are less proficient, thus assisting in developing their levels of knowledge and performance. Arranging students into groups with an awareness of their proficiency levels is crucial for group dynamics and for learning and developing language skills. Swain (2000) argues that grouping students during classroom activities influences the nature of interaction. In addition, the way students perceive their peers’ proficiency levels is significant in understanding the nature of interaction among students with
varying proficiency levels. This section explores students’ perceptions on their peers’ proficiency levels and examines the impact of those perceptions on the students’ interaction patterns during group activities.

5.4.1 FLLs’ Responses

To begin with, all participants, including the teacher, believed that there was great variation in the proficiency levels among learners in the Arabic classroom. Caitlyn, a FLL, considers that differences in proficiency levels can be intimidating and thus can have a negative effect on the learning that takes place in class. Likewise, Sofi claimed that “when it comes to group work, proficient students end up doing the work and, and most of the time, they don’t take the time to assist others.” Both of the FLLs proclaimed that the proficiency gap between themselves and the HLLs in the Arabic language classroom had a negative overall effect on interactions among peers; they were clearly frustrated with the proficiency gaps among learners. This finding confirms Kowal and Swain’s (1994, 1997) findings that extreme proficiency differences can hinder collaborative pair interaction.

Sofi believes that HLLs understand the language better. She perceives them to be proficient in speaking, comprehension, and vocabulary. She further stated that, “HLLs’ exposure to the language makes them get it better.” Caitlyn confirmed that fact and definitely noticed it in relation to speaking skills. She said she believes that there was not much of a gap in terms of reading or grammar, but a gap undoubtedly existed in speaking.
Both FLLs attributed the problem of uneven proficiency levels to poor screening and placement practiced by the department of Arabic. “Since I came in to this university…last semester…and even in this class, everyone is at a different level. I feel that the department doesn’t really test [our knowledge],” Caitlyn affirmed.

5.4.2 HLLs’ Responses

The Heritage Language Learners whom I interviewed in this study, Zain and Joelle, indicated that proficiency gaps between HLLs (who are native speakers) and FLLs were highly noticeable in the beginner classes. Zain admitted that he felt more confident in earlier classes, which entailed more vocabulary learning, even when he was not fully right at times due to the diglossic nature of the language.

Z: There were more differences in proficiency levels in earlier classes. There was more variety of students, and some were struggling more. Me, as a heritage learner, I often had a wider vocabulary early on. It wasn’t always right, but generally it connected. I would use a word I’d learned in colloquial, and someone would correct me because it reminded them of the formal version (Fus-ha) of it.

Joelle, who is a Heritage Language Learner but not a native speaker, also pointed out that proficiency differences between HLLs and FLLs were more apparent in beginner classes, but in higher level classes, skill-specific proficiency would show more and HLLs who spoke the language had less advantage in activities that entailed grammar.

J: There are a lot of people who come in and are almost proficient in colloquial Arabic (HLLs) – People who pick up the phone and talk to their moms in Arabic. But I think the higher the class level, the less advantage these people have. There are also
students that I know in this class, who love foreign languages. They speak Japanese, Chinese, and Arabic. That’s just their thing, and they really get it.

Joelle explained that having a higher proficiency in language skills was not only limited to HLLs; there were a number of FLLs in the classroom who were very good in languages, and they performed well and at higher proficiency levels than others. Joelle felt that the differences in proficiency levels did affect her participation in group activities. She expressed her struggle in learning vocabulary and comprehending the spoken language. Proficiency differences clearly influenced Joelle’s attitude toward group activities. She often felt excluded from participating because the more proficient students dominated the discussions – these were mostly FLLs working on grammar exercises. In summary, although both Zain and Joelle acknowledged that proficiency gaps existed in the classroom, it appears that Joelle was more negatively impacted by the situation. This can be attributed to different factors, such as self-confidence and self-efficacy.

Clearly, as students pointed out, proficiency variations among the students existed at many levels. First, the more proficient FLLs; second, the HLLs who were speakers of the language and had much higher listening, comprehension, speaking, and vocabulary skills than other FLLs and the non-native speaker HLL; and third, the less proficient FLLs and non-native speaker HLLs. These differences in proficiency levels, along with the nature of the assigned tasks, influenced the interaction dynamics among group members, and hence, the engagement, learning, and development of all learners in the group. To summarize, all participants, including Steven, the teacher, agreed that most
HLLs (native speakers) had a higher proficiency in vocabulary, listening, comprehension, and speaking. Additionally, they all confirmed that proficiency gaps were highly present within their classroom.

As discussed by a number of SLA scholars, “noticing the gap” can be a good thing in language learning (Ellis, 1995). “Noticing the gap” is a concept that leads to a cognitive comparison, which is deemed necessary for language learning. Learners compare what they notice in the input to their own knowledge of the target language (interlanguage), and either notice gaps or receive confirmation. According to Ellis, this process of cognitive comparison leads to restructuring of a learner’s interlanguage. In the current study, however, proficiency gaps among learners appeared to have a negative impact on interaction and learning, as perceived by the participants. This situation could have resulted from the big differences in proficiency levels among learners. Kowal and Swain (1994, 1997) argue that extreme proficiency differences may hinder collaborative pair interaction.

5.4.3 Placement Procedures

In discussing proficiency gaps in the classroom, all learners, except Zain (HLL), believed that it was a problem that affected the dynamics of interaction, and thus learning, in the classroom. They attributed that problem to poor screening and placement practices applied by the department of Arabic. “Since I came in to this university…last semester…and even in this class everyone is at a different level. I feel that [the department] doesn’t really test,” Caitlyn affirmed. FLLs’ concerns seem to be greater
than those of HLLs. In fact, FLLs felt that the placement procedure used by the department had unfairly placed students in a certain classroom, which had resulted in the big variation in proficiency levels among students. Feeling injustice can negatively influence students’ learning. Norton (2010) explains that “A learner may be a highly motivated language learner, but may nevertheless have little investment in the language practices of a given classroom or community which may be racist, sexist, elitist or homophobic” (p. 354). In other words, when learners feel prejudice, their investment in learning the language will most likely be negatively influenced. Additionally, they can tend to blame the department for not adopting proper placement procedures to avoid such an issue.

5.5 Attitude toward the diversity of learners (HLLs and FLLs)

5.5.1 FLLs’ Responses

Despite the frustration expressed by both FLLs on proficiency variations in the classroom, and the fact that a number of HLLs are proficient in speaking the language, both groups favored the presence of HLLs in the classroom and believed that it could be a positive factor in language learning and development. In Sofi’s opinion, HLLs can contribute to the learning that takes place in the classroom; she believes that they can be helpful in terms of vocabulary and culture. To emphasize this notion, Sofi cited an instance where a HLL assisted the teacher (non-native) in vocabulary.
Caitlyn felt positively about having HLLs in the classroom, as well: “having different kinds of learners is a good thing,” she stated. She perceived their presence to be beneficial. They bring a unique dynamic to the group and it is good to have different learners with different strengths, she added. “They help with vocabulary and provide a natural setting for learning words and cultural aspects; a good resource especially when the teacher is a non-native speaker. However, Caitlyn was still concerned about differences in proficiency levels. She also expressed her disappointment that in all previous Arabic courses at this university, she did not have an Arabic teacher who was a native speaker.

5.5.2 HLLs’ Responses

Stating his opinion on the Arabic language classroom’s learners with diverse proficiencies, Zain felt positive about classes that include diverse kinds of learners; it would usually make the interaction more fruitful and constructive, but, as he surmised, that depended on the task assigned and the group members. Zain reported that he felt confident and proud to assist in information related to the culture and the language during classroom activities. He further indicated that he was mostly able to assist other learners in conversations and activities which entailed speaking, but asked for help from FLLs when working on grammar exercises.

Unlike Zain, Joelle, who is a HLL but not a native speaker, was not in favor of including HLLs who are so competent in speaking the language. She believed that it
could be intimidating to the other learners in the classroom: “They answer the teacher’s questions and interrupt other learners sometimes.”

5.6 Group Work and Peer Collaboration

5.6.1 FLLs’ Responses

Sofi elucidated that interaction and collaboration during group work was usually determined by personality, exposure to the language, and the nature of the task. She said she believes that varying levels of proficiency among learners often had a negative impact on students’ participation and interactions during group activities. As she explained, on many occasions, she felt excluded from group work and stopped participating. In general, she felt that learners (FLLs) with higher proficiency in the language did not take the time to help. “They believe we won’t get it anyway,” she stated. Additionally, Sofi sensed that the more proficient peers usually dominated the interaction and they did not trust the knowledge of the less proficient students.

In contrast, Sofi found that HLLs were more helpful in explaining things – they had much better comprehension skills: “they just get it better than FLLs,” she observed. She expressed her preference to work with HLLs in group activities, but still maintained that their presence can be intimidating when they have more advanced language skills.

Unlike Sofi, Caitlyn, the other FLL, stated that there was a separation between HLLs & FLLs in the classroom: “there was minimal interaction,” she added. This could be attributed to those two learners’ different personality styles. Sofi apparently tried to work with HLLs in the classroom and found it helpful. On the other hand, Caitlyn was
apprehensive and did not favor group activities; she had clearly developed an undesirable attitude toward them as a result of a negative perception on collaboration, which was lacking among peers in the classroom in her opinion. She said she believes that proficiency, confidence, and caring are required for students to collaborate and contribute to group activities. Besides, she explained that group members use English most of the time, and that was another unfavorable factor. The third factor was the nature of the assigned tasks. “Tasks were not interactive or communicative; thus, the work was split-up among students,” she clarified.

To sum up, both FLLs expressed their concern about the variations in proficiency levels and their negative effect on group work and collaboration. They both confirmed that the nature of the task, and the learner’s character and proficiency level often impacted group work and collaboration among learners.

### 5.6.2 HLLs’ Responses

Assigning learning tasks that require group work is common practice in many language classrooms. Discussing this subject, Zain professed that he had more group activities in previous Arabic language classes, but not so much in the current class. He believed that group activities that involve conversation are a great benefit to all learners, and that HLLs are more likely to take the initiative in a group task, but it also depends on each student’s character and confidence. In general, the nature of the task influenced the interaction’s dynamics. For example, if the task entails grammar, the more proficient FLL
would participate more, he explained. In terms of constructing groups, it was mostly based on seat arrangements; but on occasion, the teacher might pair students up.

Joelle’s responses on group work activities were similar to Zain’s. She confirmed that there were some group activities in the current class, but she had more of them in previous Arabic classes. She thought that group activities tend to decrease with higher level classes. On group construction, she indicated that she would often work with peers whom she knew and was comfortable with. She was aware that there was a disadvantage to that approach: “you might not learn much from them,” she acknowledged. Referring to past experiences, Joelle stated that she worked in diverse groups and felt that it was very helpful to have a HLL who was somewhat proficient in colloquial Arabic – members assisted each other and worked very well together. In the current class, however, Joelle did not feel as positive. This was most likely due to peer relations and their familiarity with each other. “In this class, Heritage Speakers tend to work together and don’t want to waste time with other people,” she elucidated.

On the dynamics of interaction during group activities, and in line with Zain’s response, Joelle stated that the most proficient learner took the lead and the rest trusted their work and just focused on completing the task. Those tasks seemed to be focused on completing certain exercises and not requiring communicative interaction. Joelle perceived HLLs (Native Speakers) to be trusted with knowledge of the language – FLLs with lower proficiency did not question; on the other hand, grammar and sentence structure were skills where more proficient FLLs performed better. She felt that the higher level students usually took up the group work and ended up doing most of it.
Some students with a higher level of proficiency tried to assist whoever was not proficient; but generally, one person did most of the work and gave the answers.

With respect to her own contribution to group activities, Joelle felt that her cultural background did not help her in being able to contribute to group work, since she had not been in a group that worked on a task related to culture or one that entailed cultural aspects; that was the case in all of the classes that she attended at this university, as she noted. She perseverated about low confidence in her language proficiency that resulted in minimal or no contribution to group activities, saying, “You just sit there and watch.”

5.7 Learning Preferences and Learners’ Concerns

Students are a crucial element in the process of teaching and learning. As educators and scholars in the field of language teaching and learning, we need to critically examine the role of students and allow them to express their voices and concerns. Adopting a critical pedagogical view (Cummins, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2004), we must give students the opportunity to be active participants in leading changes and developments in the curriculum and the teaching practices utilized in the language classroom. In this section, the Arabic learners’ concerns and preferences are presented and compared in an effort to understand the expressed needs of the different types of the Arabic language learners in this classroom.

As discussed in an earlier section, noticeable differences in proficiency levels among learners in this Arabic language classroom pose a serious concern among
language learners, especially FLLs and the nonnative speaker HLL. In the following sections, the learners’ additional concerns and preferences are presented.

5.7.1 Desired Learning Outcomes

It is important that learners are given the chance to express their voices as it pertains to their learning preferences. The Arabic language learners expressed their thoughts and desires in regard to pedagogical methods, the classroom activities, and the fact that the instructor himself is a nonnative speaker of Arabic.

5.7.2 FLLs’ Responses

Developing Arabic speaking skills was a priority among the learning outcomes that Caitlyn wanted to achieve: “Anyone who is serious about learning a language wants to use it for application,” she indicated. As she had stated earlier, listening and speaking skills are her biggest weakness, and she perceived oral communication in the language to be the most important outcome of learning. She started learning Arabic in high school, and loved the language and the teacher, who was Egyptian; she believed that her oral skills would develop if she continued studying Arabic in college. However, Caitlyn seemed to be disappointed that she did not get the chance to do so in her Arabic studies at this university. She attributed that to the lack of communicative tasks and focus on formal Arabic in some listening exercises, which, in her opinion, was not as applicable to daily situations as colloquial Arabic would be. In addition, as she explained, the fact that the teacher was not a native speaker of Arabic resulted in frequent use of English in class.
C: The struggle this semester was that I felt like it’s an Arabic class being taught in English versus an Arabic class being taught in Arabic. If Arabic is used, you’ll be forced to speak it…I think that my ability to speak Arabic has deteriorated and lessened from when I was in high school.

This FLL was satisfied with grammar instruction and thought that the teacher did a great job at it. “I am grammar happy, especially in this course,” she stated.

Arab culture was another aspect about which Caitlyn was hoping to learn more: “Understanding the culture is important for understanding and learning the language,” she affirmed. “In high school, we focused a lot more on culture than we did in classes at this university,” she added.

To sum up, Caitlyn recalled a better experience from having had a native Arabic teacher in high school. She believed that native teachers were able to explain things better and were better equipped, from personal experience, in terms of cultural aspects, as well. Therefore, she clearly preferred to have native teachers teaching Arabic. “A non-native teacher does well explaining grammar, but not listening, writing, speaking, reading, and interpreting,” she claimed.

Similar to Caitlyn, Sofi’s (FLL) priority was also being able to speak the language. In her opinion, using the language in real life situations and being able to communicate in the colloquial was the most important aspect of learning a language: “You need to speak it and be able to communicate in it. . . . In classrooms, there should be a lot more communication. Everyone needs to be speaking and listening constantly… even if you’re learning grammar, you can still incorporate it into talking,” she explained.
Caitlyn’s statement indicates that she prefers greater focus on grammar teaching, and believes that communicative language teaching could still be utilized to learn grammar. Sofi also desired learning about Arab culture because, as she stated, “the language and the culture are really intertwined.” These findings indicate that FLLs expect to be exposed to the target language and culture in the classroom, and there was a degree of dissatisfaction due to the lack of this kind of exposure.

5.7.3 HLLs’ Responses

Joelle, a HLL who was not competent in speaking Arabic, also expressed her desire to develop her speaking skills. In particular, she said she would like to be able to communicate in colloquial Arabic and wished there was more focus on that. “In learning any language, the point is to be able to speak it. I think that speaking is the most important aspect,” she acknowledged. She admitted that oral communication posed a difficulty for her, and said her very limited exposure to the spoken language did not contribute to any development in her speaking skills. To sum up, Joelle wished more class time were set aside for listening and speaking activities.

Similar to FLLs, Joelle perceived culture to be an important aspect of language learning. As she explained, “The cultural aspect is important because when you learn a language, you want to travel and having no knowledge of the culture seems to negate the whole experience.”

Zain, a HLL who can speak and comprehend the Egyptian dialect, was not so concerned with developing his speaking skills. However, he expressed his desire to
improve his writing skills in the formal version of Arabic; he also wanted to improve his reading skills so he would be able to read Arabic newspapers, poetry, and contemporary Arabic literature, as he stated.

In summary, both FLLs and the non-native speaker HLL expressed their desire to improve their Arabic speaking skills. Speaking the language was a priority for them, and they were concerned about the scarcity of communicative activities that can help develop their oral and communicative skills in Arabic.

**5.8 Perspectives on Pedagogical Practices**

**5.8.1 FLLs’ Responses**

As presented earlier, both FLLs wanted to improve their oral communication skills in Arabic. Caitlyn seemed to be disappointed that she was not getting much chance to improve her speaking skills in her Arabic classes at this university. She wished that teachers would engage students in more activities that can help them develop their communicative skills in colloquial Arabic. Similarly, Sofi stated that the teaching methodology should target speaking more as a learning outcome. She wished they would “Focus more on speaking and doing things in more repetitive ways so you keep doing it more until you get it completely.” With respect to group activities, Sofi thought that “teachers should definitely try to pair up students. She also believed that having a HLL speaker in the group would be beneficial for learning. HLLs have the background and the culture, as she explained.
5.8.2 HLLs’ Responses

Just like FLLs, both HLLs expressed their preference for more communicative activities in class. Zain suggested that the teacher be more creative in designing group activities. He suggested “extending beyond the book and being creative in terms of the group interaction tasks.” He cited a previous class, where the instructor included communicative activities that involved role playing, learning Arabic songs, and other oral and listening activities. In addition, as he explained, “a conscious formation of groups – choosing students within groups [according to their proficiency levels]” can be a good pedagogical practice to enhance learning. In general, this HLL feels that interacting with other learners, including FLLs, would be beneficial for everyone.

Joelle also indicated that she preferred more listening, speaking, and comprehension activities in the classroom. She suggested using media sources as a learning tool to help with comprehension and oral skills. She felt that “completing homework was time consuming and overwhelming” and wished that the time was used for “more beneficial activities like media exposure.” In her opinion, media sources would allow for listening improvement and cultural awareness.

J: We haven’t actually talked much about culture in this Arabic classroom. That’s something I’d be very interested in; like watching Middle Eastern films and getting to hear people talk.

Joelle had some knowledge of the culture, but felt that she was not able to demonstrate it due to the lack of cultural activities in class.
In general, it was clear that FLLs desired to collaborate and communicate with Arabic speakers in the classroom; but, as they articulated many times, the opportunity to do so was not adequately utilized through the current pedagogical practices. In addition, students had limited interaction due to the separation among students in the classroom. All learners were concerned with the scarcity of communicative activities and the absence of any culturally focused activities in class. Three participants, Caitlyn, Sofi, and Joelle, expressed their displeasure with the use of English during group work, and the gaps in proficiency among the learners in this Arabic class. Furthermore, most participants questioned administrative placement procedures, and expressed their perspectives on pedagogical practices. To conclude, students’ perceptions on the effectiveness of the current pedagogical practices were evidently related to the learning outcomes they anticipated. It was clear that their previous experiences in language learning had influenced their opinions on this topic.

**Summary**

This chapter provided a cross-case analysis and examined commonalities and differences between HLLs’ and FLLs’ perspectives on issues related to the interactions and language learning that took place in the context of the Arabic classroom. A number of themes have emerged throughout the data analysis. Table 6 summarizes these emergent themes and provides a brief comparison between the responses of FLLs and HLLs.
Table 6. A summary of emergent themes - FLLs vs. HLLs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Emergent Themes</th>
<th>HLLs</th>
<th>FLLs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joelle</td>
<td>Zain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of affect in language learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Integrative/</td>
<td>Integrative/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner character (personality)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative/Instrumental</td>
<td>Integrative/</td>
<td>Integrative/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and perceived affect interaction</td>
<td>Integrative/</td>
<td>Integrative/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Somewhat high</td>
<td>Medium (varied by skill)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning challenges</td>
<td>All language skills</td>
<td>Fus-ha/ due to Diglossia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation in the classroom</td>
<td>Acknowledged</td>
<td>Did not mention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued...
Table 6. continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency gaps</th>
<th>Existed</th>
<th>Existed more in beginner classes</th>
<th>Existed</th>
<th>Existed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scarcity of communicative and cultural activities</strong></td>
<td>Acknowledged</td>
<td>Acknowledged</td>
<td>Acknowledged</td>
<td>Acknowledged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low exposure to target language in the classroom</strong></td>
<td>Acknowledged</td>
<td>Did not mention</td>
<td>Acknowledged</td>
<td>Acknowledged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusion

Based on the previously presented findings, this chapter attempts to answer the research questions which guided the study, discuss important themes that emerged from the findings, and address implications for pedagogical practices and future studies.

To begin with, the language learning and teaching process is assumed to be a social and cultural act and is the product of socially situated participants within a specific setting. This study took place within a specific context--an Arabic language classroom; thus, emergent themes will be addressed in reference to this setting and to participants’ beliefs and experiences. Discussions of the study’s findings are informed by SLA theories (Gass, 1997; Gass & Mackey, 2007; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Long, 1996) which clearly and fully refer to the social context when examining language acquisition. These theories consider the learner to be a social being whose cognitive processing of the L2 is influenced by social interactions and social relationships with others, including those others who provide L2 input, corrective feedback, and other linguistic resources. Moreover, theories of identity (Norton, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2004), social constructs and agency (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), and instructed language learning (Ellis, 1990, 1995) are also utilized when interpreting findings.
The main theoretical framework adopted, however, is Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (SCT). This theory, developed by Vygotsky in the 1930s, offers a framework in which cognition can be investigated along with the social context. It is frequently termed as a theory of mind, based on Vygotsky’s belief that the properties of the mind are usually revealed and understood by observing physical, intellectual and linguistic activities; these activities are basically related, as Vygotsky’s theory implies. According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), “it is a theory of mind that recognizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking” (p.1). Thus, learners are seen as social beings whose interactions with others and collaboration within the classroom setting are determinants of their contributions. Learners occupy institutional worlds where their contributions are frequently struggled over and displayed through contradictory and contested discourses, as Michael Breen (2001) argues, and as this study’s results revealed.

Participants in this study were Arabic language learners (two HLLs and two FLLs), and the non-native speaker teacher. By allowing participants to speak for themselves or represent their own lives, we can achieve a better understanding of how they understand the complex array of social, cultural, and power relations in various interactional scenes (Norton, 2000). Hence, participants were given the chance to express their voices and articulate their perceptions on the learning-teaching process that took place in their Arabic language classroom, in addition to discussing their own perceived roles within this context. Interviews provided insight into students’ beliefs, perceptions and attitudes; through interviews, students also raised important issues that affected their
language learning. Furthermore, classroom observations informed answers for the research questions.

6.1 Answer to research question 1

*RQ1: How do different learners (HLLs and FLLs) contribute to the teaching-learning process in the Arabic language classroom?*

Besides the context of learning, learners’ role in the process of second language acquisition (SLA) is significant. Classroom context refers to classroom discourse as well as behavior. It is assumed that contributions of learners within this context are influenced by affective variables as well as social dimensions. Within the framework of the SCT, language learners in this Arabic classroom are considered to be active participants whose cognition and knowledge are constructed through social interactions. Thus, their contributions are reported based on different determinants such as attributes, conceptualizations, and actions in context (Larsen-Freeman, 2001).

6.1.1 Learners’ attributes

**Aptitude.** Learners’ ability to learn and acquire new information is defined as “aptitude”, and it is one variable that can play an important role in the learning process; language learners have varying abilities and they learn at different rates. Citing Skehan (1989), Larsen-Freeman affirms that language aptitude is one of the main individual differences in language learning. Learners’ aptitude was not measured in this study, and
thus discussions are based on participants’ perceptions of their own language learning abilities. In other words, the effect of this factor was explored through learners’ reflections on their own strengths and weaknesses as language learners, and the ratings of own ability as indicated in the background questionnaire.

Joelle, a non-speaker HLL, stated that she had many weaknesses as a language learner. It was hard for her to learn new vocabulary, especially those with which she was not familiar. As narrated in her case study, she had some familiarity with colloquial vocabulary related to Lebanese food and traditional celebrations. However, learning new vocabulary, and in the formal version of Arabic (Fus-ha) was a difficult task for her. Zain, a HLL who can speak and understand Arabic experienced some challenges learning the Fus-ha as well. He admitted to having difficulty in grammar and writing. “It was challenging,” he said. Caitlyn, a FLL, found difficulty in learning how to comprehend and speak Arabic. She felt that she needed to hear Arabic more often in order to learn how to understand it and use it. In a similar manner, Sofi (FLL) confessed to having difficulty learning how to speak, and also learning grammar. She believed that Arabic grammar was complex and all the details made it difficult to absorb. As explained by Larsen-Freeman (2001), some learners have an analytic aptitude while others a memory oriented one. In general, and apart from other variables that can influence language learning and acquisition, individual learner’s aptitude seemed to have played a significant role in contributing to the learning process and language development of the participants.

**Personality traits.** Personality traits can also influence language acquisition as many scholars confirmed. Larsen-Freeman (2001) claims that individual personality traits
can inhibit or facilitate language learning. Based on classroom observations and participant interviews, it is difficult to make an accurate judgment about the individual learners’ personality traits. However, inferences can be made from observing students while they worked on assigned tasks. In addition, analyzing learners’ responses when asked to evaluate their own competency level in Arabic, one can conclude that a student’s personality played an important role in the dynamics of the learning process. Traits such as: the degree of confidence, leadership traits, willingness to help, and shyness had all played a role in the interaction that took place in the Arabic language classroom.

Sofi (FLL) explained that although a person’s level of proficiency affected the degree of participation and the effectiveness of the work, their personality was the main element that determined their level of contribution to the group. Furthermore, Caitlyn (FLL) believed that the contribution of more proficient learners and their choice to assist students with lower proficiencies was mainly determined by their personalities; some were willing to assist, while others were not.

A learner’s confidence level is an important factor in language learning. Joelle, a non-speaker HLL, believed that during group work, she lacked the required competency and others had to “put up” with that. When asked about students’ contribution to group work, she replied: “people are patient and nice enough to wait on other students to come up with their part; often times, I am the person they have to wait for”. When asked if she would usually try to interact with Arabic speakers in the classroom, Joelle felt that they often worked together since they knew each other, and she would rarely seek help from them. By not seeking to interact with HLLs who were competent in speaking the
language, it can be assumed that Joelle avoided rejection and kept a distance from a group of students she perceived to be more proficient and separated from the rest. Joelle clearly preferred to work with people she knew and she was comfortable with. This was derived from the following statement:

\textit{J: Group work always gets “a little dicey” because you want to work with people you’re comfortable with, which doesn’t necessarily mean people that you’ll do the best work with or learn the most with.}

On the other hand, Zain (HLL), who is a speaker of Arabic, stated that having a good background in the language and culture, and being able to speak it (colloquial) and comprehend it had given him a degree of high confidence when he started to learn Arabic at the university level. That confidence was perceived to be strength for someone like him; it was also a driver for his willingness to help other learners in the classroom and for his positive attitude toward learning his heritage language (Arabic). In addition, when asked about patterns of interaction within the group, Zain explained that it always depended on the student’s character and confidence.

Leadership was a trait that all learners mentioned when they were discussing participation in group activities. Caitlyn, for example, stated that the leader of the group was not always the most proficient learner. Some learners just had the leadership trait and they often assumed the leadership position, as she perceived.

Undoubtedly, a learner’s personality played a role in the interaction and the effectiveness of group work, as perceived by all participants in this study. A closer
examination of HLLs contribution to the learning process is offered in the following section.

6.1.2 Contributions of HLLs

Many scholars in the field of language education (e.g., Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Lee, 2005; Valdes, 2005) have discussed possible differences between heritage language learners (HLLs) and foreign language learners (FLLs). Discussions have focused on background knowledge, language skills, familiarity with the culture, and motivation. Researchers have also examined the varying proficiency levels among HLLs and attributed those differences mainly to factors such as home exposure and the length of formal schooling those learners received. Moreover, HLLs contributions to the learning process within the classroom have mostly been linked to their competency level in the language.

Findings from this study show that HLLs’ contributions to group activities and to assisting other peers depended mostly not on their competence, but their personalities as reported by participants-- specifically their willingness to help others in the classroom. Sofi, for example, found that although the competency level of a HLL did have an effect on their contribution to the group work and the learning, their personality played a bigger role in that aspect. Caitlyn (FLL) affirmed that HLLs had always excelled in speaking activities and that was their biggest contribution to group work; however, she also remarked that the actual contribution “Depended on the individual.”
Joelle, who is categorized as a HLL in this study, felt that her contribution to group activities did not make a difference; the reason was that none of those activities entailed cultural tasks or a focus on food or celebrations, which were the topics she was familiar with, as she acknowledged. Zain, who had a good level of competence in listening and speaking Arabic, confirmed that he was able to contribute to group activities related to listening, vocabulary, and speaking, but not those that were grammar-focused. Although a student’s confidence level and character (personality) did have a significant influence on the interaction during group work, HLLs would usually take the initiative during the activity as Zain stated; this didn’t mean they were always the most proficient, as he added. That was mostly true in the case of grammar exercises. It is worth noting that Zain’s statement was based on his experience in previous Arabic classrooms, and not the current context of this study.

Z: It varied depending on who was in the group. If there is a heritage learner, I remember there was a student who wouldn’t let go of what she learned in the household (colloquial), she wouldn’t absorb or wasn’t willing to learn what is being taught in the classroom. I and she would take the initiative but it won’t be right most of the time. Other students, foreign language learners, who put a lot of work in learning the language, would often take the initiative.

The nature of the assigned activity was also a determinant of HLLs contributions and interactions, as Zain explained. “If the task required more interaction, then students would have to participate.” On the other hand, if it was an exercise they had to solve (usually grammar or vocabulary) then some students would just sit and watch waiting for others to come up with the answers.
Classroom observations revealed that HLLs assisted other learners with vocabulary and comprehension confirmation activities. However, the separation among different groups of learners also resulted in limited contributions. Based on observations, there were two female HLLs who seemed to sit next to each other and work together. They spoke Arabic fluently and clearly knew what they were doing. They apparently had previous Arabic learning experiences before attending classes at the university-level.

Overall, HLLs contributions depended mostly on their personality traits (caring, willingness to help and confidence), their proficiency level, and the nature of the assigned task.

Next, Arabic learners’ contribution to the teaching-learning process is discussed in relation to the community of practice concept (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

6.1.3 Communities of practice within the classroom

Language learners’ contribution to the teaching and learning process can be better understood within the construct of community of practice. Wenger (1998) defined a community of practice as a joint enterprise that is made up of members whose engagement within a social entity is mutual. Understanding the notion of membership within a community of practice and what that membership entails is crucial for understanding the dynamics of interaction that occur between learners. Joelle, Caitlyn and Sofi all believed that there was some kind of separation among learners in their Arabic classroom. They perceived HLLs, and “Other Learners”, who were highly competent in the language to have created their own communities of practice and
frequently worked together. As Wenger (1998) explains, members of a community often “develop practices that are their own response to these external influences”. Classroom observations show that there were two female students (categorized as Other Learners) who always paired up to work on activities. In addition, there were two female HLLs who seemed to speak Arabic fluently and work together most of the time. It was not exactly clear what external influences impacted those separate communities of practice that existed in the classroom. One can speculate that knowledge of the language, the level of comfort working together, the nature of the assigned tasks, and the shared background could have contributed to the formation of those small communities of practice within the larger classroom community.

Joelle, who is considered a HLL but not a speaker of Arabic, have recurrently stated that she preferred to work with students whom she was comfortable with. Hence, her community of practice consisted of other Arabic learners, FLLs, whom she knew well and was familiar with. In addition, both Sofi and Caitlyn stated that there seemed to be a degree of separation among learners in the classroom.

Generally, the classroom context is considered a community of practice in which all learners are members who have a mutual goal (learning the language), and who are expected to work together in order to achieve their goal. Members’ participation within a community of practice can take different forms. The concept of “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) identifies members as “old-timers” and “new-comers.” Members, in this conceptualization, are expected to recognize and accept the positions of others, and old-timers are expected to be guides for the new-comers, but only
if they are willing to. It is clear that in this Arabic classroom, the “old-timers” -- HLLs in this case-- were not willing to let “new-comers” in. Findings show that learners chose to establish their own small communities of practice, and cooperation among the different communities was minimal. Learners’ choices, the nature of assigned tasks, or the classroom environment could have contributed to the formation of those communities of practice and the separation that existed to some degree. All these factors resulted in a dysfunctional classroom community.

In summary, learners’ attributes shaped the way they conceptualized themselves and others, affected their participation choices, and resulted in a learning environment in which contributions were limited.

6.2 Answer to research question 2

RQ2. In what ways does interaction among learners influence students’ learning as perceived by language learners in the Arabic language classroom?

5. What are the language learners’ perceptions on having learners from various lingual and cultural backgrounds in the context of their classroom?

6. What are the teacher’s perceptions on having HLLs in the foreign language classroom and on the interaction between these learners and FLLs?

From a SCT perspective, learning is a social activity, in addition to being a cognitive one. Within a particular social context, many variables (artifacts) play a role in learning development. One of the variables that has a significant role on the learning
within the classroom context is interaction among peers themselves and that between them and the classroom teacher. The crucial role of interaction in the foreign language classroom is emphasized by many SLA scholars who argue that interaction within a social context is essential for learning to take place (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000; Swain et al., 2002; Swain, 2006). Generally, factors that determine the dynamics and interaction of a classroom are mainly: class size, seating arrangement, teaching materials, the teacher, and students.

To determine the perceived effect of interaction on students’ learning, it is important to discuss the role of interaction on the learning process, in addition to factors that influence the dynamics of interaction within a specific social context.

First, I provide a brief overview of the context. The classroom size is categorized as medium–standard size as reported by the university’s online classroom description page. There were a total of thirty eight individual seats, arranged in typical rows. The total number of students enrolled in the classroom was eighteen; as presented in previous chapters, the classroom where the study took place consisted of a diverse body of learners (see Table 2). This study, however, mainly focused on two types of learners: HLLs and FLLs.

To determine the dynamics of the interaction in the classroom, the role of the students, the teacher, and the teaching materials and methods will be discussed throughout this section. One way to examine the interaction among students in this Arabic classroom is through the talk produced during various activities.
6.2.1 Classroom Discourse

Classroom discourse refers to the talk produced among the learners, and between the learners and the teacher during classroom activities. It is important to consider how participants negotiate and manage their access to the target knowledge in their exchange of talk. An increasing number of studies have examined the nature of peer-peer discourse and its significance to L2 learning from a sociocultural theory perspective (e.g. Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2000, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Researchers recognized the importance of interaction between NSs and NNSs for language development, and affirmed that “peers can concurrently be experts and novices and thus, they can provide assistance to each other in order to achieve a higher level of performance” (Wanatabe & Swain, 2008, p. 116).

Rymes (2010) suggests that researchers examine “communicative repertoires” as a framework for classroom discourse analysis and offers the following guidelines:

A. Identify different speech events in the classroom (greetings- questions- code switching)

B. Examine the language used in the events

C. Investigate how certain students participate differently across different events.

Among the communicative repertoires that occurred in the Arabic classroom was the teacher’s talk. Those specific events took the form of teacher-fronted instructions and question-answer exchanges between the teacher and the students. Observations revealed that English was dominantly used in explanations that involved grammar or
comprehension. The teacher used the target language when instructing students to do a simple activity (“turn to page number…”), but code-switching was repeatedly taking place. Students’ communicative repertoires that took place in the classroom involved comprehension and vocabulary checks inquired by FLLs from HLLs (NSs) and English was the language used in those events. The exchanges were quick and occurred when learners were working on grammar and vocabulary exercises. To conclude, communication in the target language (Arabic) was scarce in the classroom; this can be attributed to different factors such as the nature of the assigned activities, learners’ personalities, language competency, and learners’ confidence level. It is not clear if the brief exchanges among students resulted in developing the language learning. Chart 6.1 reflects the rate of interaction among different types of learners, and between the learners and the teacher in the classroom. The indicted rate is based on the frequency of exchanges observed in the classroom. It was subjectively and relatively estimated by the observer.

Figure 2. The rate of interaction in the classroom
Next, and to better understand the effect of interaction on students’ learning, data from in-depth interviews with five participants (the teacher, 2 HLLs, and 2 FLLs) is used. The data uncovered students’ perceptions on the nature of interaction that took place in their Arabic language classroom and whether the interaction had any impact on their learning. Based on the findings from data, the following themes emerged.

6.2.2 Learners’ attributes as determinants of interaction

Learners’ attributes were discussed as determinants of learners’ contributions to the learning process that took place in the Arabic language classroom as previously discussed in Research question 1. Some of these attributes were mentioned by participants when expressing their attitudes and perceptions on the interaction that occurred within their Arabic classroom. For example, a learner’s personality and proficiency level were essential determinants of their participation and interaction with peers during group activities, as participants elucidated.

6.2.3 Proficiency differences and collaboration

Research on L2 learners’ perceptions of peers’ proficiency and how it affects the nature of collaboration and language learning is limited as confirmed by Watanabe and Swain (2008). “Although proficiency differences have been discussed as one of the influential factors in the nature of peer-peer interaction, little research has documented how learners with different proficiency levels interact with each other and whether such a
grouping is useful for L2 learning” (Watanabe & Swain, 2008, p.115). As shown in this study’s findings, the level of peers’ proficiency can determine the way in which FLLs favor, or not, the presence of their HLLs peers in the classroom. Additionally, these perceptions can impact the dynamics of interaction that takes place in the classroom.

Van Lier (1996) argued that an important factor in the interaction among peers is contingency, which is more possible to occur when the interacting learners are aligned towards symmetry. This notion was confirmed when FLLs in this study voiced their discomfort with the existence of “gaps in the proficiency levels” among students, and said that it could be intimidating at times. They perceived this issue to be a problem that adversely affected interaction among peers, and consequently hindered learning. As previously presented in Chapter 3, there were diverse types of learners in this Arabic classroom. Learners had different levels of proficiency as observed, and as stated by the study’s participants.

On the dynamics of interaction during group activities, and in line with Zain’s response, Joelle stated that the most proficient learner took the lead during group activities and the rest of the group members trusted their work and just focused on finishing the task. Those tasks seemed to require completing certain exercises and did not involve communicative interaction. Joelle perceived HLLs (Native Speakers) to be trusted with knowledge of the language and FLLs with lower proficiencies did not question. On the other hand, when the activity was grammar-focused, more proficient FLLs performed better and others relied on their knowledge.
In a similar manner, Sofi sensed that the more proficient peers usually dominated the interaction and did not trust the knowledge of the less proficient ones. She believed that varying levels of proficiency among learners often had a negative impact on students’ participation and interaction during group activities. On many occasions, she felt excluded from group work and stopped participating, as she explained. According to Sofi, learners (FLLs) with higher proficiency in the language didn’t take the time to help. “They believe we won’t get it anyways”. Sofi, summed up by stating that interaction and collaboration during group work was usually determined by personality, exposure to the language, and the nature of the task. By exposure to the language, one can deduct that she meant HLLs who had competency as a result of a natural exposure to their home language.

The differences in proficiency levels among learners clearly shaped Caitlyn’s negative attitude toward group activities. She had a negative perception on collaboration, which she perceived to be lacking among peers in the classroom. She identified proficiency, confidence, and caring as required elements for students to collaborate and contribute to group activities.

To sum up, all participants in this study expressed an unfavorable attitude toward the “proficiency gaps” that existed in their Arabic language classroom.
6.2.4 Nature of assigned tasks

The “nature of the task” was identified by all learners in this study as one of the factors that influenced interaction and collaboration among students during group activities.

In regards to student participants’ perspective on the pedagogical choices, they all expressed a desire to have more communicative activities. Caitlyn wished that teachers would do more activities that can help students develop their communicative skills. Similarly, Sofi stated that the teaching methodology should be more focused on speaking. “Focus more on speaking and doing things in a more repetitive ways so you keep doing it more until you get it completely”. Just like FLLs, both HLLs expressed their preference to more communicative activities within the classroom. Zain suggested that the teacher be more creative in designing group activities- “Extending beyond the book and being creative in terms of the group interaction tasks”, he further clarified. In addition, “a conscious formation of groups-choosing students within groups” can be a good practice to enhance learning as he explained. In general, this HLL feels that interacting with other learners, including FLLs is beneficial for everyone.

Joelle also preferred more listening, speaking and comprehension activities in the classroom. She suggested the use of media sources as a learning tool to help with comprehension and oral skills. She felt that “completing homework was time consuming and overwhelming” and wished that the time was used for “more beneficial activities like media exposure”. Media sources allow for listening improvement and cultural awareness, in her opinion. To conclude, students’ perceptions on the effectiveness of the
teaching instructions were evidently related to the learning outcomes they anticipated to attain by enrolling in the Arabic language classroom.

Moreover, Zain, Joelle, Caitlyn and Sofi stated that group activities were infrequent in this classroom, and Joelle, based on her past Arabic learning experience, felt that “group activities tend to decrease with higher level classes”. Consequently, interaction among students was minimal and limited to working on grammar and vocabulary exercises from the textbook. Caitlyn affirmed that “Tasks were not interactive or communicative; thus, the work was split-up among students”.

As discussed in the literature, interaction in the language classroom can be enhanced by designing task-based activities that require communicative and linguistic skills. Accordingly, well-chosen teaching strategies and materials can contribute to a more dynamic classroom environment where language learners interact and communicate in the target language more frequently.

6.2.5 Identity positioning

Identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated to a significant extent through language and discourse (Gee, 1996; MacLure, 1993). Recent research in applied linguistics has discussed identity construction through language use (Block, 2007; Kramsch, 2003). It is through language interaction that particular identities are enacted and their relevance to social contexts is uncovered; the nature of identity in such interactions is often figured in reference to the social categories of the participants (e.g.,
Heritage Language Learner (HLL), native-speaker (NS), non-native speaker (NNS) or Foreign Language Learner (FLL) and/or contextual structures (e.g., classroom). A learner’s position, identity, and ability have significant influence on participation within a specific setting or context (Norton, 2001). The relationship between identity position and power relation can also be a framework for understanding the nature of interaction and the contribution to the learning process within the classroom context.

As discussed by Gee (2001), identities can be differentiated by four categories:

1. Natural-identity, which is acquired by the nature of the individual. HLLs get that identity for being who they are and having a connection to a certain heritage.

2. Institutional-identity, which entails authority given by an institution; a teacher’s identity, for example.

3. Discursive-identity, which is recognized through discourse with others during talk and activity. For example, participants assume discourse identities as they engage in various tasks.

4. Affinity-identity, which results from being a part of an “affinity group” and sharing practices together.

The concept of identity, however, is a complex one, and it is widely known that people construct multiple identities shaped by different situations or contexts. Analyzing data from this study, it was mostly clear that different learners have assumed multiple identities within the classroom. Joelle, who is not a native speaker of Arabic, identified herself as a HL (Natural Identity) in relation to cultural knowledge and connection to her Lebanese roots, but referred to other HLLs as “they” in discussing language skills,
especially speaking. Joelle was not competent in speaking Arabic and felt that she would be considered as a FLL in terms of language skills (Discursive identity). Joelle’s identity as a language learner was in line with other FLLs in the classroom -- a novice learner of Arabic. There were no opportunities for her to demonstrate her cultural competence, and she did not feel that her heritage knowledge gave her an upper hand in the classroom. As a matter of fact, she felt challenged in learning Arabic and her participation in group activities was limited.

Zain, who also has a Natural identity as a HLL, was somewhat proficient in speaking the colloquial Arabic; he constructed the identity of an expert in the classroom, especially when he assisted others in vocabulary and comprehension activities. Zain stated that being proficient in Arabic is part of constructing his identity. Having had a decent exposure to the language at a younger age, Zain’s proficiency in listening, comprehension and speaking was moderately higher than FLLs in his Arabic language classroom. This expert identity gave him a more powerful position within the classroom.

Both FLLs, Sofi and Caitlyn, presented themselves as highly motivated learners of Arabic and described themselves as individuals who have a great interest in learning the language and culture. Hence, in addition to the novice members’ identity in the classroom, they displayed a discursive identity when working on assigned tasks and talking to others. Their discursive identity revealed hesitation to participate in group activities. Those learners also positioned themselves as minority members of the target language (Arabic) community because of their interest in accomplishing intercommunication and understanding with the target language people (Arabs).
Steven, the classroom teacher was a Non-Native Speaker of Arabic. His Institutionalized-identity as a teacher gave him authority in the classroom. In addition, being a NNS of the target language and considering himself to be a FLL, he assumed the Expert FLL identity and a Novice teacher’s identity. This was demonstrated in his statement: “I am still a student of the language” and also when he expressed his unconsciously formed initial attitude towards HLLs as being proficient; “they can probably teach me”, he thought. In terms of power relations, he felt that HLLs had more power for being part of the target language’s community. Apparently, the NNS teacher seemed to struggle in constructing a specific identity within the context of the classroom.

6.2.6 Agency

Agency is defined as “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112), and is necessary for the proclamation of identity. Van Lier (2010) further affirms that within the educational context (classroom), agency is socio-culturally mediated. In other words, it is influenced by various artifacts present in that context; language use, peers, teaching materials, and assigned tasks are all considered to be artifacts. Learners are viewed as active agents in own learning (Norton, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Learners, especially adult learners, have a responsibility in their own learning in different ways; they can play an effective role in enhancing their learning, but other factors or artifacts are known to play a significant role as well. Norton discusses the concept of learner agency and links it to learner’s action as related to engaged participation or the withdrawal of participation.
Based on this study’s findings, participants acknowledged their responsibility in developing their Arabic learning. Zain, who initially believed that enrolling in Arabic language courses in college would instantly improve his reading ability in Fus-ha admitted that he later realized that he needed to work harder and practice reading outside the classroom context. Likewise, when Joelle questioned her own ability in Arabic, as compared to other proficient learners, she recognized that more commitment on her part, and a willingness to challenge herself, are probably things she needed to do to improve her Arabic skills.

I further add that voicing concerns about the proficiency gaps’ presence in the classroom, the scarcity of communicative tasks, and the “unfair” student placement procedures, are additional ways through which participants exercised agency in their own learning process.

6.2.7 Communities of practice and interaction

The Arabic language classroom can be considered a community of practice for all Arabic language learners enrolled. All learners are positioned to have an Affinity-identity for belonging to this community. However, as exposed by observations and confirmed by participants, there was some kind of separation among students. Cailyn, for example, felt that there was a clear separation among students, and “there was a minimal interaction”. Clearly, many students chose to form their own communities of practice (group/pair) within the classroom, and teamed together most of the time. Moreover, some of those communities drew their own boundaries and chose not to interact with others most of the
time. Example of those groups would be: two Malaysian Female students and two female HLLs. Those students did not participate in the second phase of this study (interviews).

6.2.8 Attitudes toward the presence of HLLs in the classroom

With the increasing diversity among the United States population, the number of HLLs enrolling in foreign language classrooms in universities across the country is consistently increasing. Implications for mixing students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds have been discussed in the literature, and many scholars have identified benefits of collaboration, specifically between native and non-native speaking students (Edstrom, 2007; Blake and Zyzik 2003; Katz, 2003; Potowski 2002). However, the mixing of students can also have disadvantages, as argued by a number of scholars (e.g., Katz, 2003; Potowski, 2002). The presence of HLLs who are native speakers can be intimidating to some learners; in a similar manner, it is possible that some HLLs feel annoyed with developed language skills of some FLLs, especially pertaining to grammar understanding. Participants’ perspectives on having HLLs in the classroom were explored through their responses on this topic.

Students’ beliefs

Sofi believed that having a HLL speaker in the group would be beneficial for learning and expressed her preference to work with HLLs in group activities; “they have the background and the culture”, as she stated. She felt that HLLs were more helpful in explaining things, in terms of vocabulary, comprehension and pragmatics; “they had
much better comprehension skills- they just get it better than FLLs”. However, Sofi also stated that the presence of HLLs can be intimidating when they have significantly more advanced language proficiency.

Similar to Sofi, Caitlyn believed that having HLLs in the classroom can be beneficial, especially if they engage in short discussions or conversations in the spoken Arabic (colloquial). She further added that their presence could be helpful when the teacher is not a native speaker as they can assist in explaining vocabulary and cultural aspects when needed.

Joelle, who is a non-speaker of Arabic HLL, stated that in the past and in different Arabic classes, she had worked in diverse groups and felt that it was very helpful having a HLL who was somewhat proficient in speaking - members assisted each other and worked very well together. In the current class, however, she did not feel as positive. This can be attributed to the separation that existed among different groups (communities of practice) in the classroom. “In this class, HLLs who are native speakers tend to work together and don’t want to waste time with other people”, she elucidated. She also expressed her displeasure with the presence of proficient native speakers in the classroom and stated that even hearing one HLL speak fluently on the phone was intimidating.

In addition to foreseeing a potential benefit for having HLLs in the classroom, FLLs perceived the establishment of friendship with HLLs to be a facilitating factor in language learning and development; yet, they admitted to cautiously seeking membership in the communities of practice, both within the classroom and outside the classroom.
In general, HLLs are perceived to be a valuable resource, both linguistically and culturally, and their role becomes even more crucial when the instructor is not a native speaker (NS) of the target language, as FLLs stated. Overall, participants in this study expressed mostly positive attitudes toward the presence of HLLs in this Arabic classroom, with some hesitation on the presence of highly proficient HLLs.

Teacher’s beliefs

As an instructor, Steven admitted that he has, generally, had imprecise assumptions on the proficiency level of the HLLs and the reasons for which they enroll in the Arabic language course. He often thought that they were taking the class as an easy way to fulfil the General Education (GE) requirement. He explained that due to an inadequate placement strategy, he had some students whose level in Arabic was high enough to make them just sit there and watch, looking for an easy “A”. The presence of HLLs had often made him somewhat uncomfortable; he would automatically question their motivation and their proficiency level, as indicated in the following statement:

_Unconsciously, when I see Arabic names, I think may be these people should be teaching me instead me teaching them. They might be new comers or been here for generations— I don’t know._ However, with experience, he realized that many HLLs did not have enough knowledge of the language, and after a couple of weeks, he would determine their proficiency level; it “shows in their homework assignments and exams,” he uttered. He also found out that some of them enroll in the class in order to “reconnect with their heritage” and not just for an easy grade as he would initially speculate.
Concerning HLLs skills, Steven explained that HLLs who were fluent in speaking the language (Arabic), performed much better than FLLs in a group work that required mostly vocabulary skills, especially in beginner level classes. He also pointed out to situations when he had HLLs who had some previous knowledge of the formal Arabic language (Fus-ha), and should have been in a higher level course. He attributed that situation to inaccurate placement strategy on occasion as having HLLs with a noticeably high proficiency was not always the typical case, as he explained. Familiarity with the Arabic culture is another advantage that HLLs have over FLLs, as Steven uttered. “They come from different regions and….they can give their own input or perspective on this”.

To sum it up, Steven believes that an oral proficiency in the colloquial form of Arabic (‘Ammiyya), can be an advantage for HLLs in oral and listening activities, but not necessarily in written activities or grammar. Foreign Language Learners, who gradually learn all components of the language, typically do better in grammar, which involves learning the specific rules of the language, he added.

6.3 Answer to research question 3

RQ3. How can pedagogical choices affect classroom interaction?

The influence of contextual variables on learners’ contributions was undoubtedly present. The teacher’s pedagogical choices are essential contextual factors that have a significant influence on the interaction that takes place within the classroom as well as on
learners’ contributions. The nature of the language pedagogy applied in the foreign language classroom has the ability to provide opportunities for positive learners’ contributions as confirmed in the literature. On the other hand, straining those opportunities can limit those contributions, thus limiting language learning.

To answer this research question, it is important to revisit information related to the teacher’s profile and background (presented earlier in Chapter 4). Steven, is a graduate student (PhD) in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and is a FLL of Arabic. Teaching Arabic language classrooms was part of his assignment as a GTA. Assigning GTAs to teach foreign language classrooms is a common practice among many foreign language (FL) departments in universities across the country. As reported by Laurence (2001), a significant portion of GTAs was identified in FL programs which offer PhDs. Foreign language programs often have an obligation to fund their graduate students in one hand, and provide low-cost instruction in the other.

Steven was required to participate in a two-week training program prior to his assignment where he was introduced to different language teaching pedagogies; that was the only foreign language teaching training he received. It is a known fact that GTAs are unable to take additional pedagogy training because of the pressure to complete their own degree in a timely manner. The limited training and expertise in foreign language teaching have inevitably had an effect on Steven’s pedagogical choices in this Arabic language classroom.

The other factor that might have influenced pedagogical choices for this Arabic classroom was the fact that Steven was a non-native speaker of Arabic; in fact, through
his statements during the interview, he positioned himself as a learner of Arabic. Having a limited competency in the spoken language had resulted in his choice of rarely utilizing activities that require oral/communicative skills. Additionally, this fact also caused the frequent code switching while giving instructions, as evident by this study’s data (classroom observations and participant interviews).

Finding from the study clearly show that the instructor heavily relied on the textbook as a pedagogical tool. Explicit grammar instruction was a major part of the pedagogy applied by the instructor, and he frequently used the chalkboard to explain grammatical concepts.

The following is an evaluation of the book published in an article by Wahba & Chaker (2013) in which they offer an evaluation of approaches used in current Arabic textbooks:

Alif Baa and al-Kitaab: This series, consisting of four volumes (two of which are evaluated here), is designed to enable learners to reach an advanced level of proficiency. The first level consists of two books covering the first year of Arabic: Alif Baa and al-Kitaab Part I. The first book is intended to help the student learn to pronounce the sounds of Arabic, write its letters, and begin speaking, and the second is designed to build on the introductory book and further develop skills in MSA. Grammatical points are introduced in both texts gradually. Students are expected to prepare grammar outside of class, leaving class time to be devoted to the activation of vocabulary and the development of speaking (Wahba & Chaker, 2013, p. 114).

According to Wahba & Chaker, the publisher and authors do not indicate if the texts were actually tested before publication, but they do mention that “the philosophy guiding the materials is based on collective, long-term classroom experience and consultation with
various teachers” (2013, p.114). In general, the textbook focused on grammar concepts, vocabulary, listening (CDs), and some cultural knowledge. As can be concluded, instructors are expected to design activities to enhance the development of speaking and vocabulary skills.

6.3.1 Pedagogical choices and teacher’s Belief

Discussing pedagogical choices with Steven, he indicated that he had to follow the curriculum set by the department and did not have control in making curricular decisions or making major changes in the syllabus. The teacher’s belief influenced his or her pedagogical practices, and Steven felt that he just had to follow the syllabus. Glisan and Donato (2012) argue that any improvements to L2 instruction can only be made through “rigorous and thorough teacher preparation” and “by viewing the teacher as situated at the core of instruction” (p. s6). In this study, where the teacher was a GTA, it is assumed that such preparation would not be realistic.

Steven believed that grammar should be taught and explained by the teacher, and he often found this method to be effective with FLLs, but not so much with HLLs. As cited by Batstone (2012), scholars are increasingly acknowledging that instruction which focuses explicitly on individual grammatical forms is potentially effective (e.g., Klapper & Rees, 2003).

On the subject of teaching vocabulary, Steven admitted that he often found difficulty choosing the most effective method. Apparently, he considered that learning vocabulary was mostly the student’s responsibility and it was difficult to teach this component of the
language within the classroom context. He explained that he would put students in group and “give them conversation prompts” to focus on. He did not use this approach often during the term, as he stated. “I use activities like that may be a couple of times during the term”, he uttered.

Concerning the issue of interaction during group activities, Steven believes that it was the students’ choice whether to contribute to group activities or not. He feels that some students are shy and find it very hard to produce orally in the target language. For that reason, he believes that “leaving it right there” is the best approach fearing that pushing the students can be “a negative re-enforcement” and it might discourage them from learning the language.

*S: As a teacher, you want to make sure of what the students are comfortable with and that is not hurting their progress, whether they would be overly exuberant or reserved or passive. You have to adjust your strategy depending on different groups.*

Steven added that having smaller classroom, or a small number of students within the classroom, makes it easier for group activities and more interaction among students, as he has experienced.

Inquiring about the role of HLLs in group activities and whether he finds it helpful for facilitating the interaction when the activity involves vocabulary or cultural aspects of the language, Steven clarified his belief which is not pushing any student to do more than what they want to do. Most of the activities that took place during my observations were based on exercises in the textbook; those varied from grammar exercises to fill-in the blank vocabulary ones. The instructor would ask students to work.
on the activities in groups. What usually happened was that students would turn to a classmate sitting next to them or behind them. The instructor acknowledged that he did not always assign members into the group, but tried to intervene at times. During my observations, Steven arranged groups in a couple of instances, and observations showed that there was at least one student with a higher proficiency level in most of the groups. Students used English to communicate while working on the activities, and the instructor did not make it mandatory to use Arabic in the classroom. With respect to encouraging FLLs to seek out HLLs and not be shy about trying to interact, his response was that he considered it to be a kind of “negative reinforcement”.

Overall, Steven’s teaching strategy was mainly focused on covering the material assigned by the department for each specific course. He mostly relied on the textbook and the activities presented in it. He stated that teaching grammar is largely based on instructions given to students, while vocabulary acquisition is mainly the students’ responsibility. He firmly believed that pushing students to do activities they were not ready to do voluntarily would be a kind of “negative reinforcement” and he chose not to follow that approach in his teaching.

6.3.2 Pedagogical choices and students’ beliefs

In regard to student participants’ perspective on the pedagogical choices, they all expressed a desire to have more communicative activities. Caitlyn wished that teachers would do more activities that can help students develop their communicative skills in the
colloquial version. In a similar manner, Sofi stated that the teaching methodology should be more focused on speaking. “Focus more on speaking and doing things in a more repetitive ways so you keep doing it more until you get it completely”. With respect to group activities, Sofi thought that “teachers should definitely try to pair up students. She also believed that having a HLL speaker in the group would be beneficial for learning. HLLs have the background and the culture, as she exclaimed. Just like FLLs, both HLLs expressed their preference to more communicative activities within the classroom. Zain suggested that the teacher be more creative in designing group activities. “Extending beyond the book and being creative in terms of the group interaction tasks”, he further clarified. He cited a previous class where the instructor had communicative activities which involved role playing, song listening, and other interesting activities. In addition, “a conscious formation of groups-choosing students within groups” can be a good practice to enhance learning as he explained. In general, this HLL feels that interacting with other learners, including FLLs is beneficial for everyone.

Joelle also preferred more listening, speaking and comprehension activities in the classroom. She suggested the use of media sources as a learning tool to help with comprehension and oral skills. She felt that “completing homework was time consuming and overwhelming” and wished that the time was used for “more beneficial activities like media exposure”. Media sources allow for listening improvement and cultural awareness, in her opinion. To conclude, students’ perceptions on the effectiveness of the teaching instructions were evidently related to the learning outcomes they anticipated to attain by enrolling in the Arabic language classroom. Participants in this study expressed
different perspectives on the instructor’s profile, the instructional methods utilized, and the dynamics of the interaction that occurred in the classroom. Caitlyn, for instance, who previously had a native Arabic teacher in high school believed that native teachers were able to explain things and were helpful in terms of cultural aspects as well; she clearly had a preference for native teachers. “A non-native teacher does well explaining grammar, but not listening, writing, speaking, reading and interpreting”, she claimed. Moreover, Zain, Joelle, Caitlyn and Sofi stated that group activities were infrequent in this classroom, and Joelle, based on her past Arabic learning experience, felt that “group activities tend to decrease with higher level classes”. Consequently, interaction among students was minimal and limited to working on grammar and vocabulary exercises from the textbook. Caitlyn affirmed that “Tasks were not interactive or communicative; thus, the work was split-up among students”.

As the study’s data reveal, the only activity which entailed actual production of the language in a communicative way was the Oral Skit, an assignment listed in the syllabus (based on the department’s curriculum) as an end of term requirement. Sofi, Caitlyn, and Joelle expressed their fondness for that activity. That could be attributed to their desire to practice and improve their oral skills in Arabic. Using the language in real life situations, and being able to communicate in the colloquial, was the most important aspect of learning a language in Sofi’s opinion. “You need to speak it and be able to communicate…In classrooms, there should be a lot more communication. Everyone needs to be speaking and listening constantly… even if you’re learning grammar, you can still incorporate it into talking”, she further explained. Her statement indicates that she
was referring to the greater focus on grammar teaching, and her belief that communicative language teaching could still be utilized to learn grammar.

As discussed in the literature, interaction in the language classroom can be enhanced by designing task-based activities that require communicative and linguistic skills. Accordingly, well-chosen teaching strategies and materials can contribute to a more dynamic classroom environment where language learners interact and communicate in the target language more frequently. One of the most effective ways to promote language learning in the classroom context is through integrating communicative tasks as one pedagogical methodology. As can be deducted from students’ responses, their primary goal for learning the language was to be able to use it for communication with the target language community. Communicative tasks can inspire oral utterances and enhance interaction among students. Scholars who support such activities argue that they promote learning through comprehensible input and negotiation of meaning (Krashen, 1985; Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993).

6.4 Answer to research question 4

RQ4. What role does motivation play in the participation patterns of learners in the Arabic language classroom?

Many variables have been identified as having an influence on language learning, and among them are motivation, learner’s attributes, and learning contexts. Motivation,
defined as the driving factor that leads individuals to behave in a certain way within a particular situation, has been a focus of SLA research for many years. Initially, researchers have focused on the types of motivation that drive language learners to pursue learning a second language. In recent years L2 motivation researchers have widened the research on motivation and paid more attention to temporal and contextual variability (Ushioda and Dornyei, 2012). As a result, a socio-dynamic perspective on motivation is being discussed in the current literature.

Holding this perspective, “the investigation of contextual factors and individual-contextual interactions is likely to entail triangulation of multiple forms of data from diverse points of view,” (Ushioda and Dornyei, 2012, p.402). This study’s data was collected from classroom observations, students and teacher’s interviews. Classroom observations, however, provided limited data on Arabic learners’ behaviors within the classroom; the semi-structured interviews elicited more in-depth data as participants self-reported on their motivation and their engagement during their Arabic language learning process. Students’ beliefs and attitudes, along with their behaviors within the learning context (classroom) demonstrate the situated complexity of L2 motivation.

The connection between participants’ initial motivation and the way in which that motivation is displayed in the Arabic classroom context will be examined. Making this connection helps “to clarify the conceptual distinction between motivation to engage in L2 learning (choices, reasons, goals, decisions), and motivation during engagement -how one feels, behaves, and responds during the process of learning” (Ushioda and Dornyei, 2012, p. 397).
Participants’ motivations to study Arabic were presented in earlier chapters (chapters Four & Five) where Arabic learners unveiled information about factors that motivated them to learn the language.

Although all participants in this study believed that learning Arabic could help them to secure good careers in the future, the students’ primary motivation was their interest in learning Arabic (FLLs) or their pride in their heritage and a need to reconnect with their roots (HLLs). The teacher, on the other hand, stated that his primary reason for learning Arabic was securing a career, but he also expressed an interest in Arabic and an intention to help foster cross-cultural communication. Therefore, all participants had a combination of integrative and instrumental motivation, with integrative being the principal motivating factor for students, and instrumental for the teacher (Steven).

Motivation, however, is not linear or stable but rather a complex and dynamic concept that is influenced by different factors throughout the learning process. Examining the role of motivation in learners’ participation decisions within the classroom context, the dynamic system framework is adopted. This framework entails an integration of internal motivational factors along with other contextual factors that shape the process of SLA. It builds on the situated analysis of motivation, which takes into account the fluctuating nature of motivation during the learning process and focuses on the interaction between contextual factors and personal motivational cognitions of the learners (Dornyei, 2002, 2009; Dornyei and Tseng, 2009; Ushioda and Dornyei, 2012).
6.4.1 Motivation and contextual factors: teacher, peers, and pedagogy

Teachers play an essential role in creating an effective learning environment within the classroom. In addition, the way students’ perceive their teacher’s effectiveness impacts their motivation to engage in the learning. When given a chance to voice their beliefs and concerns about their Arabic classroom experience, participants expressed their views on the issue of having a non-native teacher. The two FLLs (Caitlyn and Sofi), in addition to the HLL who is not a native speaker, Joelle, expressed a preference for teachers who are Native Speakers (NS). They perceived that NSs have more ability to explain language and cultural concepts. Having a NS teacher seemed to enhance those learners’ motivation and encourage them to engage in learning. Caitlyn, for instance, who started studying Arabic in high school, expressed her liking of her Egyptian teacher at the time, and confirmed the role that feeling played in her decision to study Arabic in college. All learners were highly satisfied with grammar instructions, but mentioned that code switching and using English in the classroom had negatively affected their oral competency in Arabic. The use of English was a common practice by most students in the classroom as well. Caitlyn indicated that the use of English during group activities was a draw back and had negatively affected her motivation to participate.

Proficiency differences have been discussed as one of the influential factors in the nature of peer-peer interaction and language learning (Kowal & Swain, 1994, 1997; Leeser, 2004; Watanabe and Swain, 2008). Kowal and Swain (1994, 1997) stated that extreme proficiency differences may actually hinder collaborative pair interaction. Based
on this study’s findings, proficiency differences among students not only discouraged collaboration, but also affected motivation. Sofi, Caitlyn, and Joelle expressed their frustration with the proficiency gaps that existed in the classroom and conveyed the negative impact of that situation on their willingness to engage in group activities, and accordingly on their learning.

This Arabic classroom consisted of diverse types of learners (see chart in chapter 3) whose proficiency levels varied significantly as stated by participants and confirmed by classroom observations. For example, there were two female HLLs who were native speakers of Arabic and had a higher degree of proficiency in the language (based on observations). Additionally, there were a couple of FLLs who were “just good at learning languages” and were considered to be more proficient in Arabic as Sofi, Caitlyn, and Joelle all exclaimed. Those perceived differences in proficiency levels resulted in Joelle, Caitlyn, and Sofi’s decreasing motivation to engage in group activities.

Caitlyn believed that there was a separation among the different types of learners in the classroom; that separation had negatively impacted collaboration and real interaction among students during classroom activities. She also referred to the varying “interests” of students in terms of contributing to group activities; in fact, she perceived a lack of interest among many to participate and collaborate which affected her own motivation to engage in group activities. Her belief had clearly inhibited her engagement in group activities, as she stated her preference to work alone. Researchers have investigated the role of emotional engagement in group activities (e.g., Pietarinin et al.,
2014) and found that, most of the time, emotional engagement contributes to cognitive engagement in tasks and activities in the classroom as well as in the learning outcomes.

Many of the pedagogical choices utilized in the classroom did not align with participants’ goals and expectations. Caitlyn, Sofi, and Joelle expressed their desire to improve their Arabic speaking skill. Speaking the language was a priority for them, and they were concerned because of the scarcity of communicative activities that can help them develop their oral and communicative skills. As a matter of fact, Joelle liked the Oral Skit activity that was required at the end of the semester and wished there were more activities that entailed speaking and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, all four participants stated that group activities were not commonly assigned in the classroom, and that most of them did not require actual communication. Classroom observations confirmed that most assigned activities were based on solving grammar exercises (verb conjugation) or explicit fill in the blank vocabulary exercises from the textbook.

As clearly indicated in these findings, students’ dissatisfaction with the instructional methods resulted in a decreased level of motivation during the learning situation.

Although the degree of contextual factors’ influence on motivation could not be overtly measured, their impact on participants’ willingness and motivation to engage in the learning during classroom activities was inevitable.
6.4.2 Personal motivational cognitions: attitudes, beliefs, and conceptualization of own ability (self-efficacy)

In general, all language learners who participated in this study began learning Arabic with passion, curiosity and interest in the language and culture. Therefore, their attitude could be categorized as positive. The positive attitude tended to fluctuate and their interest decreased at some points during their learning process, depending on the situation of the learning and their cognition of their efficacy at those times, as the study’s data revealed. A number of scholars have provided insights on the ways through which language learners rationalize negative or positive outcomes in their learning experience and how their perceptions form ensuing engagement in the learning (Ushioda, 1996a, 2001; Williams and Burden, 1999). Moreover, factors such as sense of self-efficacy and positive teacher feedback are recognized to be enhancing while other factors such as competitive pressures are known to be inhibiting, as Ushioda and Dornyei (2012) reported. I further add that disappointments and resentments toward administrative practices and pedagogical choices can be inhibiting to students’ motivation and thus engagement during the learning situation.

Four out of five of the participants in this study believed that proficiency gaps among students were highly present in the classroom. The students felt that the department’s placement procedures were not adequate and resulted in unfair placement of Arabic students in Arabic foreign language classes. That was one of the factors that caused students’ lack of motivation to engage in group activities.
In regard to self-efficacy, it appears that a high degree of self-efficacy can positively impact a student’s motivation to engage in group activities, and the opposite would be true. Zain felt proud and confident in his oral skills, even though his proficiency in the colloquial version was not always helpful in completely understanding *Fus-ha* (formal version). That perception of efficacy encouraged him to participate in group activities, especially when they required vocabulary and comprehension. Thus, a high degree of self-efficacy can positively motivate students’ participation and engagement.

Unlike Zain, Joelle experienced challenges in the Arabic classroom. Initially, Joelle’s attitude toward learning Arabic was a positive one, and she was greatly motivated to master the language of her ancestors. However, she experienced a drawback when she faced difficulties in the classroom, and felt that her proficiency level was lower than many of her classmates. That appeared to negatively impact her participation in group activities—she would just sit and watch sometimes, as she admitted.

Caitlyn was highly interested in learning Arabic, with a strong desire to develop communicative competency in the target language. However, she developed a negative attitude toward participating in group activities as a result of her disappointment in pedagogical practices and the lack of interest and collaboration among peers in the classroom, as she perceived it. Sofi acknowledged that she did not talk in class, and just sat and looked at the book. She perceived the ability to speak Arabic as her biggest weakness, and that perception could have affected her participation decisions in the classroom. In short, research data revealed that a student’s conceptualization of their own
competency in Arabic had an influence on their classroom participation and interaction, especially during group activities.

Steven’s choices of instructional methods and the frequent use of English during the class could be attributed to low confidence in his oral competency in Arabic. In addition, his initial attitude toward the presence of HLLs in the classroom seemed to reflect a low degree of self-efficacy, most likely in terms of speaking and cultural skills. This was clear when he stated that “they can probably teach me”. He would soon discover that not all HLLs have high proficiency in the language, as he explained. He apparently disliked having HLLs who were proficient and native speakers of Arabic. Apparently, this situation adversely affected his motivation to teach those students as he felt that their motivation for being in the class was just getting an “A” and satisfying their General Education Curriculum (GEC) requirement. Being a non-native speaker of Arabic himself caused him to feel somewhat uncomfortable teaching a class with highly competent HLLs. Steven’s competency and confidence in his Arabic grammar skills were reflected in his effective and detailed grammar instructions.

To conclude, learners’ motivation during the situated learning experiences played a significant role in their decisions to engage in activities within the classroom context. Positive motivational factors, such as confidence in own ability (self-efficacy) often resulted in more engagement while negative factors led to withdrawal from participation for the most part.
6.5 Summary of findings

The aim of this study was to investigate whether the interaction among different types of learners in the Arabic language classroom had any benefits on the language learning within the classroom context. Prior to my data collection phase, I expected to find a lot of interaction among students and be able to hear the talk that took place in the classroom. I planned to analyze the HLL-FLL talk and examine whether any kind of learning would have occurred. However, my classroom observations revealed that the interaction among learners was minimal, and I soon discovered that there were many factors that affected the dynamics of the interaction in the classroom. Accordingly, the study’s focus has shifted toward an investigation of the factors that affected the participation patterns and interaction in the classroom. Even though classroom observations were conducted, most of my data came from participant interviews as discussed in previous chapters; the data provided a deep insight into the influential factors that played a role in the interaction dynamics as perceived by participants.

This study adopted the SCT, developed by Vygotsky and his colleagues (Vygotsky, 1978), as the overarching theoretical framework. Classrooms are viewed as social settings where students from different backgrounds meet and interact on a regular basis while going through the process of learning. Sociocultural theorists view interaction as a social practice which allows learners to negotiate and construct meaning. Moreover, with this theoretical framework, it is believed that knowledge is constructed when learners interact and collaborate with more capable individuals (ZPD). Hence, learning occurs through the process of mediation where knowledge is shaped and advanced by the
use of cultural tools such as language (e.g., Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The importance of interaction in language classrooms is emphasized by many SLA scholars who explicitly take social context into account. With this perspective, the language learner is viewed as a social being whose cognitive processing of the L2 is affected by social interactions and social relationships with others, including those others who provide L2 input and corrective feedback.

The present study’s findings displayed that there was some interaction among Arabic learners, and it took place during paired and group activities assigned by the teacher. All observed activities, except for the final oral skit preparation, were focused on solving grammar and vocabulary exercises. The patterns of interaction were in the form of vocabulary checking, grammar negotiation, and answer confirmation. Although students were expected to work with a partner or within a group, they seemed to work independently from one another and then confirmed their answers with their peers. It is unclear whether any kind of learning could have occurred during those limited incidents of interaction, especially that English was the dominant language used in classroom discourse. Moreover, findings from this study revealed that the interaction between HLLs and FLLs did not spontaneously take place as I presumed; that could be attributed to various factors discussed as emerged themes in earlier sections.

The presence of Arabic HLLs in the classroom was another focus for this study. Many scholars in the field of language education (e.g., Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Lee, 2005; Valdes, 2005) have discussed possible differences
between heritage language learners (HLLs) and foreign language learners (FLLs) in terms of background knowledge, language skills, culture familiarity, motivation, and other factors which categorize HLLs as a distinctive class of learners. The role of HLLs in the interaction and learning process was examined closely with the assumption that this group of learners can be a unique and valuable resource in the language classroom. Results from this study indicated that although FLLs perceived a potential benefit to HLLs’ presence, challenges appeared to be more prevalent. First, HLLs were perceived to have separated themselves from peers in the classroom. Second, the presence of HLLs who were native speakers of Arabic, and had a higher proficiency levels, resulted in causing intimidation on the part of FLLs and the non-Arabic speaker HLL. Third, it was clear that learners’ personalities played an influential role in the dynamics of interaction between the different groups of learners. Fourth, the type of assigned activities in the classroom did not enhance communication among the learners. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the teacher indicated that the classroom size impacted the interaction among students in his opinion. He believed that smaller classrooms had often entailed a greater degree of interaction.

The study’s findings revealed that HLLs with high proficiency in the language tended to create their own communities of practice within the classroom; they seemed to have drawn boundaries around their community and separated themselves from peers. Reasons are not clear and the limited scope of this study, including participation decisions, did not allow for further investigation. I speculate, however, that various
factors such as motivation, identity, personality, pedagogy, and/or classroom environment could have played a role. On the contrary, HLLs whose competency was comparable to other FLLs, except for speaking and comprehension skills, seemed to be willing to interact with peers, and even willing to assist when possible. Thus, based on these findings, we can assume that the higher the proficiency of the HLL, the less willing the learner was to interact and assist others in the classroom.

The study has shown that individual learner characteristics and beliefs can determine their classroom participation decisions. For example, a learner’s linguistic background, identity position, personality traits, attitude toward classroom activities, self-efficacy and motivation are significant factors that have an undeniable impact on learners’ interaction behavior.

Finally, an additional significant finding from this study was that factors such as the nature of assigned tasks, the proficiency gaps among learners, and the separation that existed in the classroom were found to negatively impact learners’ motivation to participate in classroom activities. The following chart is a summary of factors that were found to impact the interaction in the classroom.
6.6 Implications

Arabic is the fastest growing language in the United States as reported by a number of published reports. A study by the Pew Research Center (Richards, 2016) reports that the number of Arabic speakers in the United States has grown by 29% between 2010 and 2014. In fact, data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that the number of Arabic speakers has nearly doubled in that period, increasing from 615,000 in 2010 to 1.1 million by 2014. Additionally, Ortman and Shin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) projected the number of Arabic speakers to increase from 1.6% in 2010 to 1.8% in 2020. This number can be even larger as a result of the recent immigration of refugees from war-torn Arab countries such as Iraq and Syria within the last few years.

The above statistics indicate that the number of Arabic HLLs in Arabic foreign language classrooms at U.S colleges and universities will continue to grow in the near
future. Accordingly, Arabic departments and Arabic teachers need to be aware of different issues related to this considerably recent phenomenon. Research in the field of language education in general, and heritage language education, in particular, has mostly addressed topics related to HLLs profiles, linguistic abilities, and needs. This study builds on findings from current research and sheds light on unique issues related to Arabic HLLs in the foreign language classrooms in the U.S. Moreover, most of the published research is focused on Spanish learners-- in addition to limited research on Japanese and Chinese HLLs -- as a review of the literature revealed.

Few studies discuss topics pertaining to the interaction in the classroom between HLLs and FLLs or investigate factors that enhance or limit such interaction. Furthermore, little research can be found on Arabic heritage learners even though the presence of HLLs in Arabic language classroom has been steadily increasing. The scarcity of research on Arabic HLLs was a motivating factor for initiating this study and exploring issues concerning the presence of this group of learners in the classroom.

Little research has offered in-depth analysis of how FLLs perceive their peer's proficiency level, and how their perceptions impact the nature of interaction and language learning – none on Arabic language learners. Evidence from the present research shows that significant proficiency differences among learners can negatively affect the interaction process. This finding is in line with Kowal and Swain’s (1994, 1997) statement that extreme proficiency differences may hinder collaborative pair interaction.
Although this study has conservatively shed light on the Arabic teacher’s beliefs and attitudes on aspects related to the teaching practices and the presence of HLLs in the classroom, it is the only study that has touched on this issue. A review of the literature revealed that there were no studies that attempted to closely explore Arabic teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward the presence of Arabic HLLs in the Arabic foreign language classroom. A few studies, however, surveyed Arabic teachers and provided an analysis of teacher profiles, perspectives and needs on issues like institutional settings, demographics of learners, professional attitudes, needs, and opportunities (Belnap, 1995; Al-Batal, 2011-2012).

### 6.7 Pedagogical Implications

Findings from this study revealed that the interaction between HLLs and FLLs did not naturally take place as presumed. This research identified a number of factors that negatively affected the interaction in the classroom. Some of the factors were cognitive in nature while others were contextual. In general, it is believed that language teachers have the ability to control contextual factors by following specific strategies in their classrooms. Thus, the teacher’s role is essential for promoting and facilitating interaction in the classroom.

First, I begin by identifying some of the factors, and then propose suggestions that can help language educators facilitate the interaction among students, and consequently, contribute to developing the language learning in an effective way.
Separation among learners

- Get to know your students and allow them to know each other by designing Ice-breaker activities in the first few sessions of the academic term. Activities that entail sharing information about backgrounds, strengths and weaknesses as language learners, learning goals, and other similar topics can certainly create a positive classroom environment and minimize any hostility that can be created by false perceptions of the other in the classroom. Such activities can foster social relations among various students in the classroom and enhance students’ engagement in the learning.

- Design in-class communicative activities that allow interaction among students. Mix up groups of learners and try to include a HLL in each group. Role playing activities, for example, are always fun and allow communication among students. Also, try to enforce the use of Arabic when working on such activities.

- Create out-of-class activities (projects) and intently choose group members. Try to mix up the groups, including diverse types of learners in each group. Connecting HLLs with their communities is an important practice in heritage language education, and it provides a venue for FLLs to gain cultural awareness and practice their speaking in the target language. Example of activities: Community visits/ Refugee organizations/ volunteering opportunities at community centers/ poetry reading groups/ review media sources and share current news – research Arabic music, and other activities.
**Proficiency gaps**

We need to closely look at placement procedures. As Sturman (1996) asserts, “Registration and placement procedures, and the way they are administered, are strongly associated with students’ degree of satisfaction with the schools, the teachers, and the lessons” (p. 338). Thus, placement procedures should be reevaluated by the Arabic department. Placing Arabic learners in appropriate levels is crucial for a positive learning experience within the classroom, as findings indicated. I suggest that the department adopt a standard assessment tool to evaluate the proficiency levels of learners and place them in the appropriate classroom. Appendix E provides a list of professional language education organizations and programs, and a few of them offer standard assessment tools.

**Lack of frequent and clear input**

Most scholars in the field of language teaching and learning agree on the importance of using the target language in the classroom. Language learners need to be exposed to the target language and receive a clear input in order for learning to take place. According to Krashen (1980; 1989), articulate teacher talk is crucial to language learning within the classroom. The importance of comprehensible and clear input in teaching Arabic was also discussed by Al Hawari (2013) who argued that the clarity and frequency of input are among essential guiding principle for Arabic language acquisition. This study examined the Arabic teacher’s discourse and investigated learners’ perception on this topic. It was found that the instructor was code-switching most of the time, with English being the dominant language for communication within the classroom. The lack
of frequent and clear input in the target language resulted in a decline in FLLs speaking skills, as perceived by the learners. This finding should be an eye opener for language teachers, and recommendations to resolve this issue will be discussed (based on the speculated cause).

*The nativeness issue*

This study gave students a space to express their beliefs and perceptions, in addition to allowing them to voice their concerns and needs. Findings revealed that the FLLs had a strong desire to develop their Arabic speaking skills and be able to communicate with people from the target language. In addition, FLLs in this study, expressed a preference for a native speaker teacher.

Does that mean that all Arabic teachers should be native speakers? Not necessary, and not realistic, in my opinion. In reality, many Arabic language teachers in colleges and universities across the U.S. don’t have a native or native-like proficiency in the language. However, it is worth noting that the nativeness of the language teacher is a controversial issue, especially when it entails teaching HLLs. A study by Beaudrie (2009) examined Spanish HLLs preferences and found that most students did not seem to have a strong preference for a specific background of the teacher whereas Hancock (2002) found that Spanish HLLs had a preference for Native Spanish teachers.

Whether the teacher is a NS or NNS, the need to provide opportunities for clear and frequent input in Arabic is critical, and the role of the teacher in providing those opportunities is crucial. NNS Arabic teachers can find ways to resolve the situation by
finding alternative avenues for students to receive clear and native-like input in the target language. Here, I offer a number of suggestions to address this issue:

First, teachers can encourage students to be autonomous and effectively direct them when seeking opportunities to develop their speaking skills. As a study by Samimy (2008) revealed, an adult Arabic FLL was able to achieve advanced oral proficiency by following specific strategies and immersing himself in the language.

Second, teachers can design communicative activities in the classroom, and purposefully include a HLL in each group when possible. Most HLLs have a native-like proficiency in spoken Arabic, and their pronunciation would be close to the target language. Interaction with peers who are more proficient in speaking should be advantageous. Based on the Interaction theory (Long, 1981; 1996) and Vygotsky’s SCT (1978), language-related discussions in social interaction can provide learning opportunities for language learners. HLLs can provide the scaffolding needed to improve the learning of the less proficient learners (ZPD).

Third, I recommend that Arabic departments hire two instructors to co-teach the class; by doing so, they can efficiently use teachers’ skills in different courses. If one teacher is a NNS, the second instructor should be a NS or have a native-like proficiency in speaking. If the class meets four times a week, the NNS teacher can focus on teaching grammar two times a week while the co-teacher can focus on designing communicative language activities where students get the chance to practice their oral skills and learn about the culture of the target language. Recently learned grammar concepts can also be
integrated in the communicative activities. This can be done twice a week and can be called “Recitation” or “Arabic Clinic”. Although this suggestion sounds challenging, I believe that with careful preparation and design, it can be implemented.

In addition, and in order for students to improve their oral skills in the target language, weekly conversation tables need to be planned and run by both instructors teaching the course. The meetings don’t need to be mandatory, but teachers can offer incentives for students who attend. For example, if a student attends at least five conversation table meetings during the semester, their final grade in the course can improve by one level (A- → A, or B+ → A-, etc.). This way, Arabic instructors provide opportunities for learners to practice their speaking in an informal setting that allows for interaction among students. Discussion topics could focus on different contemporary and critical issues and can also include topics related to the target language (Political issues in the Middle East- Celebrations in the Arab world- famous poets and writers in the Middle East- famous musicians and singers, etc.).

The nature of assigned tasks

An analysis of this study’s results revealed that the nature of the assigned group tasks play a role in the dynamics of interaction. Most of the group/pair activities entailed solving grammar exercises or fill in the blank vocabulary exercises. This type of activities, as the study exposed, did not require much communication among students; as a matter of facts, most students worked on the exercises independently, and minimal negotiation took place.
In order to enhance the interaction and promote the use of the target language, task-based and communicative activities should be utilized. It might be unrealistic to expect GTAs to develop many activities due to the time constraints and the pressure on them to complete their own school work. Department coordinators should assist in providing pedagogical materials to GTAs in this case. Furthermore, Arabic departments should provide opportunities for language teacher’ training on a regular basis. Proper teacher training is essential to improve the quality of education. Teachers need to be trained not only on pedagogical methods, but also on issues related to understanding learners and establishing positive environments in the classroom.

*Teacher training and development*

Proper teacher training is vital for the improvement of language teaching and learning. Nowadays, Arabic teachers are faced with the challenge of having diverse types of students in their classrooms. As noted earlier, Arabic classrooms often include FLLs, HLLs, and other (non-Arab Muslim) learners. These learners have different backgrounds and different linguistic skills. Therefore, teachers need the proper training to deal with this diversity in their classroom and build on the resources brought into the classroom. There are a number of professional organizations that offer online and regular training workshops for language teacher training (see Appendix E), and programs are encouraged to provide such opportunities for teachers.
Finally, fostering positive intercultural attitudes is an important aspect in learning languages; with the negative connotation surrounding the Arabic language, this becomes a crucial aspect. As language teachers, we are responsible to help language learners in learning both the language system and the cultural context where language skills could be applied. Cross-cultural awareness should be one of the goals for language teaching.

To sum up, as educators and scholars in the field of Teaching and Learning, we need to realize the fundamental role of teachers in the language classroom. We further need to critically recognize the role of students in the teaching and learning process, and devotedly believe that they are a crucial factor for this process to be successful. Knowing who the students are and designing activities that accommodate their learning needs is important. We also need to support learners and give them space to express their voice and question teaching practices in different educational settings. Finally, we should allow students to be active participants in leading changes and developments of the curriculum and teaching practices in the language classroom.

6.8 Limitations of the study

This study is qualitative in nature, and the data were collected from classroom observations and participants’ interviews. In this section, I acknowledge a number of limitations for this study.

First, it is important to note that time constrains, and permission to access the site allowed for a limited number of classroom observations (four observations).
Second, the study was confined to a beginner-intermediate level Arabic classroom situated in a large mid-western university in the United States. Therefore, participants’ attitudes and perceptions might not represent those of other populations.

Third, findings were based on a limited number of site observations and the perceptions of a small number of participants. Although many attempts were made to interview more Arabic HLLs, only two agreed to the interviews-- one of them was a third generation Arab and was not a speaker of Arabic. Therefore, her linguistic background and her beliefs may not be similar to those of a “typical HLL”.

6.9 Suggestions for future research

The Arabic language classroom is a context that is truly understudied. As previously mentioned, the number of Arabic language classrooms has increased significantly in the last decade, and there is a crucial need for more research in this area in order to uncover different issues related to this context. Research can provide various insights to Arabic language educators and administrators, who can then work on improving the learning and teaching process of this critically needed language.

To begin with, future research can be conducted to expand on some of the topics brought out in this study. For example, it would be interesting to investigate and compare the participation patterns and beliefs of two groups of HLLs: one with a high level of proficiency in the language, and another with a lower proficiency. Additionally,
Future studies to explore learners’ motivations before and after studying Arabic, and investigate the factors that impacted changes, if any, would be valuable. Surveys, along with participant interviews can be utilized for data collection. Participants should be a mix of different types of learners- FLLs, HLLs, and Other learners (those with religious affiliation to Arabic).

It would also be interesting to conduct a study to measure the effects of interaction on the learning development of HLLs and FLLs by focusing on a group of learners and designing specific communicative activities for the group (implement interventions). Evaluate learners’ skills before and after the intervention. The span of the study should be a complete semester (about 16 weeks).

Finally, it is worthwhile to explore Arabic teachers’ beliefs on various issues, including language learners profiles and skills, pedagogical choices, curriculum design, and teacher training. Data can be collected via surveys and interviews. In addition, the researcher should include both NS teachers and NNS teachers, and compare findings.

6.10 Conclusion

The number of Arabic HLLs in Arabic foreign language classrooms at U.S colleges and universities is expected to grow in the near future. Additionally, the fact that Arabic is categorized as a critical need language by the U.S. Department of State, the number of FLLs interested in learning Arabic has also increased, and more universities and colleges across the U.S. are offering Arabic language classrooms. Most of these classrooms are likely to include both HLLs and FLLs. Accordingly, Arabic language
educators ought to understand the different linguistic and cultural profiles of HLLs and build upon the knowledge brought by this group of learners into the classroom and view it as a unique learning resource that FLLs can have access to and can benefit from. In order for that to happen, learners in the classroom need to get familiar with each other and have opportunities to interact and communicate. Activities that involve interaction need to be designed by language teachers whose pedagogical choices unquestionably help initiate and enhance interaction in the classroom.

A particular noteworthy finding from this study was students’ concerns about the appropriateness of Arabic learners’ placement procedures. All participants believed that proficiency gaps were highly present in the classroom and attributed that to inappropriate placement procedures implemented by the department. We need to closely look at placement procedures. According to Sturman (1996), “Registration and placement procedures, and the way they are administered, are strongly associated with students’ degree of satisfaction with the schools, the teachers, and the lessons” (p. 338).

As previously noted, this classroom included students from different backgrounds. Having diverse classrooms pose an additional challenge to the teacher. Teachers need to understand their students’ backgrounds and needs and set specific strategies to enhance the interaction and the learning within the classroom. This could be achieved by teacher development programs and workshops where teachers receive the proper training to deal with such situations.
Evidence from this research showed that pedagogical methods utilized by the teacher had a significant effect on the dynamics of the interaction in the classroom. This finding illuminated the critical issue of language teacher’s training and development.

To sum up, the main topic investigated in this study is the interaction between HLLs and FLLs in the classroom and its impact on the learning process. Data analysis, however, unveiled a number of emergent themes related to various issues that affect interaction among learners in the Arabic language classrooms. This study shed light on influential factors in the process of interaction in the classroom and provided suggestions for Arabic language professionals who persistently attempt to improve the learning of their students. In addition, the study brought about students’ voices and suggestions on ways to manage the diversity in the classroom and provide a successful learning experience to all learners in the classroom.


275


279


Appendix A: Background Questionnaire

Name: _____________________________

2. Telephone number or e-mail: _________________________________________

3. Age: ______________

4. Gender (circle one): Male / Female

5. Major: __________________________ Minor: __________________________

6. College Rank: __________ (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate)

7. Country of origin: _____________________

8. If you were not born in the U.S., how long have you lived in the U.S. for?
   __________

9. First language: _____________________ If Arabic, which dialect?
   _____________________

10. Where are your parents/caregivers from?
    Mother: ______________ Father: ______________

11. Languages mostly used at home (in order of frequency):

    a. _____________________
    b. _____________________
    c. _____________________

12. Growing up, was Arabic media (Television/Radio/Other) utilized at home?
    Yes / No

13. At what age did you first begin to learn Arabic? _______________ Spoken
    _______________ Written

14. Length of formal Arabic learning experience (Modern Standard Arabic; Fus-ha):
    _____________________
15. Do you currently use Arabic outside the classroom? Yes / No (circle one)
a. If yes, informal or formal version of Arabic? ____________________

16. Rate your current overall language ability in ARABIC:

1 = understand but cannot speak
2 = understand and can speak with great difficulty
3 = understand and speak but with some difficulty
4 = understand and speak comfortably, with little difficulty
5 = understand and speak fluently like a native speaker

17. How would you rate your language ability in the following skills? (Circle one for each skill)
   a. Listening: Excellent / Good / Fair / Poor
   b. Speaking: Excellent / Good / Fair / Poor
   c. Reading: Excellent / Good / Fair / Poor
   d. Writing: Excellent / Good / Fair / Poor
   e. Grammar: Excellent / Good / Fair / Poor

18. What would you like to improve about your Arabic language ability?
____________________________________________________________

19. In your opinion, how can you improve your Arabic language ability? Explain briefly.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

20. What is your purpose for learning Arabic?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B: CONSENT FORM I- Classroom Observations

Consent
IRB Protocol Number:
Behavioral/Social Sciences
IRB Approval date:                                Version:

The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Title of Project: Classroom discourse in an Arabic foreign language classroom and the benefits of interactions among learners: A case study of college-level Heritage Language Learners (HLLs) and Foreign Language Learners (FLLs).

Investigator: Manal Habbal, PhD student at The Ohio State University

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:

My name is Manal Habbal and I am a doctoral student in the School of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University and currently working on a research project that explores issues related to the language learning process and specifically examines interaction among learners in the Arabic language classroom. For my project, I hope to interview students who are heritage language learners and others who are foreign language learners in order to gain a better understanding on how they value interaction within the classroom context. I also hope to explore their beliefs on other issues related to the language learning process.
A heritage language learner is basically a learner who was raised in a home where the heritage language was spoken by family members, and who understands or speaks the language with varying degrees of proficiency.

A foreign language learner is a language learner who has no previous experience or exposure to the language and does not come from a family that has any connections to the language.

I will be conducting observations where a video camera and an audio recorder are used to record activities going on during group work.

**Duration:**

A total of four observations, at different times, are to be expected. You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating, there will be no penalty to you and your decision will not affect your current or future relationship with The Ohio State University.

**Confidentiality:**

Your name and identifying information will be kept confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices.

Any information you provide will be used solely for the purpose of this research project and will not have any effect on your class evaluation by any means. After observations and questionnaires are collected, you will have the right to read and review them if you choose to do so.

**Incentives:**

There will be no monetary incentives for participating in this study; future educational benefits for Arabic language learners can be an indirect incentive for your participation.

**Participant Rights:**

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your grades in any way.
If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about this form or the project itself, please ask me now and I will do my best to clarify things further. If questions or concerns come up later, you can discuss them with me. If you prefer to speak to someone else in the department, you can contact my advisor Dr. Keiko Samimy at the following email address: samimy.2@osu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

Signing the consent form:

I have read this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject: ______________________________________

Signature: ____________________          Date and Time: _____________ AM/PM

Investigator/Research Staff
I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant.

Printed name of person obtaining consent: ______________________________

Signature of person obtaining consent: ______________________________

Date and Time: _____________________________ AM/PM

Thank you for your participation!

Manal Habbal
Doctoral Student in Foreign & Second Language Education
The Ohio State University
School of Teaching & Learning
Email: habbal.1@osu.edu
Appendix C: CONSENT FORM II- Interviews

Consent
Behavioral/Social Sciences

The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Title of Project: Classroom discourse in an Arabic foreign language classroom and the benefits of interactions among learners: A case study of college-level Heritage Language Learners (HLLs) and Foreign Language Learners (FLLs).

Investigator: Manal Habbal, PhD student at The Ohio State University

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:

My name is Manal Habbal and I am a doctoral student in the School of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University and currently working on a research project that explores issues related to the language learning process and specifically examines interaction among learners in the Arabic language classroom. For my project, I hope to interview students who are heritage language learners and others who are foreign language learners in order to gain a better understanding on how they value interaction within the classroom context. I also hope to explore their beliefs on other issues related to the language learning process.

A heritage language learner is basically a learner who was raised in a home where the heritage language was spoken by family members, and who understands or speaks the language with varying degrees of proficiency.

A foreign language learner is a language learner who has no previous experience or exposure to the language and does not come from a family that has any connections to the language.
I would like to invite you to talk to me about topics related to the language learning process within the classroom context. You will get the chance to bring up any ideas related to the language learning and interaction among peers. If you are interested in being interviewed by me, we can set up a time and place that are at your convenience. The questions I intend to ask elaborate around the following topics:

- How and when you decided to learn the language
- How do you interact in your language classroom
- How you decide to participate during communicative exercises
- How do you perceive the value of group work
- How do you evaluate your language proficiency level

Duration:

Each interview should last 45 minutes to an hour and will be audio-recorded. A total of two interviews, at different times, are to be expected. You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Confidentiality:

Your name and identifying information will be kept confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups:

• Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
• The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices.

Any information you provide will be used solely for the purpose of this research project and will not have any effect on your class evaluation by any means. After interviews are transcribed, you will have the right to read and review them if you choose to do so.

Incentives:

Participants will be given a $30 gift card to Target stores.

Participant Rights:
You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your grades in any way.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study. An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about this form or the project itself, please ask me now and I will do my best to clarify things further. If questions or concerns come up later, you can discuss them with me. If you prefer to speak to someone else in the department, you can contact my advisor Dr. Keiko Samimy at the following email address: samimy.2@osu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

Signing the consent form:

I have read this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject: _______________________________________

Signature: ______________________          Date and Time: _____________ AM/PM

Investigator/Research Staff
I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant.

Printed name of person obtaining consent: ________________________________

Signature of person obtaining consent: _________________________________

Date and Time:______________________________ AM/PM

Thank you for your participation!

Manal Habbal  
Doctoral Student in Foreign & Second Language Education  
The Ohio State University  
School of Teaching & Learning  
Email: habbal.1@osu.edu
Appendix D: A sample of interview questions

1. When did you decide to study Arabic formally (in school/college)?

2. Why did you decide to study Arabic?

3. As a language learner, what are your strengths and weaknesses, in your opinion?

4. Are there any specific challenges for you as an Arabic heritage/foreign language learner?

5. How do you feel about group work in the classroom?

6. Do you usually feel that there is a difference in the proficiency levels among your peers?

7. Have you always had a mix of foreign language learners and heritage language learners in your group?

8. Do you find any differences in terms of the effectiveness of the group work when you have a mixed population of learners (HLLs and FLLs)?

9. How is the pattern of interaction determined by your group?

10. Do you feel that every student contribute to the group work?

11. Do you believe that group work is effective in terms of developing your language skills? Which skills specifically?

12. How do you feel about the presence of heritage language learners in the foreign language classroom? Any suggestions?
Appendix E: Resources for Arabic Teachers and Administrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Association of Teachers of Arabic</td>
<td>• <strong>Journal</strong>: Al ‘Arabiyya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.aataweb.org">www.aataweb.org</a></td>
<td>• Suggests professional development programs offered by other organizations (ACTFL &amp; Qatar Foundation International)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)</td>
<td>• Standards for language learning (5Cs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.actfl.org">www.actfl.org</a></td>
<td>Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STARTALK Program</td>
<td>• Language Teacher Development workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.startlak.umd.edu">www.startlak.umd.edu</a></td>
<td>- Online Heritage Teacher workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) at the University of Maryland</td>
<td>- Regular workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission</strong>: To increase the number of U.S citizens learning, speaking, and</td>
<td>- Summer programs for the advancement in language teaching and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching critical need foreign languages</td>
<td>• Offers a program for HLLs of Arabic “My Celebrations and my Community”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Middle East Languages Resource Center (NMELRC)</td>
<td>• Provides evaluation and assessment tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.nmelrc.org">www.nmelrc.org</a></td>
<td>• Offers teacher training workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offers published reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Qatar Foundation International  
http://www.qfi.org/ | - Offers professional development workshops for teachers of Arabic  
- Encourages and sponsors Arabic language programs in U.S schools (K-12) |
| National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC)  
www.nhlrc.ucla.edu | - Professional Development workshops for Heritage Language Teachers (Alliance w/ STARTALK)  
- Publication: *Heritage Language Journal*  
- HL Historical Profiles (Chinese, German, Japanese, and Russian) |
| National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC)  
www.nclrc.org | - Online practical resources for teaching world languages, including Arabic  
- The Haya Project - A web-based Instructional Tool *(Hayya Nudarris Ma’ayeer Ta’allum Al’Arabiyya- Standards based Arabic Teaching)*  
The project is funded by STARTALK and implemented by the National Capital Language Resource Center to develop Standards-based Arabic teachers in the U.S  
- Publications and Reports  
- Conferences on language teaching  
- Workshops and Summer programs |
| Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)  
www.cal.org/heritage/ | - Heritage Voices Collections *(online series where HL educators and programs share voices)*  
- The Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages |
### Mission
To promote the maintenance and development of heritage languages for the benefit of individuals, communities, and society

### Heritage Language Programs Database
- Publications on Heritage Language Education

### Avant - STAMP 4S Program
(STAndards-based Measurement of Proficiency)

https://avantassessment.com/stamp4s

### Mission
To improve the teaching and learning of language in the US and around the world through effective assessment.

### Provides online proficiency assessment tests for different languages, including Arabic

### Suggested books

