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It's More than Elementary:
Remote Teaching and Learning with Arabic Learners

Christine Rosalia[1]
Hunter College, City University of New York, New York, USA

Abstract

A challenge teachers often face is finding or making high interest, culturally relevant texts at lower reading levels. A case study of a Yemeni Arabic emergent reader in a Spanish-dominant high school drew needed attention to the paucity of Arabic materials and challenges of supporting literacy across first language groups. Such challenges were exacerbated in remote instruction, when for a time, sheltered instruction was limited due to shorter instructional times, staffing, and evaluation of the stable technological hardware and instructional platforms. Using a translanguaging stance the researcher drew on her experience learning Arabic as a beginner to inform online material making and instruction of Arabic LESLLA background learners. Constructivist online tools, usually marketed to young children, were carefully selected and fully integrated into a larger class novel study without appearing childish or disconnected to what more advanced readers in the mainstream class were using to practice and improve their literacies. A more holistic situated view of the learner was possible when teacher and student roles were disrupted and the teacher had to deal with her own linguistic incompetence in the minoritized language, Yemeni Arabic. This double case study offers teacher educators and teachers a way towards needed restructuring and 'decreation' of language teaching and learning toward individualized instruction and exchange where materials from the start are matched to a learner level, technological access, and rights to multiliteracy.

Keywords: pandemic remote learning, decolonizing multilingualism, Yemeni Arabic

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[1] Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christine Rosalia, Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Hunter College, City University of New York, 695 Park Avenue, West Building 1113, New York, NY 10065. Email: crosalia@hunter.cuny.edu

Introduction and Background

In this article I reflect on what is elementary, or a necessary foundation, for working with LESLLA background learners, and on how online remote teaching and learning afforded connection between me and my learners, particularly one sixteen-year-old learning to read for the first time in Standard Arabic and English after not attending formal school since the second grade in Yemen. On one level, this article can give readers tips about modifying online technology tools originally designed for elementary-aged children learning to read for use with learners 15 years or older. While the context of this study includes a high school and high school curricula, the circumstances of learning to read for the first time at an older age connects to the LESLLA community. On a second level, this is a self-study where I asked: How could I better teach literacy to learners whom I knew very little about due to remote learning and my own linguistic assumptions and limitations? I wondered how taking an online Arabic language class at the same time I was teaching English online could improve my communication with LESLLA students.

Alison Philips, in her 2021 LESLLA conference keynote, discussed what it means to really see someone and to speak language together. While I had prided myself as a language educator on being culturally and linguistically open, remote teaching and language learning with Yemeni Arabic learners has positively begun the decentering of my practice. While I did not know it when I began struggling with my linguistic incompetence in Arabic, as Phipps (2019) argues, my struggles to 'decreate' were prerequisites necessary to a process begun (and continuing) of decolonizing my own multilingualism. As with so many of us during the global pandemic, understanding decreation has meant learning and acting in new and unforeseen ways. For me, my pre-pandemic role as a literacy coach at an international high school had me working with – or glimpsing "at" in passing to be more accurate – a minoritized language group: Yemeni Arabic speaking adolescents, ages 14-18.

All students at the New York City high school where I am a literacy coach have been in the United States for less than four years. In the last two years, approximately 86 percent of our student body of about 400 high schoolers has been Spanish speaking, but at least 15 other languages are also used by students from 30 countries. Before remote instruction, literacy classes were grouped by language proficiency. However, in the months of the pandemic when New York City public school[2]s were giving families a choice of remote or in-person learning, classes were grouped based on mode of instruction. In those months, our school, like many, had an "all hands on deck" mandate. With remote class sizes of 27 students on average, the classroom teachers and I, as literacy coach, would differentiate classes into smaller groups, or in "Zoom-speak": breakout rooms. Because the other teachers were Spanish-bilingual, unlike me, I would especially work with the non-Spanish speaking students. It was here that I began seeing our Yemeni Arabic speakers, in particular, more clearly. I could see how the lack of Arabic bilingual resources, compared to our Spanish and French resources, was not equitable.

As I was working with one Arabic learner, Abdullah[3], in response to how our school could do a better job, he asked for two improvements: leveled work and teachers who spoke the variety of Arabic that he did:

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[2] Our school takes a decidedly translanguaging approach whereby we want our students to use their other languages in support of English learning.

[3] All teacher and student names are pseudonyms.

Give us work that is at the same level. We want to learn step by step. The work you do should not be expected at the same level as the other students. Please give us less assignments that are at our level of English. I think this is more fair.

I have a second idea. There are not so much [sic] Arabic teachers at school. My idea is to get more teachers who can speak Arabic. Please give us more teachers that speak Arabic of Saudi Arabia and Yemen.[4]

To answer this call for action, I began learning Arabic. This was fairly easy to do as I was approaching a semester without college teaching and could take it practically free from the university where I also work as a professor. Having studied languages (Italian, French, and Japanese) before, it had been my interest to put myself in the shoes of my learners, particularly as online language learners without a large community to practice their new language. As is typical of formal Arabic language course offerings I would learn Modern Standard Arabic[4]. I was not intimidated by Arabic not being a roman alphabet language, and figured similar to my learning of Japanese, I'd learn the new writing while also learning some basic syntax and communicative vocabulary. I planned to keep a learner diary, when relevant, similar to the diaries I had seen other language teachers do of their experiences of language learning, in hopes that my recording of learning insights could inform my teaching (e.g., Casanave, 2012; Schmidt & Frota, 1986). Such a diary had been useful in my recent study of Italian at the same university: I would bring learning experiences into the Teaching English to Other Speakers of English (TESOL) graduate courses I teach on second language acquisition and literacy.

For context, the high school expectations of English as a new additional language to study were quite different from the expectations of me as a remote so-called "foreign language" learner. My Arabic teacher did not use content-based teaching (Lyster, 2007). Instead, a linguistic syllabus was used. By contrast, our high school literacy team does project-based learning where, each spring, across levels, our students read a novel that will later elicit social action[5]. For many students it is the first chapter novel they read in English. At the start of the semester when I started learning Arabic, my high school students were reading the novel, *The Color of My Words* by Lynn Joseph.[6] Students were expected to engage with the novel's themes which included first love and heartbreak, alcoholism, loss of family and home, government

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[4] Abdullah's request is rhetorically aware. At the time we actually only had one language paraprofessional at the school who spoke Arabic. The variety she spoke was from Morocco. We had tried to recruit two other Arabic speakers (one Yemeni and one Syrian, but their work availability unfortunately had been inconsistent and short).

[4] It is important to know that Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is a second language and language of schooling because there are approximately 30 varieties of Arabic (World Bank Group, 2021). MSA is also the language used when reading the Qu'ran. At the time of my placement in the beginner course I was aware that MSA would not necessarily help me in speaking Yemeni Arabic, which itself is a cluster of varieties depending on where you are from in Yemen. When I inquired about Yemeni Arabic, my lab instructor, knowing my interest, and being from Yemen himself, offered to teach me some "street" language or dialect. In looking for Arabic instructors in NYC, most at that status of instructor were from Morocco, and reflect socio-economic immigration patterns.

[5] More on pedagogical linguistic approaches in a public international high school like this one can be found in Mendenhall, Bartlett and Ghaffar-Kucher (2017).

[6] There is also a Spanish version of the novel, *El color de mis palabras*. This 840 lexile level novel is considered at a 5th to 9th grade interest level or for early teens.

injustice, human rights, overcoming trauma, and self-actualization, particularly through language. The protagonist is a 12-year-old girl living in the Dominican Republic who grapples with what the power of words can do for herself, her family and her community, writ large. This was precisely what we hoped for our students: that becoming more literate in the languages they knew would give them more power to tell and live their stories. Because of the personal and creative nature of exploring, at times, heavy themes, student expression throughout the term was encouraged toward final projects that were to include the writing of poems, use of music, spoken word, diaries, and other multi-modal or multimedia presentations. Choice in modes and means of expression were how the team carried and negotiated three theoretical frameworks into pedagogy: being anti-racist, translanguaging, and applying a Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm, or MALP (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010, 2011). Certainly, perhaps more than ever, with the media focusing since spring 2020 on violence toward people of color and social activism, we saw encouragement everywhere to "disrupt" and make "good trouble" similar to the work of activists like John Lewis.

Theoretical Frameworks

Kendi (2019) defines an anti-racist as someone who "is expressing the ideas that racial groups are equals and none needs developing, and is supporting policy that reduces racial inequality" (p. 24). Likewise Love (2019) writes that she wants to teach her students not just the basics of academic literacy, "their abcs and 123s," but to teach them "to demand their 'undisputed dignity' and 'the recognition of one's inherent humanity'" (p. 52). To be an anti-racist teacher working with new immigrants means to actively take on the roles García (2017) and DeWilde (2021) have outlined in their work with adult migrants of being "a detective, co-learner, builder, and transformer" (García, p.22). These are similar to guiding questions in which DeCapua (2019) directs teachers to: 1) question your own assumptions, 2) foster two-way communication, 3) explicitly teach school tasks and academic ways of thinking and 4) promote project-based learning (p. 80). These frameworks informed not only our instruction as teachers at the international high school, but my motivation to take up Arabic study. As such they are woven throughout all aspects of this study.

Methods

The data I report on here are from my diary reflections both from my teaching of LESLLA learners, and from my own learning of Modern Standard Arabic. I began studying Arabic online in late January 2021. My Arabic professor and undergraduate classmates in the Zoom class verbally consented to Zoom video recordings of our class sessions. The practice of recording Arabic class Zoom sessions was for pedagogical purposes such as emailing recordings to students who could not attend a session, had WIFI connection interruptions, and for students to use for review. At this time, I had over-lapping roles as a teacher educator for an MA-TESOL program, and as a literacy coach at a high school serving new immigrants to New York City. Therefore, when New York City public schools were forced to close from March 15, 2021 to September 2021, students and faculty, there too, verbally consented to being recorded on Zoom for the same reasons my Arabic class had. The high school Zoom recordings were used in addition for teacher training and professional reflection since, at the high school level, remote instruction was completely new. The recordings I drew on for this study included approximately

40 hours of English teaching and 40 hours of Arabic class or 4 hours of instruction per week for 10 weeks.

Methods followed self-study using diary reflections like those described by Christine Pearson Casanave (2012), where she documents her "ecology of effort" to learn the language of her students (Japanese) in an interested and curious way "in situations where other life activities take priority and it would be tempting to avoid language study altogether" (p.642). Despite knowing the importance of teachers being language learners themselves, I had put off my learning of Arabic as a new language. The opportunity to learn Arabic online, I reasoned, would help me be a better online language teacher, literacy coach, and teacher educator, as I am all three. In my review of diary reflections and Zoom recorded video from my different roles, I looked for "critical incidents" or unplanned events that helped me to question my "taken for granted thinking about teaching" (Farrell & Baecher, 2017, p. 3).

Context: Adjusting Focus on the Material Needs of Arabic Learners

As mentioned above, pandemic instruction at the international high school meant large, mixed-level classes formed based on student choice for in-person or remote learning, not on proficiency level as the classes had previously been based. A further complication was that the teacher of record had to negotiate a dilemma of teaching both in-person and remote students at the same time. While some schools used a "HyFlex learning" design where the online and in-person students were taught by the same teacher at the same time (Educause, 2020) our team instead divided our human resources so that online teachers only worked with online students and vice versa. However, these classes did not operate completely autonomously. On days when all students and staff were remote (e.g., by schedule, regularly, once a week, or because a COVID case closed the school), we managed large class instruction with four adults: the teacher of record, a student-teacher, a literacy coach [me], and a language paraprofessional[7]) in one large zoom room. This room looked like Figure 1.
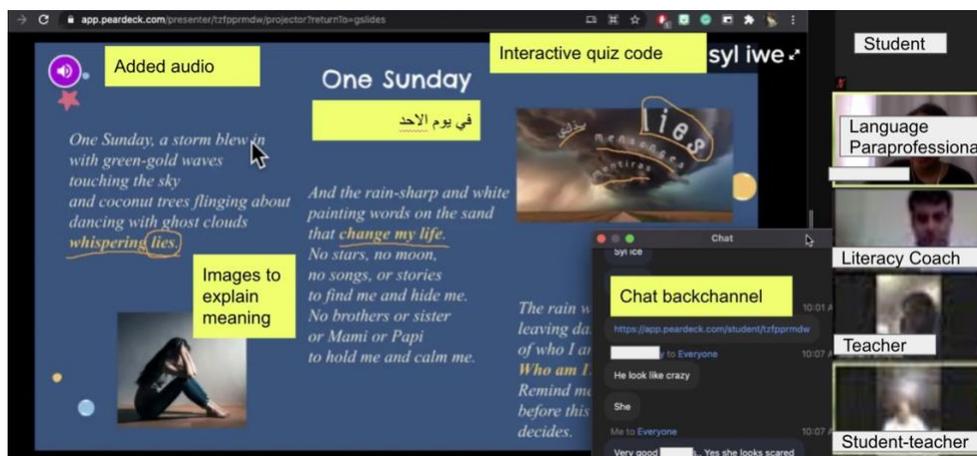

Figure 1. Full Class Instruction on Zoom
Note. The images of people are stock images and real names are blocked.

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[7] A language paraprofessional works with students individually or in small groups providing first language supports, particularly when a student has newly immigrated and needs significant translation of the language of instruction. Translator and language paraprofessional are interchangeably used in this paper.

A benefit of having all the teachers in the large zoom session at the same time (once we coordinated tasks), was co-constructing material that gave students and teachers multiple entry points. One entry point was the interactive multimedia itself. In Figure 1, for instance, you see a Google slide that students could use outside of the synchronous class that had embedded audio of the text being read (see the purple play button). Inside the Zoom session, the slide became interactive for the teachers and students via software that let them circle or underline keywords (i.e., lies, change my life). In addition, Zoom chats were used as a backchannel between all users (and privately between members) for multiple purposes, especially to offer multilingual translations, add more information, ask questions, and give comments. The sample chat in Figure 1 also shows the complex diglossia of delivery through technology. While the code and link for the interactive quiz is given, you also see two things: first, a student using the chat instead of the quiz link because this was the fastest way to reply from their phone ("He look crazy" and then the self-correct to "She"), and second, me encouraging yet a different student, recasting her spoken answer of "scary" to describe the image of a girl with, "Very good, Fatima. Yes, she looks scared." Other entry points included using images that were labeled in the three other languages of the class: for instance, in Figure 1 "Lies" is translated into Arabic, French and Spanish. Finally, we all benefited from open (written and spoken) translingual translations of the text as part of our translanguaging norms of participation.

As much as students and teachers all worked to make the learning environment accessible, large group instruction still meant fewer opportunities for students to practice expressing themselves. Therefore, we worried about the different reasons for this, including lack of prowess and speed in muting or unmuting oneself, teachers not being able to see a student's face or body language, home environment constraints, hardware and WIFI issues, and, despite the use of more than one language in instruction, those languages were predominantly Spanish and English. Arabic learners were at a clear disadvantage. This was particularly true of one student who is the focus of this case study, Fatima. The context of reading a class novel in English or Arabic did not match her LESLLA background.   In the next section, I document my progression of working with Fatima first through full-class material design, then in small group instruction, and finally in individual sessions.

Fatima and Me

Fatima was a new 9th grader at the international high school in January 2020. Only the language paraprofessional had met her in a home visit before the pandemic lockdown. Fatima, 15-years-old, and her family had just moved to New York. In Yemen, Fatima went to school until she was in the second grade, but her formal education was interrupted after being the victim of an explosion that had left her with hearing loss and extensive burns. Fatima reported not coming on camera during Zoom classes because she felt self-conscious of her appearance. Her degree of hearing affected the pronunciation of her Arabic and English. In Spring 2021 she had just begun home instruction in reading Modern Standard Arabic (MSA): her parents were paying for a tutor for Fatima and her siblings. Because Fatima's language and literacy repertoires did not include MSA, we teachers knew she could not read the class novel, even if we had a translated version. We knew content-based instruction would need to be heavily modified for Fatima because her explicit print literacy instruction had just begun.

Fatima's print literacy in English at the time of this study was comparable to mine in Arabic: I was still learning letters and sounds. Both Fatima and I could write from memory only a few words , and relied on copying them. These words were greetings, so, in our respective language classes, Fatima and I excitedly said "good morning" and "goodbye" to our remote teachers as soon as we could. We wanted to participate. Besides in our Zoom classrooms, neither of us had someone talking to us in the new languages we were each learning. Another point of similarity between our learning experiences was a lack of social connection or communication with classmates. This, of course, was exacerbated by the pandemic where one could not make small talk with classmates before or after a class. While there was another girl from Yemen in Fatima's class, the other girl often had internet connectivity issues and relied on using English chat as her preferred backchannel. Efforts to pair the girls for oral practice in Arabic or English never worked. In fact, because of internet issues, for months I had not understood that Fatima's classmate could read in English at approximately a 4th grade level.

Despite my work through a translator to tell Fatima that I was in a similar language learning boat, I was unsuccessful at doing so, and we were not able to communicate with one another about our shared experiences. Phipps (2019) captures our mutual vulnerability:

> How, when we do not share language, do we work at this fragile edge
> between human beings, those whose language dominates and those whose
> language is almost inaudible in cognitive terms? How do we show
> ourselves to be capable of speech, of presence in conversation and the
> social bond, how do we make and tell stories, and how do we create a
> space for ethics, without a language to share, or without a language in
> which to be understood as doing precisely this? (p. 41)

Question Your Own Assumptions

Until I began studying Arabic from a beginning level, I did not viscerally realize the impact of using classroom materials that were far above a beginner learner's language level. Even when my teacher gave detailed explanations of interesting content (e.g., what the words of a song meant linguistically and culturally) in my dominant language of English, I became frustrated that this explanation did nothing toward my ability to communicate in Arabic. It was one thing, for instance, as an observer to realize the poem Fatima was reading with her class in Figure 1 needed to be heavily translated, and that only high frequency content words were applicable to her study (e.g., "lies" and "sunday"), but another to grapple with how explicitly-taught language was (not) interacting with repeated instruction. The differentiation of pictures and live translations from a paraprofessional got Fatima through a gloss of content and inclusion of age-appropriate high interest themes, but what language learning was appropriate next? In the phrasing of the MALP® framework, I was "accepting conditions" (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010, p.70) that Fatima was in a class which was reading a novel far above her English level, and questioning how school work could be differentiated to language and content practice that truly was immediately relevant to her? We, her teachers, lacked clarity, and I wondered, despite us lovingly teaching her (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Hos, 2020), how she viewed our curriculum.

I thought about similar issues in my own beginner language learning. In my Arabic class, similar to Fatima's experience, the materials used during class and the textbook seemed to give

me only one choice: to be okay with "gist" and "waiting" (Phipps, 2019, p. 39). Phipps (2019) defines "struggling for gist" as occurring when one is learning "on the margins with hourly paid teachers on precarious contracts" (p.39) or "outwith familiar pedagogical structures and resources, and with no, or highly limited, aids for learning" (p. 40). Teaching in the early days of the pandemic embodied this. In class, I would get translations, but the number of new phrases to memorize before I really understood letter-sound correspondence, for me, was overwhelming. I did not have the kind of resources as a language learner I was used to getting to be active in the language I was learning. Indeed, in a "note to teachers," the authors of my textbook explained, "the vocabulary used in listening and handwriting exercises is not active vocabulary. The meanings of some of these words are given merely as *entertainment* [emphasis mine]*,* so the learner knows that he or she is writing meaningful words" (Brustad, Al-Batal, & Al-Tonsi, 2019, p.xii). Therefore, I'd often be given a list of words as shown in Figure 2, perhaps with the intention of a fair snapshot of my future with the multiple varieties of Arabic, but this was never explicitly discussed, similar to Fatima's workout of grappling with a full novel.

Meaning	maSri		shaami	Formal /written
bread	ᶜeesh	عيش	خِبز	خُبز
chicken	firaakh	فِراخ	دجاج	دَجاج
neighbor (male)		جار	جار	جار
neighbor (female)	gaara	جارة	jaara جارة	jaara جارة
brother		أخ	أخ	أخ
sister		أخت	أخت	أُخت
new (masc.)		جِديد	جديد	جَديد
new (fem.)	gidiida	جِديدة	jdiide جديدة	jadiida جَديدة
Good evening!	مساء الخير misaaʼ il-kheer		مسا الخير masa l-kheer	مَساء الخَير masaaʼ al-khayr

Figure 2. Sample Vocabulary list from my textbook, Alif Baa, 3rd edition, p. 86
Note. Materials in the course often showed three varieties of Arabic side-by-side to expose students to them: "maSri" or Egyptian spoken Arabic, "shaami" or Levantine Arabic (spoken in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Israel and Turkey), and "formal/written" Arabic or MSA.

     My Arabic teacher, also a Gnawa musician, instructed me specifically, given my newness to the language, to expect a kind of "silent period" and to learn through my senses. When we learned the Arabic long vowels, he traced them back (perhaps as a creative entry point) to the sounds of birds. Similarly, he connected the "ta" (or "ta mabuta") feminine gender marker to animism. Both of these abstract connections, he said, were how Arabic "preserved its soul." I remember thinking the man was out of his mind, but it is not hard to find a pedagogical emphasis on listening, particularly an audio-lingual method, in beginner materials. For example, in a note to students my textbook advised:

> The key to dealing with the richness of variation in Arabic is to
> differentiate between what you recognize and what you use actively.
> Choose one form to use actively and leave the others for recognition. This
> is what native speakers do when they interact with people from other
> countries, and it is an important skill to develop (*Alif Baa*, 2019, p. viii).

Therefore, part of confronting my own assumptions about language and decolonizing my multilingualism was to be more open to ways of learning that have been criticized in the field of TESOL such as the audio-lingual method. This is still not easy. As a professor of language teaching, I am more comfortable in raising alarm when I witness a pedagogy that does not align with research I know. I remember feeling justified in my critiques of my teacher's audio-lingual methods when a friend sent me an article from *The Economist* (September 18, 2021) titled "No book at bedtime: The travails of teaching Arabs their own language." It opined that "the root of the problem" of "almost 60% of ten-year-olds in Arabic-speaking countries struggling to read and understand basic text" was "bad teaching" (para, 2). The article points out "[a]dults often stumble over the written word, too, so bedtime reading to children is rare. Only about a quarter of Arabic-speaking parents read to their children often, compared with more than 70% in much of the West" (para., 5). In the U.S. context, the reading wars are again aflame with the pandemic, and interestingly, here too I had to catch my resistance when reading articles on the Science of Reading, which blames education professors for not teaching more about the dangers of "cue reading" (whereby teachers emphasize looking at the cue of a picture to help them to unlock words versus explicit phonics decoding) and not doing more to teach explicit language processing (Schwartz, 2020).

I had learned that Fatima was learning Arabic through Qu'ran reading with audio-lingual methods, and my own Arabic teacher emphasized explicit phonics teaching. As a result, I began changing my own teaching and learning. Additionally, it was not lost on me that Fatima chose the word "patient" to describe herself as a learner (see Figure 7b), and I took inspiration. In my Arabic learning I still felt frustrated from time to time, and I used my notebook to record those feelings. However, I stopped wanting my teacher to make materials the way I wanted them, and made my own materials practicing what I could not fully grasp in class. I used an online book maker, bookcreator.com, with a notebook template for my learning, because it let me place audio models near the words I could not pronounce well. Bookcreator is a tool that, before the pandemic, had been mostly used in elementary settings; in one platform it allows users to add text (including a dyslexic font), audio, video, transcription, pen-writing/drawing, and speech-to-text. I would screen record my Arabic lessons or audio record them with my phone so that later I could upload the recordings. I would listen to my own recordings in comparison. It helped me to see and hear words over and over. Figure 3 shows some of my first pages:

Figure 3. My Online Arabic Learning Diary
Note. Inside margins, I would write comments like this one: "I feel sad at the amount of time I am using to decipher the sound to the words. I feel like the teacher could have made some listening materials for me and the class. I know the class is mostly heritage speakers who have awareness of sounds already, but I know that like me, they cannot read yet, or read well, so this would still help them. I know my classmates cannot read, because they ask lines to be read for them."

Changing Instruction

Based on my own struggle, I wanted Fatima to have more multimodal support and practice activities, clearly connected to what the rest of her class was doing, but at her level. I wanted her to know her teachers were looking for a better language learning fit for her. This began with language modification. For example, the class was asked after a class read-aloud to respond to "Why does Ana Rosa love and fear Sunday?" A first level modification by Fatima's teacher was to break this question into two simple questions and to give pictorial clues as hints for typing in a response (see Figure 4). This modification, however, needed further refinement upon the realization that the idiomatic expression "spends time," and the compound sentence were too difficult for Fatima to comprehend. The cues provided by teachers were not obvious. In addition, the task of filling in a sentence frame or blank as an academic and school-based task needed explaining (see the MALP® Framework's "Focus on new activities for learning with familiar language and content" [DeCapua & Marshall, 2010, p.70]). Third, the typing Fatima needed to do to complete the "fill in the blank" activity was slow-going.
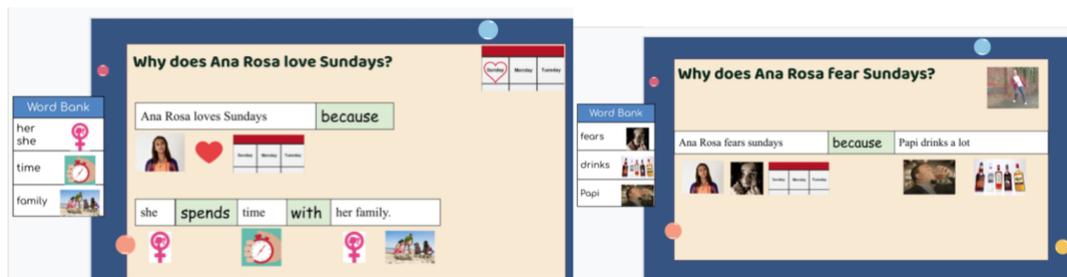

Figure 4 First modification of class novel materials by another teacher using Google Slides

Note. This model was meant to lessen cognitive load for Fatima but it actually increased it due to relying on needing to know cues such as the woman symbol for "she" and idiomatic expressions like "spend time with."

A second modification was to use a simple sentence structure and to ask Fatima questions in order to build up her comprehension and arrive at the understanding that the protagonist has mixed feelings about Sundays due to her father's alcoholism. Rather than typing a sentence, Fatima would practice dragging and dropping the parts of the sentence as users do in the language learning app, *Duolingo*. I was using *Duolingo* in my own Arabic learning and found the daily practice and instant feedback comforting, even if it was still based on learning letter sound correspondences only. The online constructivist software, *BoomCard*s (boomlearning.com) allowed me to mimic the *Duolingo* environment with the novel content I choose. Because the sentences were very simple (matching my Arabic proficiency), I could use *Google Translate* to add audio and text in Arabic, as well as in English. Figure 5 shows cards from the deck Fatima practiced from her phone.
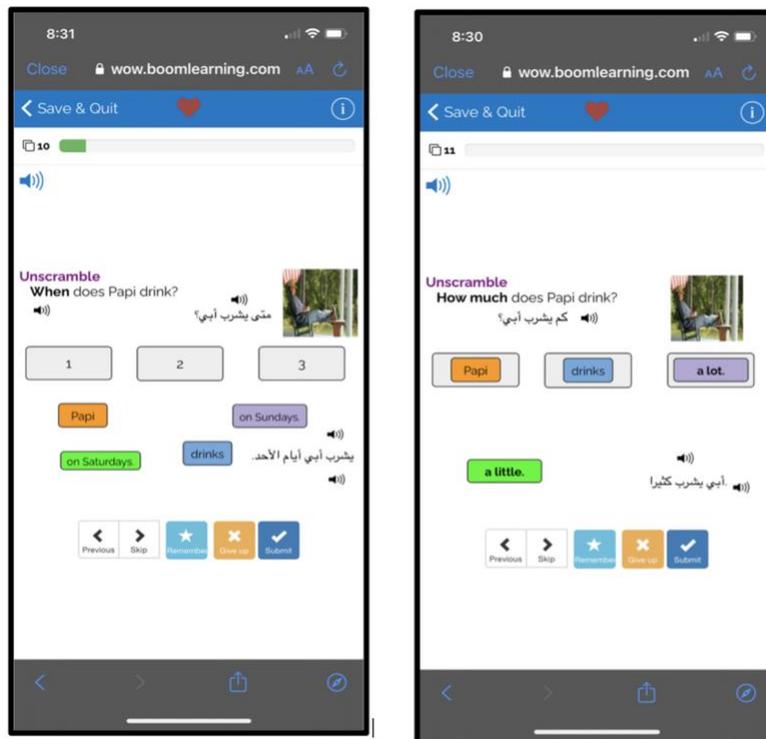

Figure 5. Second Modification: Self-correcting practice with audio and text in Arabic and English.

Over time I added more practice around the content of Fatima describing her family and the family in the novel. I designed this practice to follow a sequence of first " unscrambling the sentences," to second, "typing in the blanks", to finally using handwritten sentences about her family (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Learning sequence from BoomCards to BookCreator
Note. Boomcard (unscramble and fill in the blanks) lead to handwriting about Fatima's family.

Furthering School Tasks and Academic Ways of Thinking

As the end of the school year approached, both Fatima's teachers and mine needed assessments to formally evaluate our respective learning. At Fatima's high school, students do an oral presentation for their literacy class. At this point in the term, I was becoming Fatima's and three other students' primary teacher. The class had finished the novel and Fatima's group was using BookCreator as both a platform to discuss the novel and to create their presentation, which would be a comparison connecting their hopes and dreams with those of the novel's protagonist. Following the MALP® paradigm, the final project was taken apart into smaller pieces using group co-construction and "scaffolding of the written word through oral interaction" (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010, p.70). That is, students orally dictated their responses to a teacher who wrote their words for them. Fatima, like her classmates, was taught how to search for images and video to show meanings (see Figure 6). I moved back and forth between what the students knew about Ana Rosa (Image A) and what they knew about themselves. BookCreator allowed Fatima to practice and get feedback on her oral production before presenting. Before and during the presentation (*Images B* and *C*), Fatima's classmates could read about her and ask her questions.

Figure 7. From group discussion to Fatima's presentation

Note. Image A shows a description of the protagonist, Ana Rosa, made by Fatima and her classmates. Images B and C are multilayered pages used by Fatima to prepare and give her presentation about herself, in contrast to Ana Rosa.

This process was purposefully different from the options given to me for assessment as a student of Arabic. By contrast, I was asked to memorize a script introducing myself, the Arabic equivalent to: "My name is Christine. I am American. I live in Brooklyn, in the city of NYC. I am a student. I study Arabic. I love Arabic." While this was communicative language and at my level, after I had presented in front of my classmates, as Fatima had, I did not walk away feeling any more connected to my classmates or teacher than before.

Two-way Communication: Building Literacies

Unlike in my previous language learning, when taking my beginner Arabic course, my teacher did not give me ways to practice hearing the language beyond decoding. I missed nursery rhymes or simple songs I had used when studying beginner Italian, French, or Japanese. When I asked if my Arabic teacher had any supplemental materials such as jazz chants (Graham, 1978) to practice, my teacher explained that Arabic is not a rhyming language in the way English can be (see Figure 8). I would need to wait on the accumulation of vocabulary to see and hear patterns.

I missed books and stories. I found some online bilingual materials, but few had written text and audio. For example, from my teaching, I knew of the website library, *Unite for Literacy* (https://www.uniteforliteracy.com/) which had translations of English pattern books in other languages, including Arabic. The translations, however, were audio narrations only, so did not help my letter-sound correspondences for studying Arabic or Fatima's matching need, though I welcomed the change to read actual texts. Therefore, I tried to take the audio narration from the site and see if the transcribing feature within BookCreator could help me to make a pattern book bilingual (see Figure 9).
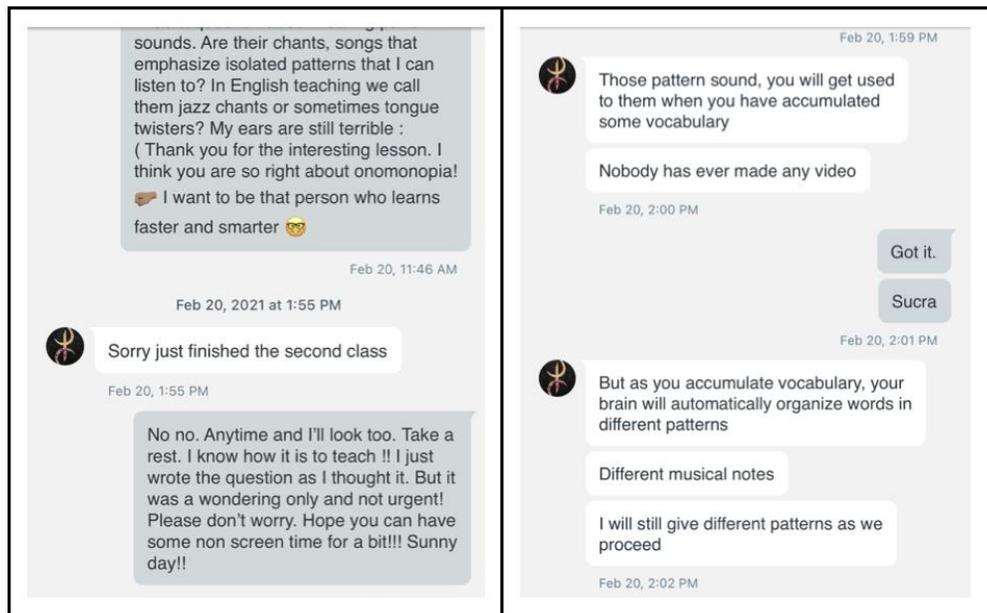

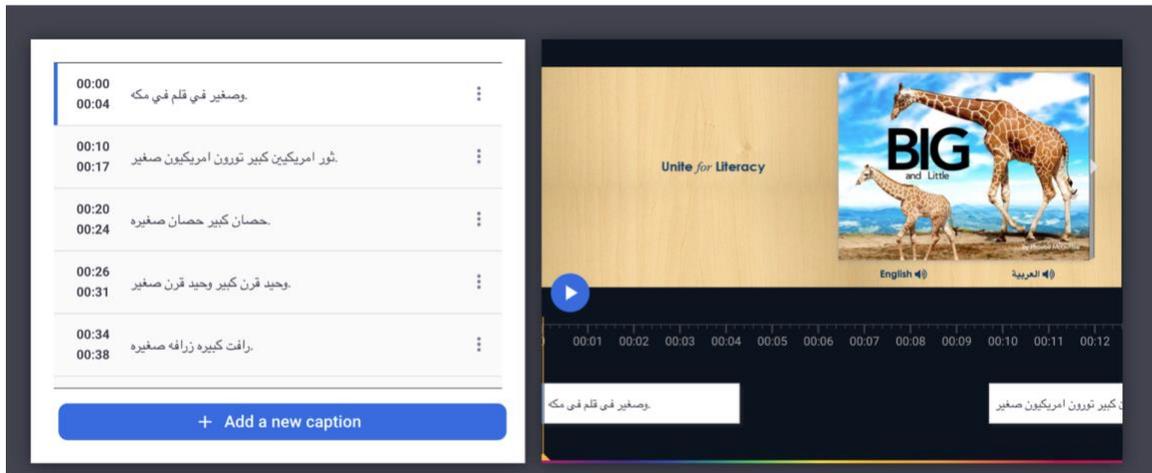Figure 8. Chat with my Arabic professor asking for familiar materials

Figure 9. BookCreator's transcript generator of a Unite for Literacy narrated book

I had some success in that, with help, I could make corrections to the machine learning translations – even if I was not very interested in learning how to say animals such as "bison" in Arabic. I could hear and see repetition of "big" (كبير) and "little" (صغير) in Arabic. So, too, could Fatima when we practiced reading in English. In this particular pattern book's case, there was not a difference between how to say this main vocabulary, but the differences in how to say some of the animal names between Egyptian Arabic and the Yemeni Arabic were sometimes significant. While technology gave us a head start, I quickly realized (again) the struggles of when there seems to be no commercial market for language learning in the languages you are learning. To search in English for children's materials in Arabic, assuming such books would offer repetition of key phrases like this one, or lower-level decoding, provided little help because of my lack of knowledge of children's literature in Arabic, and my ability to search in Arabic was limited due to my beginning-level language skills.

I knew story and repetition of vocabulary in a meaningful context would improve Fatima's literacy as well as my own. Plus, Fatima and I would be working together over the summer, and I wanted a book at our level. Despite living in New York City with a wealth of libraries and bookstores, I was able to find only one children's book that fit my requirements, an Arabic bilingual version of Eric Carle's (1994) *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. I also mailed some "high low readers" such as the decodable reader *Fake* (Saddleback Publishing, 2016) to Fatima. For both of these books, I wanted to make bilingual versions with English and Arabic narration. Determined to do this, I serendipitously was able to hire an undergraduate work-study student who spoke Yemeni Arabic. She was able to not only help me make digital versions of these books on BookCreator, but joined me in sessions for about one month with Fatima over the summer. Figure 10 shows a sample of the digital bilingual activities and versions we made from the paperbacks.

Once it was summer break, Fatima and I had less pressure to follow a class curriculum. There was no more class novel that needed modifications because it was above her language level at the time. I had the time and space to explore different materials based on her interests and to follow even more closely her language progress. For me, too, I could learn some spoken Yemeni Arabic for communication. For our shared mutual learning, I continued to make exercises recycling studied vocabulary and syntax (days of the week, family) in multiple

contexts, but I also used a language experience approach to find out about Fatima's daily routines and interactions. Asking her what she did between weekly sessions opened up more personalized word study. I spoke more about my language learning to normalize finding what works for her and in giving her more choices of the books she wanted to read. Therefore, when we read a decodable book focusing on the language point of using "can" ("I can help") we could make jokes about getting her siblings to do things for her (e.g., Sister, can you help me make the bed?) and I could draw on her love of *Dunkin Donuts* (see Figure 11). Fatima began to giggle in sessions, and to report on using English more outside of our sessions. Because our sessions were on Zoom, it was possible for Fatima's younger siblings to hear, and they began to engage with us at times. They began to not only translate for her, but to practice role plays, and "take the mic" to tell stories about their loved sister. In one session the girls turned on their camera to show who was taller and explain who had read the most pages in their personal Qu'rans. Fatima was in the lead! In another session, they taught me how to kneel properly when praying and showed me how a clock in their home reminded them when to pray.

Figure 10. Digital versions and activities made from paperbacks
Note. I used and recreated these copyright print materials I had purchased following FairUse copyright laws during remote instruction on a password protected website.
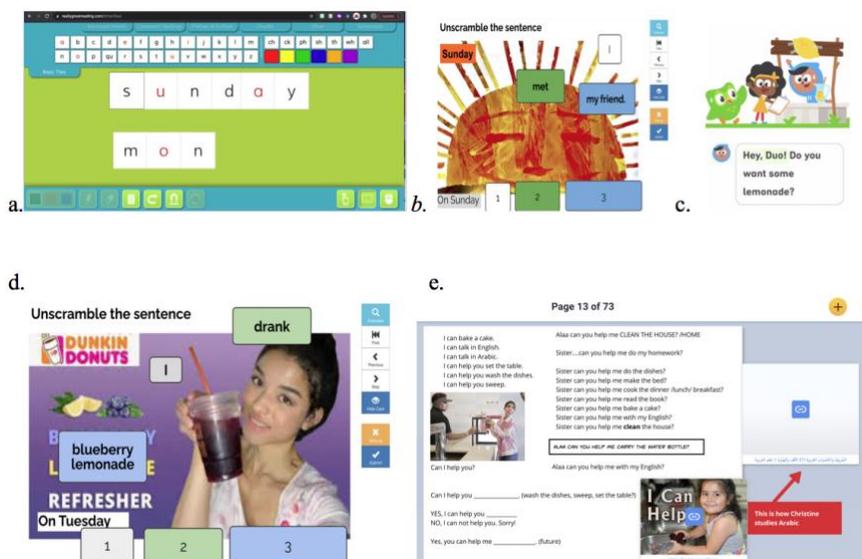
Figure 11. Enjoying and connecting literacy practices across technologies and texts on daily habits

Note. a. Using letter tiles on http://www.reallygreatreading.com/lettertiles/ to spell days of the week, b. and d: Using BoomCards to recall the week using images from *The Hungry Hungry Caterpillar* and *Dunkin Donuts* fan channel, c. *Duolingo ABC* Lemonade Stand story, e. *BookCreator, Unite For Literacy,* and *Aljahera Media Institute* https://learning.aljazeera.net/

Discussion and Call to Action

What does it mean to really see someone? How do you not become that teacher who has the same first day for 25 years? Having experienced the COVID pandemic, what does it mean to positively disrupt and transform pedagogy so that possibilities are gained, instead of regressing back to a status quo of doing school with exceptions (Delpit, 2006; Love, 2019; Chang-Bacon, 2021)? In the course of my learning Arabic remotely, I understood what it meant to be a linguistic minority in a language class and to struggle to find appropriate learning resources at my level. While it is difficult to try to teach bilingually without basic competency in the language, the experience of grasping for "gist" (Phipps, 2019) in Arabic has made me a stronger advocate and teacher. In order to make co-learning online with emergent readers possible, it's not enough for teachers to know the challenges such learners face; my experiences show that teachers are more effective when they have visceral, first-hand experiences engaging with similar kinds of learning, coupled with a knowledge of available online tools such as *BookCreator, DuolingoABC* and *BoomCards,* among others. These online tools may be marketed more to elementary teachers, but I found they could be used powerfully with LESLLA learners.

My co-learning with Fatima has also made me curious about pedagogical transfer, my own and Fatima's. For instance, at the time I worked with her, Fatima was learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) through recitation of the Qu'ran. While as a pedagogue I have a predisposition to think repeated reading of the same text over and over again would be boring, this method is a familiar entry point that I could be using more with Fatima, and with a different appreciation than expected in my own learning of Arabic. Custodio and O'Loughlin's (2017) recommendation of using Readers Theatre for connecting to oral readings might be especially

appreciated by L1 Arabic learners of English, along with always offering audio recordings. Similarly, knowing that readers of Arabic rely on a "trilateral-root model" (whereby they know when they see the same three root consonants that they will be able to unlock meaning[8]), I should emphasize morphologies that do repeat in English, helping to understand meaning in a regular patterned way such as English affixes like *-re, -able, un-,*etc.

In word study programs such as *Words Their Way* (Helman et al., 2010) morphemic analysis tends to come at an advanced "derivational stage," but for L1 Arabic learners of English it could come earlier. Teachers should expect that teaching minimal pairs means introducing words that have the same consonants, but very different meanings, such as *pulls* and *plus*, knowing that Fatima, and learners of similar backgrounds, may be looking for a consonant pattern such as *PLS* (Ahmad, 2017). Other important cross-linguistic differences are noted by Palmer et al. (2007) (see Figure 12). Finally, understanding that Yemeni Arabic is a cluster of dialects or varieties of Arabic that varies by region and within the Arabic-speaking world is part of seeing our full learners.

How can LESLLA, if it does not exist already elsewhere, develop literacy resources that reflect varieties of Arabic, spoken and written? A call to action for multilingual literacy needs to be full bodied, and intentional. The start of decolonizing and rebuilding certainly should include teachers learning the languages of our students, particularly minoritized languages. Also imperative are technological pedagogical practices that can modify and mimic gamification seen in early reading technologies in order to gain the benefits of making learning joyful. In my work with Fatima, I intentionally modified resources I could find in MSA or in other Arabic varieties to include her first language, spoken Yemeni Arabic. For literacy instruction, the World Bank (2021) recommends capitalizing on similarities between languages (what they term "capitalization of the convergence" [p. 10]) and the interplay of lexicon between languages, as well as focusing on systematic phonics instruction and "whole-word" instruction – methods that are commonly overlooked in TESOL teacher education, but that also seem to have not been in use in many Middle East and North African countries. Finally, any deeper learning and teaching must be done in partnership with students' families. Anecdotally, in my 2-year experience of working with four Yemeni girls, in-person attendance has been sporadic for complex reasons, but online learning has helped bridge gaps in access. Remote learning with Fatima allowed both of us into each other's personal spaces, homes, families, and multilingualism. Such a radical welcoming must not be wasted, but integral to the process of transforming education not just so "a foot is in the door" with technologies such as Zoom, but so that the teacher-student relationships can resist future storms, such as future school shut-downs or limits in physical accessibility. I am still learning and welcome LESLLA Community feedback.

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[8] For example, the root KTB (which has the basic meaning of *write*) can be combined with different patterns of vowels to give, among other words, *kataba* (he wrote), *yaktubu* (he writes), *kitab* (book), *maktab* (office), and *maktaba* (library).

English	Arabic
Orthography • Letter forms remain the same regardless of placement in the word. • Many phonemes are represented by multiletter graphemes. • It has unpredictable phoneme-grapheme patterns—deep orthography. • Vowelling system remains constant from childhood to adulthood. • Vowels are letters of the alphabet. One vowel letter, however, represents multiple vowel phonemes. • It contains many heterographic homophones (same pronunciation, different spelling, and different meaning) such as *sale* and *sail.* • Though bound and free morphemes are present in English, the system is much simpler than the Arabic morphological system. Infixes are not present.	• Letter forms take on a different shape based on placement in the word—initial, medial, or end. • One letter equals one phoneme. • It has predictable phoneme-grapheme correspondence when vowels are present—shallow orthography. When vowels are not attached to letters, Arabic is considered to have a deep orthography. • Short vowels are present in works written for children, the Qur'an, and poetry; however, short vowels are omitted in all other works intended for adult audiences. • Short vowels are diacritical marks attached to consonants; for this reason, some linguists consider Arabic a syllabic rather than an alphabetic language. Long vowels are expressed in Arabic by using letters; however, each letter represents a single long vowel phoneme. When vowels are present, there are no homophones in Arabic. • Three and four combinations are converted to hundreds of variations on the root by complex use of morphemes through a pervasive use of derivations including tense, gender, person, and number, as well as meaning. Infixes are numerous. It has a trilateral/quadrilateral root model.
Concepts of print • Although English includes dialects and the concept of standard and nonstandard English, the variation between dialects is minimal • It is written from left to right. **Syntax** • All sentences contain a verb. • Contains verbs for to be and to have. • Tenses of regular verbs are indicated by suffixes or by helping verbs. • It has articles a, an, and the.	• All Arabic countries have two forms of Arabic formal (FusHa), also called Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and colloquial (Aamiyya), also called Non-Standard Arabic (NSA). Furthermore, NSA varies from nation to nation. NSA can also vary within the same country by geographic regions. • It is written from right to left. • Noun sentences do not contain a verb (e.g., God great). • It has no verbs for to have and to be. • Tenses are indicated by addition of suffixes to a single root. • It has one article, al- (close to meaning to the) but no articles similar to *a* or *an.*

Figure 12. Contrastive analysis comparison of English and Arabic, adapted from Learning from Abdallah: A case study of an Arabic-Speaking child in a US school (Palmer et al., 2007, p.10).

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