

Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA) in the Teaching of Arabic in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The variety of Arabic language that can be found in written texts is different from what the Arabs use in daily conversations. This creates a problem for Arabic language teachers and program developers, who might find it difficult to decide which language variety they must teach to ensure that Arabic language learners can use the language effectively. Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA), which is said to combine both varieties, emerges and offers a solution for this problem. As the effectiveness of a solution depends on the context, this research is conducted with the purpose of helping teachers understand the nature of ESA and its suitability for Arabic language teaching in Indonesian context. The method of literature review was employed. Based on the literature review, it is found that ESA can help Indonesian learners achieve communicative competence, but they still need to learn the other forms of Arabic, especially the classical one, to access Islamic knowledge. Thus, it can be concluded that having ESA as a base to develop communicative skills might be beneficial, but it does not mean that the other forms of Arabic should be left behind. The basic rules of ESA and teachers' knowledge about ESA also need to be considered carefully.

Keywords: *Educated Spoken Arabic, Arabic, Language Teaching*

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic language is divided into a spectrum of varieties, but it is known for its two main varieties, which are fusha, the formal form, and ammiya, the informal form. These varieties raise a question of which variety should be taught in Arabic language programs [1]. Amidst this debate, the term Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA) arises and offers a solution to the confusion [2], [3].

The effectiveness of a solution depends on the context it is applied in. Hence, before implementing ESA in Indonesian context, it is important to understand the nature of ESA, along with the benefits and challenges it presents, as well as its suitability for Arabic language teaching in Indonesia.

A number of scholars have discussed the nature of ESA in their work [3] [4] [5]. Promadi [3] particularly explores ESA's position in Arabic language teaching in Indonesia. The two issues will also be discussed in this paper, but to make new contributions to the literature regarding ESA in Indonesian context, this paper is going to explore further on how the nature of ESA fits into the Indonesian context, the challenges of incorporating ESA

in Arabic language teaching in Indonesia, and strategies to tackle the challenges.

2. METHOD

The method of literature review was done in order to gain information about ESA as well as its position in Arabic language teaching in general and specifically in Indonesia. The documents that were reviewed include books and articles, most of which were published within the last 10 years and obtained from Google Scholar.

The literature review was done with a few steps. First, the writer searched for the most recent books and articles that are relevant to the topic in Google Scholar. Second, the writer read the literature that has been collected and took notes. Third, the notes were developed into a mind map that were then used to help the writer during the writing process.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the results of literature review will be elaborated. The findings and discussions center on the background information about ESA, the nature of ESA, scholars' views on ESA and the situation of Arabic

language teaching in Indonesia. This section also explores how ESA fits in the teaching of Arabic in Indonesian context.

3.1. Arabic and Communicative Language Teaching

Language teaching used to set the ability to master the rules of the target language as its main goal. However, the goal has now shifted to the ability to communicate in the target language [1], [4]. Thus, many language programs now put more emphasis on the informal form of the target language, which is usually used during conversations [4]. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as an approach that can facilitate this goal.

According to [6], CLT has its own views on language. Language is seen as a tool used to express meaning whose main function is to allow communication and interaction between its users. Moreover, CLT views language as more than just a set of grammatical rules. CLT divides language based on its functional and communicative uses. This approach puts communicative competence as its goal. Based on its views on language, CLT sees communicative competence as the ability to use, manipulate and understand language for various purposes, functions and settings.

Despite its popularity, CLT can be problematic for Arabic language learners and teachers. Some languages, such as English, have similar formal and informal forms, but the same cannot be stated for Arabic [2]. The variety of Arabic language that can be found in written texts is very different from what the Arabs use in daily conversations. Furthermore, the conversational variety of Arabic also consists of many different dialects.

According to [5], Arabic is a diglossic language, which means that it is divided into two main varieties. The two varieties are called fusha and ammiya. As time went by, interactions between the two varieties create a spectrum of multiple language varieties. This phenomenon led many scholars to see Arabic as a multiglossic language.

Arabic written texts normally use the classical form of the language, which is known as fusha. This variety of Arabic can be found in religious texts, such as Al-Qur'an. As time went by, fusha developed into its more modern version, which is called Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). MSA is used in formal settings typically found in the modern era, such as business meetings, trials and conferences. According to [4], MSA is relevant for reading and writing, but not for conversational settings.

The variety of Arabic used in daily conversations is called ammiya. This variety of Arabic consists of many different dialects. Ammiya and fusha have some syntactic and lexical differences [3]. If conversing in

fusha is considered unusual, using ammiya in written texts is not a common practice.

While other language programs shift their focus to the informal form of languages with the rise of CLT, many Arabic language classes still tend to focus more on the classical or formal forms of the language, which are fusha or MSA. This phenomenon is called reversed privileging [4]. Putting the emphasis on fusha and MSA, which contradicts other language programs' shift to the conversational language varieties, will help Arabic language learners develop strong reading and writing skills, but it will not equip them with the ability to use the language to communicate with the native speakers.

The two main varieties and their different characteristics create a debate among Arabic language practitioners, which centers on the question of which variety to be taught to the learners. According to [1], some scholars believe that fusha should be the one that Arabic teachers focus on, as it is considered as the official language and used in formal settings. This notion seems to be the cause of the tendency to focus on teaching fusha in Arabic language classes. However, others say that developing Arabic learners' ability to engage in conversations using the target language is more important, as the ability could help them survive or even establish a career in Arabic-speaking countries.

3.2. Educated Spoken Arabic

Amidst the debate, the term Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA) arises. ESA is basically a combination of fusha and ammiya [2], [3]. The characteristics of ESA, as described thoroughly by [3], are as follows.

- a. ESA contains elements from both fusha and ammiya. For example, in the sentence "Fi khtilaf ben l-qarya wi l -madina," the word "fi" is taken from ammiya, while the rest is fusha.
- b. ESA is used by "educated" people, which means that ESA is considered polite and appropriate.
- c. ESA takes vocabulary and syntactic structure from fusha, but deletes case endings like ammiya.
- d. ESA is classified as spoken language.
- e. ESA minimizes the use of ammiya and focuses on elements that are common in all dialects. For example, the word "aiwa" is used in ESA as it is used by Arabic users from Egypt, Syria, Libya and Saudi Arabia.
- f. ESA maximizes the use of fusha. For example, the word "frog" is "difdi" in fusha and "kurrit may" in ammiya. Its ESA form is "dufda", which is more similar to the fusha form but contains the vowel of the ammiya form.

- g. ESA is influenced by regional dialects, but focuses on elements that are common in all of them.
- h. ESA is influenced by foreign languages, especially for words with no equivalent in Arabic.

In his discussion regarding ESA, [3] suggests the use of ESA as a target language for Arabic language learners. As fusha and ammiya share some similarities, he believes that teaching them separately will be repetitive and inefficient. Hence, teaching ESA, which combines both forms, as the target language is seen as more efficient. Some of the advantages of teaching ESA as the target language can be seen below.

- a. ESA is functional as it will help Arabic language learners survive in Arabic-speaking environments.
- b. ESA can help Arabic language learners develop the ability to engage in conversations confidently.
- c. ESA helps learners understand fusha.
- d. ESA helps learners understand the basic grammar.
- e. ESA is effective and efficient as it can be used and understood by all Arabic language speakers.

Another opinion on teaching spoken Arabic comes from [5], who states that language programs should have two goals, which are to develop learners' communicative competence and to make sure they have proper knowledge about the structure of the target language. He believes that focusing on only the formal variety of Arabic will not help learners develop their ability to communicate effectively, as they will most likely deal with the other varieties when they enter Arabic-speaking territories. Hence, Arabic language learners need to be made aware of the numerous varieties of Arabic, including the spoken Arabic. This indicates that teaching ESA will be useful, but it does not mean that the other varieties of Arabic should be neglected.

The importance of introducing the numerous varieties of Arabic to learners is also stressed by [4]. Ryding [4] believes that Arabic language programs should adopt a balanced approach, which means that they should help learners build a comprehensive understanding of the target language by introducing its varieties. Ryding [4] suggests that Arabic language teachers incorporate culture in their teaching. Introducing cultural products and the language varieties used in them could help learners increase their awareness and knowledge regarding Arabic language varieties and when they are used. This approach is supported by the argument presented by [7] about how language and culture are closely related.

Some other scholars, like [8] and [9], reject the idea of seeing Arabic language varieties as separate entities. They prefer to see Arabic as one language that consists of many varieties that are interrelated, which include ESA, MSA and all the dialects. Al-Batal [8] also claims

that the benefits of teaching Arabic dialects are greater than the confusion it creates for learners, which contradicts the notion presented by [3].

As ESA sums up the language forms that are commonly used in conversations by native speakers of Arabic, teaching this variety will benefit both learners and teachers. ESA will give learners the ability to engage in conversations with Arabic speakers with any dialect, while teachers do not have to teach every single dialect and be repetitive.

3.3. ESA in Indonesian Context

To determine whether ESA is suitable for Arabic language teaching in Indonesia, it is necessary to first examine the current situation in the context. According to [10], the teaching of Arabic in Indonesia is divided into two groups that are managed by two different ministries. The Ministry of Education and Culture manages the teaching of Arabic as an optional foreign language in high schools, while the Ministry of Religious Affairs organizes the teaching of Arabic as a mandatory language in faith-based institutions under it.

Despite the different positions of Arabic, the main goals of teaching Arabic for each ministry used to be different as well. However, as [10] states, both ministries have gradually put more emphasis on the importance of developing Arabic learners' communicative competence. While certainty regarding teaching and learning goals has been provided, the policy of Arabic language education still does not clarify which variety of Arabic should be taught to learners, which might lead to confusion [11].

Even though the importance of developing communicative competence has been acknowledged, the ability to access knowledge about Islam is still considered as one of the main goals of learning Arabic alongside achieving communicative competence in Indonesia [10]. As Arabic language learning is often associated with one's devotion to his/her religion in the Muslim community [12], many Arabic language learners in Indonesia regularly deal with religious texts, such as Al-Qur'an and Hadith, which are written in fusha [6].

This situation indicates that focusing on only one variety of Arabic will not help Arabic language learners in Indonesia fulfil their intentions. To be able to have communicative competence and access Islamic knowledge written in the classical form of Arabic, learners need to be exposed to and learn the varieties of Arabic used in daily conversations and Islamic texts. This indicates that ESA might be helpful in building the communicative competence of Arabic language learners in Indonesia, but it should not be the only variety that is taught to them.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that ESA is efficient and suitable for developing Arabic language learners' communicative competence. It is efficient because it focuses on the most common language items in conversational settings, which prevents the teaching and learning process from being repetitive. ESA is also beneficial for teachers and learners who wish to develop communicative competence as it is actually used to communicate in real-life settings. However, it does not mean that the other varieties should be neglected, especially in Indonesia, as the other varieties have their own roles in the learners' contexts. For example, most Arabic learners in Indonesia learn the language to gain the ability to access Islamic knowledge that is written in the classical form of Arabic.

Hence, teaching Arabic using the approach suggested by [4] might be suitable for Indonesian context. As it has been explained before, [4] encourages teachers to incorporate cultural aspects when teaching varieties of Arabic language. To illustrate, teachers can explain to learners that texts that contain Islamic knowledge are written in fusha and introduce the variety to them. As they move to other types of cultural products, such as movies, teachers can explain that the variety of Arabic used in such products is different from what they find in the religious texts. When exploring the spoken Arabic, which consists of numerous dialects, teachers can focus on ESA to avoid being repetitive.

Before applying the approach, there are a few things that need to be considered. The approach requires teachers to have proper knowledge about the varieties of Arabic. This can be a problem for Arabic language teachers who receive fusha-centered language education during their pre-service period. Those teachers might not be familiar with the varieties of spoken Arabic. Another problem may arise from the nature of ESA itself. Even though many scholars have provided detailed descriptions for ESA, identifying language forms that are classified as ESA is not as easy as it sounds.

More studies and surveys that identify the language forms of ESA might help teachers develop better understanding about ESA. According to [13], many attempts have been done to identify the features of ESA. However, it is important to make sure that these identifications are accessible for teachers who are going to teach Arabic.

One way of making sure the Arabic teachers have proper knowledge regarding ESA is including it in their training. Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW) at University of Edinburgh offers a course that is intended to prepare Arabic language teachers to teach the varieties of the language. The course can be a good reference for creating Arabic teaching preparation programs. According to [14], the course

helps pre-service Arabic teachers achieve five goals, which are:

- a. To overcome the fear of teaching various Arabic dialects;
- b. To rebuild their understanding of Arabic as one language that consists of many varieties;
- c. To understand the relationship between the language varieties;
- d. To have the ability and tools to teach the varieties; and
- e. To build empathy for learners.

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