

Identity Negotiation and Access to Arabic During Study Abroad in Egypt

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Poststructuralist Theories of Identity

- Identity is multiple and performed in interaction
- Tensions and negotiation between individuals, socio-historical context
- Potential for both reproduction and transformation of existing societal norms
- (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004; Norton and McKinney, 2011; Butler, 1999; Block, 2007)

Identity and Study Abroad

Salience of National Identities:

(Dolby 2004, 2005, 2007; Jackson 2008, 2010; Kinginger, 2008; Patron, 2007; Siegal 1996; Talburt, 1999)

Salience of Gendered Identities:

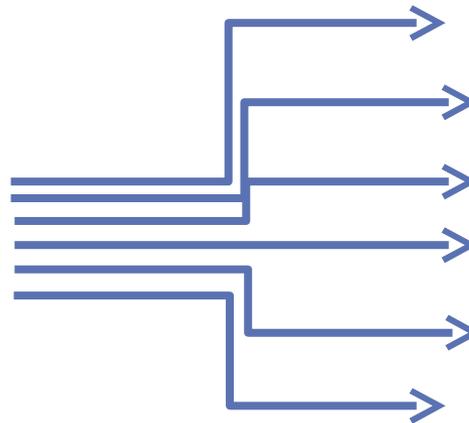
(Anderson 2003; Bacon 2008; Brecht et al. 1995, Isabelli Garcia 2006; Kinginger 2008, Patron 2007; Polyani 1995, Siegal 1995; Talburt 1999; Twombly 1995)

Identity Negotiation During Study Abroad in Egypt

Identity Categories

Indexed Identities

Foreigner
Gender
Religious



Settings

Alexandria University: Middlebury Program (January 2010-January 2011)

American University in Cairo

- Study Abroad Program (September 2009-May 2010)
- Arabic Language Institute (January 2010-January 2011)



Participants

- **Students (23 Midd, 31 AUC)**
 - Case Studies (4 Midd, 2 AUC)
- **10 Arabic teachers (3 Midd, 7 AUC)**
- **13 Egyptian friends of the students (11 Midd, 2 AUC)**

Data

- **Language Contact Profile (Freed et al., 2004)**
- **Interviews with teachers, associates, and students about experience**
- **Technological Observations (Subset)**
- **Pre and Post Arabic interviews**
- **Participant Observations (Case studies)**

Arabic Language Use (Hours per Week)

	Program	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
*Speaking	AUC	6.7	5.6	1.5	21	30
	Midd	32.4	6.9	10.5	24.5	20
Reading	AUC	6.3	6.4	0	24.5	30
	Midd	7.9	6.7	0	24.5	20
*Listening	AUC	9.9	7.1	0.5	35	20
	Midd	27.8	11.0	1.5	35	20
*Writing	AUC	5.8	7.2	0	30	30
	Midd	10.5	8.2	0	24.5	20

Arabic and English (Hours per Week)

	Program	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
*Arabic to Arabic NS	AUC	5.7	5.4	0	17.5	29
	Midd	20.1	10.1	7.5	35	20
*Arabic to Arabic NNS	AUC	3.6	4.6	0	24.5	30
	Midd	22.2	10.2	0	35	20
*English to Arabic NS	AUC	12.7	10.2	0.5	35	30
	Midd	0.90	2.4	0	10.5	20
*English to Arabic NNS	AUC	23.6	12.4	0	35	30
	Midd	3.2	4.4	0	17.5	20

Foreigner Identity

- **Representatives of American Politics**
- **Morally Loose Westerners**
- **Fascinating Westerners**
- **Tourists**
- **Wealthy Foreigners**
- **Foreign Guests**
- **English speakers**

Hindering Access

Representatives of American Politics:

At the same time, we're cursed everywhere because we have to have a response to why is America in Iraq? Why does America encourage Israel in Palestine against the Palestinians? Why did America like Bush? Why are we responsible for everything in American politics when I was 12 years old when Bush was elected but we're still responsible for it because of our skin and our passports (Rose)

Wealthy Foreigners:

Because I'm American, I'm American, and he always says oh, American, oh, American, come here, come here, come here to my shop and I don't like to be American there because sometimes the people think that I have a lot of money, and I'm a student, I'm poor (Rob)

Facilitating Access

Foreign Guests:

When I was in Cairo I met a man on the street, I was just asking him where a store was, and he was like, I wanted, he was really happy I was studying Arabic and he was like I have to buy you sweets, I have to do something for you, he wanted to help me
(Isabelle)

Fascinating Westerners:

Because of the attention from them, I have more opportunities for interaction than if for example, I was in Paris, and I was just normal, and no one would talk with me until I talked with him
(Francis)

Hindering Arabic Use

Speakers of English:

People have the idea first, that someone with blond hair and green eyes is a foreigner, a foreigner speaks English, most people have this idea, that if he wanted to speak with them, he'll speak English with them, oh, "English is very good, do you speak English" (Haidar, Egyptian roommate)

Guests:

The Egyptians basically, Egyptians think that Arabic is very hard and Americans or foreigners generally or non-Egyptians, it's very hard for them to learn Arabic, so we view them with like, pity, like so he tries to make it easier for them like that (Alaa, Egyptian teacher)

Facilitating Arabic Use

Foreign Arabic Speakers:

They're so confused as to why this big white guy speaks Arabic . . . and then they say where are you from, and I say American, and they say oh, America's nice, and you know you kind of do that, and once, you know if the cab ride's long enough you can get beyond that, when I go to get my hair cut, I have very deep political discussions, and we talk about the differences between life and work and salaries and everything in America (Rob)

It's obvious that I'm foreign, because of that they always are interested in me, but after they know I speak Arabic they sit with you because what's that, who is this foreigner? (Anders)

Indexed as Egyptian

Facilitating Access and Arabic Use:

They kind of expect me to speak Arabic because I look Arab, so most of the time people come up to me and speak Arabic to me (Mita)

Hindering Access and Arabic Use:

I say I'm American, and they say, but no you're not, like you're coloring is not American, and I'm like nope, I'm American, through and through, I'm American, and they're like no, but really, what are you, and I'm like okay, well, my dad's family is Mexican, and they're like oh, so you're Mexican, and I'm like no, I'm American, I promise I'm not lying, and that's like kind of frustrating because everyone has this mentality that like Americans are all white, and that's just like not true (Pearl)

Gender

- **Traditional good girls**
- **Loose foreign women**
- **Targets of sexual harassment**
- **Female interlocutors**
- **Guests of the family**
- **Romantic partners**

Hindering Access and Arabic Use

Traditional Good Girls:

I feel like I can't have a conversation, like I can't just like shoot the breeze with an Egyptian man that I meet or talk to because it might come across as something, even if it doesn't, it's just like everything, I've been warned so many times, like oh, you can't just like strike up conversations with men, because they're going to take it the wrong way, um, whereas, the guys I know, the American guys I know, especially, they're a few of them that do have very good language skills, like Arabic language skills, they can, and they've had just like, random conversations with people on the street corners and stuff, so they've had more of an opportunity, or it's more acceptable for them to like go up to a random Egyptian man and like talk to them (Tasha)

Loose Foreign Women:

Even other Egyptian girls, will maybe say how can you live with American girls, how? After this you won't be good, you'll be with boys all the time, you'll be, you'll be, you'll be and lots of things, like how can you live with an American girl, how, they think that this American girls will make you, seriously, will make you not good or something like that (Halima, Egyptian roommate)

Facilitating Access and Arabic Use

Female Interlocutors:

I think there's something good, that I can, I can start conversations with women and I think there are a lot of people that don't understand Egyptian women, um, so that's always good because I can see things from their point of view that I think the men can't see (Isabelle)

Guests of the family:

When they see in their faces that they [the students] are happy and speak Arabic, that is the best thing for them [the family], they are very, very, very happy, and my family always calls and says you need to bring the girls again, you need to bring the girls, we miss them, and they talk with them, how are you sweetie, I miss you, they're friends now, it wasn't the same five years ago when we saw the announcements on TV, and we see the news, it's not the same thing at all, now they have American friends they like a whole lot (Inas, Egyptian roommate)

Religion

- **Muslims** (shared beliefs)
- **Non-Muslims** (outsiders, partners for religious discussions)
 - **Jews** (Israeli enemies, partners for religious discussions)

Hindering Access

Non-Muslim outsiders:

I'm not Muslim, like I don't wear a hijab. Like I've actually, we've had times where we've gone out in public wearing hijabs and it's actually been so much better for us, like everyone's been so much more welcoming and helpful because they like they realize initially like right off that our Arabic isn't perfect so we're not from Egypt but then they're like, oh, because we're wearing the hijab they like think we're Muslim and so they've been much more receptive and like welcoming so, maybe if I was a Muslim it would be easier to integrate into the society, I don't know, maybe. (Ariana)

Muslim alienation:

They think I'm one of them, but I'm not one of them, and sometime like if they know I'm, oh, okay, I'm one of them and I think like them and things like that, they maybe like say something I'm not comfortable with, like oh, Israelis or Jews (Welat)

Helping Access

Muslim insider:

I mean like my dad's half Pakistani, it's a Muslim country, so when I'm interacting with other Muslims, then yeah, definitely, actually 100% [I'm] like less foreign (Rashid)

Jewish partner for religious discussions:

In the beginning I was a little afraid when I wanted to say I'm Jewish, but now like I don't have a problem, I say I'm Jewish and we talk about religion (Keith)

Conclusions

- Identity negotiation influences both access to Egyptians and the use of Arabic during study abroad in Egypt
- Crucially, the *same* identity category can *both help and hinder* access to Egyptians and Arabic use
- Researchers, study abroad programs, and students should focus on how these identities are negotiated rather than the categories themselves as predictors of facilitation of access and Arabic use

Program Role

- Access to Egyptians via communities of practice (especially for females)
- Language pledge
- Technological facilitation
- Training in ethnographic research methods (Jackson, 2008, 2010; Roberts et al, 2001)
- Raising at-home Arabic levels
- Post program linguistic maintenance
- Pre-program Dialect Instruction

I think there are opportunities in the regular university for this beginning [in dialect], I was annoyed because I arrived without any means to interact with the people here (Francis)

Access for Women

Providing Opportunities:

That's very important and the discussions I had with them were very good, and there's a culture here, it's hard to speak with anyone in the street, I'm really thankful for the experience in the dorms because there were many opportunities to speak with them about anything (Lynda)

[This opportunity is] a dream I don't dream of (Amina, Egyptian roommate)

Missing Opportunities:

If there was a place where there were women who spoke Arabic who wanted to speak Arabic with an American . . . with the people I talk to I think it's not appropriate if I tried to speak for a long time on personal things with the grocer or the fruit seller (Anna)

I'm telling you, there's lots of people who want to be friends with those that speak Arabic, but it's the direction, I wasn't shy, but there's ones who are shy (Nora, Egyptian roommate)

Language Pledge

The pledge as a reason not to reply in English:

There were two girls speaking English, and I said, I'm sorry, I only speak in Arabic, I don't want to listen to English, please (Mallory)

Looking for a pledge:

I've heard about the language contract they sign in the Middlebury program . . .
I would have liked to do that (Rashid)

I don't really know what people do to like legitimately practice Arabic all the time, my friend Billy says all right, I'm going to have two days this week where I'm not going to speak any English at all, and he just, it never works out for him, it just never works out for him (Jacob)

Thank You!
Questions?

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