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ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

**The American University in Cairo**

**School of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Arabizi: A writing variety worth learning?**

**An exploratory study of the views of foreign learners of Arabic on Arabizi**

**A Thesis Submitted to**

**The Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language Department**

**In partial fulfillment of the**

**Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts**

**By:**

**Mona Farrag Mahmoud Attwa**

Abstract

This paper investigates the views of learners of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) on Arabizi as well as the possible effects of these views on the field of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL). For purposes of this paper, Arabizi is defined as: writing Arabic in Latin characters and Arabic numerals on computer-mediated communication (CMC). The study tries to answer the following research question:

What is the attitude of AFL learners on Arabizi regarding:

- a. its effect on their communicative skills with native Egyptians on CMC?
- b. learning AFL?

In a pilot study, a web-based questionnaire was posted on the researcher's Facebook page and copies were handed to AFL students enrolled in the spring program in the Arabic Language Institute (ALI) at The American University in Cairo (AUC). Nineteen complete responses were received and analyzed. The questionnaire was amended for the main study and 23 responses were gathered from students enrolled in the summer course of The Center for Arabic Studies Abroad (CASA). The results of both the pilot and the main study indicate that AFL students believe that Arabizi hinders an effective communication in Arabic on CMC and complicates AFL learning process. The participants express their need to learn Arabizi in order to have better communication with Egyptians on CMC. Moreover, they think that Arabic is acquiring a new writing variety. The researcher examines the potential consequences of these views on the field of TAFL and the status of Arabic language on CMC.

*Keywords:* e-Arabic, CMC, Arabizi, TAFL, Latinization

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## **Introduction**

Learners of foreign languages (FL) are always encouraged by their teachers to practice the language with native speakers. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has made this practice easily accessible in the modern age with a multitude of other benefits in the field of second language learning.

Recent research confirms the benefits of CMC if integrated in the learning process. Hamzah (2004) summarizes the benefits of CMC in the field of FL. He agrees with Warschauer (1996) that CMC acts as a discussion platform where FL learners feel less threatened and more equal. CMC minimizes the teacher's role allowing more space to learners' participation (Kern, 1995; Kelm, 1992; Beauvois, 1992; Warschauer, 1997, as cited in Hamzah, 2004). This, in turn, provides more opportunity for more new interpersonal and communicative interactions (Beauvois & Eledge, 1996; Swaffar, 1998, as cited in Hamzah, 2004).

As far as the focus on linguistic knowledge is concerned, Hamzah (2004) also agrees with Warschauer, 1997; Blake, 2000; Pellettieri, 2000; and St. John & Cash, 1995 that CMC helps students focus on linguistic forms as it allows communication through a text-based medium. This allows students to personally identify linguistic errors (Kelm, 1992, as cited in Hamzah, 2004), and produce more quality output (Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996; Chun, 1994, as cited in Hamzah, 2004). CMC, in this way, allows students to reflect and pay close attention to their L2 production (Kroonenberg, 1994/1995; Sotillo, 2000, as cited in Hamzah, 2004), leading to more independent learning of the target language (Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts, 1996; Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000, as cited in Hamzah, 2004).

Similarly, learners of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL), and namely in this paper, learners of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA), are increasingly urged by their teachers to mingle with native Egyptians in all aspects of life. Equally with other FL teaching, CMC has made this interaction increasingly possible, especially when learners are not learning the dialect in Egypt. However, learners of AFL find themselves facing a problem of decoding a written code that is not introduced to them in the classroom: Arabizi. Arabizi is the phenomenon of writing Arabic in Latin characters and Arabic numerals widely spread among CMC users in Egypt and other countries in the Arab world. The phenomenon is thought to have been started on CMC and mobile devices when they were first introduced to Egypt without systems supporting Arabic language. However, many Egyptians continue to follow this habit even when CMC devices start supporting Arabic. Recently, this way of writing has found its way to TV commercials, posters, printed book (Omar Taher's *Captain Misr* is an example), and in the post-revolution supplement of the official newspaper of Egypt entitled, *Ta7rir*. (For samples of Arabizi, see Appendix A)

This study focuses only on Arabizi used via CMC and the views of foreign learners of Arabic regarding this phenomenon. CMC means investigated are social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, and mobile SMSs. The paper wants to know, on one hand, whether AFL learners think that Arabizi affects an effective communication with native Egyptians on CMC and whether they think it has any influence on learning AFL. On the other hand, the study investigates the consequences of these views on the field of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL). The paper starts by defining Arabizi and its major characteristics, and then a literature review of what has been written on this phenomenon follows.

### **Arabizi: Definition and Major Characteristics**

For purposes of this paper Arabizi is defined as a written code of Arabic using Latin characters and Arabic numerals to carry out Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) (Palfreyman, D. and Khalil, M. a., 2003, Yaghan, 2008, Essawy, 2010 & Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al, 2011). This code is thought to have been invented to accommodate Arabic language to CMC but spread later to be used in handwriting (Yaghan, 2008, Essawy, 2010).

The word “Arabizi” is a blend of the two words “Arabic” and “Inglizee” (The Egyptian word for “English”). Since English is the most common foreign language used on the Internet in Egypt (Bjornsson, 2010), this term is coined to refer to the Arabic language written in English characters. The term is used sometimes as well to refer to code-switching between Arabic and English while speaking. But for purposes of this paper, “Arabizi” is used to refer to this code of writing defined above and described below. It is also used by Yaghan (2008) in his study entitled: “*Arabizi: A Contemporary Style of Arabic Slang*”.

There are some general characteristics that define Arabizi as a writing code. As for the representation of vowels and consonants, Yaghan (2008) notices that the use of vowels is optional in Arabizi and they even can be omitted depending on the reader’s familiarity with this variety, the contextual clarity of the word, and sometimes the allowed number of characters per message in case it is sent via CMC. When vowels are used, the general trend is that the “a” represents the *fatha*, the “i” or “e” represents the *kasra* and the “u”, “ou”, or “o” is used to represent the *damma*. Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al (2011) support this observation when they referred to the inconsistency of using the symbols used to represent short and long vowels.

As for consonants, Yaghan (2008) says that consonant sounds are represented by their English counterparts; however, Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al (2011) note that the representation of consonants depends on the second language (L2) of Arabizi users. For example, if the user's L2 is English, the ج can be represented either with "g" or "j"; while if the user's L2 is French, the same sound will be represented with "gu". As for the Arabic sounds that do not exist in the Roman alphabet such as ع and ح, Arabizi users sometimes resort to Arabic numerals or to the closest English counterpart to represent them. For example, the ح can be represented with "7" or "h", the ط with "6" or "t", and the ع with "3" or "a". It is assumed that the choice of the Arabic numeral is based mainly on the close similarity between the shape of the numeral and the Arabic letter it represents (Yaghan, 2008 & Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al, 2011). Interestingly, the ح is represented by adding an apostrophe to the "7" to become "7'" and the ع is "3'", applying the same strategy used in the Arabic writing system of adding dots to distinguish between similar shapes of letters, though in the case of Arabizi apostrophes are used. Moreover, using the same symbols to represent different consonantal sounds is typical in Arabizi. For example, Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al (2011) argue that the "t" is used to represent ط, ت, and ض, also the "z" is used to represent ظ, ذ, and ز, and the "s" is used to represent س, ص, and ث. The stressed consonant, which takes the *shaddah* ّ sign in Arabic, is inconsistently represented by either a doubled letter or a single letter, where in the latter case the users depend on the context and their knowledge of Arabic to decode the word.

Arabizi also bears many features of CMC language as it is characterized by a lot of abbreviations; especially because it is mainly used in informal talks (Yaghan, 2008 & Essawy, 2010). Moreover, Yaghan (2008) notices that beside the English abbreviations, there are many other abbreviations used for Arabic endings, such as the use of @ to refer to feminine plurality

suffix in Arabic pronounced /aat/; and “8” to indicate the first person past tense suffix in slang Arabic pronounced /eet/.

One more feature is that Arabizi differs not only from one Arab country to another (Yaghan, 2008), but also within the same country depending on each group of users (Abdel-Ghaffar, et al, 2011). Hence, in order to understand different words, Arabizi users rely heavily on context as much as they rely on their previous knowledge of Arabic words (Yaghan, 2008). Abdel-Ghaffar, et al, (2011) conclude that the efficiency of using Arabizi depends on its users and their experience with writing Arabizi. Therefore, they conclude that it is more efficient when used among people who know how to use it.

As for the reasons of using Arabizi, Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al, (2011) report that users find it easier and faster to type in English characters than in Arabic characters, as they feel Arabic characters are not technologically friendly. Some users also view it as a fashion that makes them look “cool” (Essawy, 2010) and some others just do it to “go with the flow” (Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al, 2011). Some other users report that they use Arabizi because they are too lazy to shift the keyboard to the Arabic characters while typing in English. The majority of users confirm that Arabizi does not affect their identity as Arabs, though it may weaken their linguistic ability of Arabic on the long run (Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al, 2011). Moreover, Arabizi is said to help its users to easily code-switch between Arabic and English (Palfreyman, D. and Khalil, M. a., 2003; Yaghan, 2008; Essawy, 2010; & Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al, 2011). Based on this, an assumption is made that Arabizi users are mainly bilingual speakers of Arabic and English or French, as these are the main two second languages taught in the Arab countries (Palfreyman, D. and Khalil, M. a., 2003, Yaghan, 2008, Essawy, 2010 & Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al, 2011).

### **Literature Review**

In light of the diglossic situation in Egypt and the dominance of English as the second language in work place and education, Warschauer (2002) conducted an exploratory study on young professional internet users in Egypt in order to find out which languages they use on the internet. A questionnaire was given to 43 young Egyptian professionals followed by interviews to four of them.

The study showed that Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) was rarely used on the internet by the participants. However, a new diglossic situation was found, mainly between English and a Romanized colloquial Arabic. As far as Arabizi is concerned, or Romanized Arabic as Warschauer (2002) called it, it was found that it was heavily used in informal emails and online chatting. This Romanized Arabic was characterized by code switching into English, though some of the participants wrote only in Romanized Arabic without English. Warschauer argued that the emergence of Romanized Arabic gave colloquial Egyptian a new realm, even if in a Romanized version. Writing colloquial Arabic in online communication and discussing religious and political topics was, according to Warschauer, an interesting development to the use of colloquial Egyptian, which was frowned upon when used in these fields. A reason for this, as Warschauer argued, could be the absence of authority in a context where informality was highly acceptable.

A script analysis was also carried out and found that the phonemes of Arabic that were not in the Latin characters were represented by numerals (for example: 2,3, and 7). Warschauer said that this way of representation started spontaneously on the internet and was now widely recognized among its users. The participants stated that they resorted to Romanized Arabic to express highly personal content in their own language when they could not express it well in

English. This was related to their feeling of pride in their own language and that Arabic was more expressive when discussing personal issues than English. Also they argued that their use of English and Romanized Arabic did not mean they wanted to embrace western culture and renounce their Arab identity. On the contrary, they argued that their use of English could be traced back to the ability of the Egyptian culture to embrace everything and make it its own.

Palfreyman and al-Khalil (2006) attempted to analyze what they called “ASCII-ized Arabic” used in IM conversations in an attempt to stand on the social factors affecting the usage of this representation of Arabic. The analysis also aimed to describe how Arabic was represented using ASCII characters and how far this representation was consistent. The researchers investigated the linguistic resources users drew on in order to compose this variety as well as the social purposes it served. The study focused on female university students in the United Arab Emirates and included three sources of data: a corpus of instant messenger conversation, responses to an email survey and researchers’ observations.

The results of this study showed that ASCII-ized Arabic was mainly used in informal context and the language was typically short and abbreviated. The researchers argued that this phenomenon came to existence as a response to technical constraints on using Arabic language on CMC. ASCII-ized Arabic was found to draw much from spoken language, the orthographic symbols and also the social context which govern the conversation. ASCII-ized Arabic was also found to be loaded with code switching between Arabic and English, the fact which was facilitated by using Latin characters to write both languages. However, the analysis showed that whenever English symbols were not representative of Arabic sounds, users of ASCII-ized Arabic resorted to orthographically similar numerals, which, according to the researchers, represented

the sounds of Arabic more faithfully. The researchers also argued that this ASCII-ized form of the UAE vernacular might be considered as the first long written texts of this vernacular. This, in turn, should provide the vernacular with local prestige. The researchers concluded that users of ASCII-ized Arabic chose to disregard the Arabic writing system and drew on the orthographic system of another language - English - which enjoyed a higher prestige and dominance within the context of globalization.

In his MA thesis entitled *Egyptian Romanized Arabic: A Study of Selected Features from Communication Among Egyptian Youth on Facebook*, Bjornsson (2010) wanted to know the extent of influence of Arabic orthography on Arabizi, or what he called “Egyptian Romanized Arabic (ERA)”. He also wanted to investigate whether users of ERA write it arbitrarily or there have been some norms that were starting to emerge. Interestingly, he explained why he named it “Egyptian Romanized Arabic” and not “Romanized Egyptian Arabic” for instance. He said this term makes it clear that the Romanization is done the Egyptian way as he noted that ERA might be different from one country to another, as his cited examples from the UAE in the study of Palfreyman and al-Khalil (2006) mentioned above and from Morocco in Berjaoui (2002). He argued that the nationality of ERA user could be identified from his/her way of writing (p. 51). According to him, this is mainly because ERA is a reflection of the spoken dialect, and in his study the underlying one is the Egyptian dialect.

For that reason and in order to answer his research questions, Bjornsson (2010) built a corpus from Facebook groups within Egypt network, to make sure that the posts are from Egyptians. His corpus consisted of 110 posts (one post from one person) with a total of 7255 words; an average of about 66 words per user. From this corpus, he looked first at the



representation of the phonemes of Egyptian Arabic; the consonants and the long and short vowels. Second, he looked at some features which he chose because, according to him, their pronunciation in Egyptian Arabic does not coincide with their way of writing with Arabic orthography. These features were: the definite article, the feminine ending, the germination, the future prefix **هـ/ـهـ**, the preposition **لـ** and **بـ**, and some other features mainly related to different prepositions.

Bjornsson (2010) concluded that users of ERA did not consider it a system of writing. While there was a relative consistency in the representation of consonants in his data, there was still no common ground for the representation of vowels, even on the level of the individual user. He also concluded that users of ERA had the English language in mind whenever they searched for an appropriate representation for the Egyptian Arabic phoneme. He based this assumption on the following: English is the most popular foreign language in Egypt at the time of the study, users represented the **ش** with the typical English digraph /sh/, and ERA, similar to English, had a low phoneme-grapheme correspondence where most vowel phonemes had diverse way of spellings in different words. However, he assumed some influence of Arabic orthography in the representation of the definite article, the lack of marking in the germination, the relative pronoun **اللي**, and the writing of the two prepositions mentioned above. Nevertheless, there were instances when Bjornsson could not decide whether it was the influence of Arabic orthography or what he called ad hoc transcription, like for example the representation of the definite article. Finally, he said that the future of ERA was still uncertain as the users were still a minority among Egyptian Internet users, since in order to write ERA one needed to be familiar with a language written in the Roman alphabet, which is still, according to him, not that common among Egyptians.

Essawy (2010) investigated the use of Latin script in Arabic handwriting of native Egyptians. Her main aim was to know how this variety appeared, who was using it and whether this form of writing became standardized and socially acceptable. Essawy discussed the impact of this phenomenon on the status of Arabic language with respect to the domination of English language in the Egyptian society. For answering these questions, Essawy analyzed a sample of handwritten Arabizi (or what she calls a “hybrid language variety” of Arabic). The analysis looked at linguistic features characterizing this process of hybridization and the social context where this variety was used. A questionnaire was conducted on Egyptian bilingual participants to determine the age group of the users of this variety, the reasons of spreading from CMC to handwriting, the level of standardization, and finally the social context in which it is used.

Essawy concluded that Arabic in Latin script was becoming an acceptable written variety among Egyptian bilinguals, especially within age group 15-20. Interestingly though, she argued that CMC was not the originator of Arabic in Latin script, rather it was the tendency of Egyptian young bilinguals to match what they write with their speech in informal context. Essawy argued that CMC acted only as a platform for young people to give voice to Arabic in Latin script. The choice of this variety, according to Essawy, was a choice by the bilingual youth of Egypt to express themselves using the same language mixtures they use while speaking adapting it to CMC and the surrounding English globalization. Essawy saw the resort to Arabizi by young bilingual Egyptians as a way to avoid language policing because they had a feeling of insecurity while writing in normal Arabic script. Finally, in order to preserve the status of MSA in the society, she called for more research to stand on the social scope of Arabizi and called on language planning programs to exert successful efforts to integrate MSA in the cyber space and other forms of technology.

Abdel-Ghaffar et al (2011) conducted a survey on 70 Egyptian Facebook users ranging from 20 to 40 years old. The aim of their survey was to know the context in which young Facebook users write in Arabizi and whether this was related to their sense of Arab identity. Their paper also reflected briefly on the advantages and disadvantages of Arabizi in order to consider whatever solutions it might have offered to the problems of writing normal Arabic script. At the end of their paper they presented samples of Arabizi that appeared in commercial ads, banners, and posters.

On one hand, the results of the questionnaire showed that 82% of the participants were using Arabizi. Abdel-Ghaffar et al (2011) agreed with the results of the papers mentioned above that Arabizi was mainly used in informal context and among young bilingual speakers. Moreover, the participants argued that since Arabizi became commonly in use, it, thus, has acquired a relative level of standardization among its users and they found no need to shift to Arabic script. On the other hand, Abdel-Ghaffar et al (2011) conducted another survey on 28 participants where they reported that Arabizi, in fact, enabled its users to share a special code that bonds them together; or better said, establishing their own speech community. However, the majority of the participants said that using Arabizi did not affect their sense of Arab identity.

As far as the writing system is concerned, Abdel-Ghaffar et al (2011) concluded that Arabizi did not offer a solution to the problems of the Arabic writing system; rather it complicated the text as it was not consistent among its users. For example, Arabizi did not differentiate between emphatic and non-emphatic sounds and it took longer to be mentally processed by the users.

The above review shows that Arabizi becomes a conspicuous way of typing Arabic among native Egyptians not only on Internet, but also in handwriting. Some of the users even do not see a need to stop using it as long as it is economical and enjoys some level of standardization (Warschauer, 2002; ; Essawy 2010; & Abdel-Ghaffar et al, 2011). This highlights the need to investigate the views of AFL learners who communicate with native Egyptian on social networks, more importantly with the eyes of the whole world recently directed to social networks after the Arab Spring which is initiated, organized and discussed on online social networks. To the extent of the researcher's knowledge, no study has been done on the impact of this phenomenon on learners of AFL. Hence, this study aspires to introduce a new dimension on the study of Arabizi in relation to TAFL and the current situation of Arabic on CMC.

## **The Study**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the views of AFL learners on Arabizi. At the time when this study is conducted, Arabizi seems to be evolving and spreading in other media of communication such as TV commercials, street banners and posters, and even it has been adopted by the official newspaper *Al-Ahram* in its post-revolution supplement entitled *Ta7rir*. The study aims to know whether AFL learners think that this way of writing which they encounter on social networks and other CMC has any effect on their communication with native Egyptians on CMC and their process of learning AFL. The study as well reflects on the effects of these views in relation to TAFL. In order to reach this aim, a hypothesis has been formed and tested in a pilot study.

## **The Pilot Study**

Hansen (2010) argues that one of the difficulties that hinder word recognition and reading skills in Arabic is the orthography of Arabic which is totally different than the orthography of the learners' L1. Based on this, the researcher hypothesizes that if Arabizi is written in Latin script, AFL learners whose L1 is written in Latin script will find reading and understanding Arabic easier; and hence, a more effective communication can be established. A pilot study is conducted to test this hypothesis and answer the following question:

What is the attitude of AFL learners on Arabizi regarding:

- a. its effect on their communicative skills with native Egyptians on CMC?
- b. learning AFL?

### **Methodology and participants.**

A web-based questionnaire was posted on the researcher's Facebook wall. Participants were very few; hence the researcher printed copies of the questionnaire and handed it to students enrolled in the semester of Spring 2011 at The Arabic language Institute (ALI) at The American University of Cairo (AUC). (For a copy of the questionnaire, see Appendix B).

In total, 19 complete responses are collected and analyzed. Five students have studied Arabic for less than a year, 9 have studied Arabic for a year to two years, 3 students from 2 to 3 years, and 2 students for more than 3 years. Twelve students have studied both MSA and ECA, and two students have studied other varieties as well such as Iraqi and Omani. All of the participants have studied Arabic in Egypt, where 10 of them have studied it also in the USA, one of them has studied Arabic in Japan and another in Oman. Four of the students are in the Elementary level in MSA, 13 in the intermediate, and 2 are in the advanced level. As for ECA, 10 students are in the elementary level, 7 are in the intermediate, while only one student is in the advanced level. The following table shows the percentage of MSA and ECA proficiency levels of the students.

Table 1

*Percentage of MSA and ECA Proficiency Levels of the Participants*

Arabic Variety	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
MSA	21.05%	68.42%	10.53%
ECA	55.56%	38.89%	5.56%

**Results.**

The results show that 73.68% of the students communicate in Arabic via CMC. A percentage of 84.21% of the participants communicate with native Egyptians on CMC, where 60% communicate in both English and Arabic with native Egyptians, 15% communicate in Arabic, and 25% communicate in English. As for using Arabizi, 55.56% use this code, and 100% see Egyptians using it.

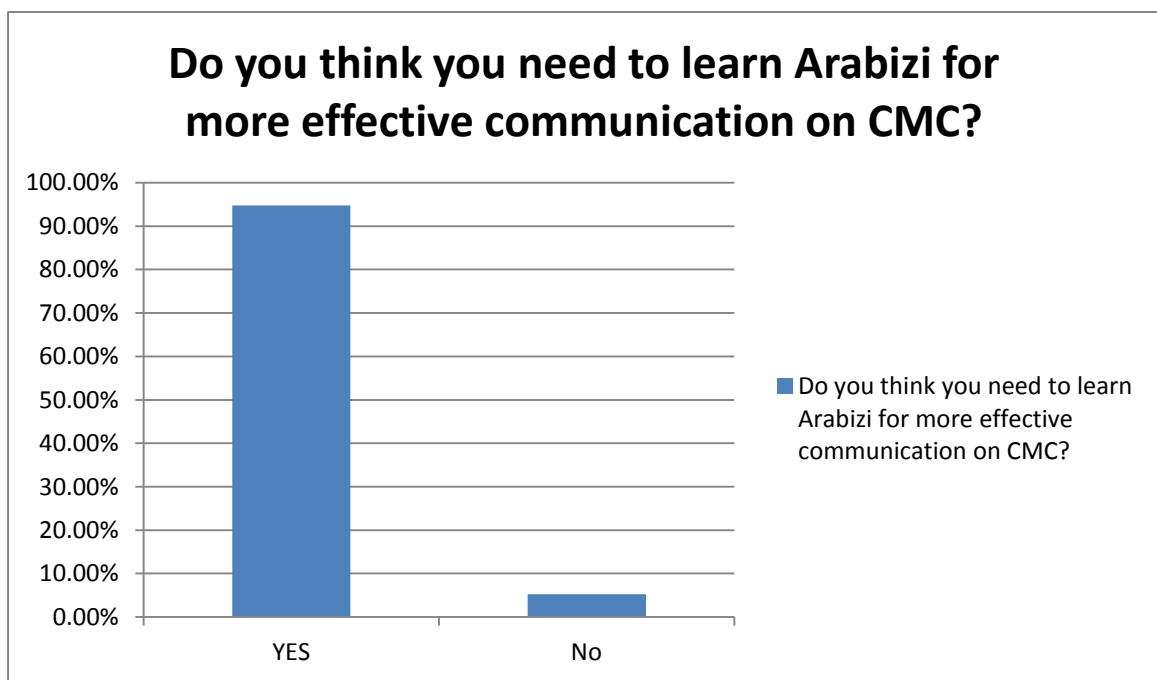


Figure 1. *Learning Arabizi for more effective communication on CMC.*

Moreover, 63.16% of the students report that they cannot read or write easily in Arabizi and 94.74% of the participants think they need to learn Arabizi in order to communicate more effectively with Egyptians on CMC (see Figure 1). In addition to this, 78.95% believe that Arabizi is becoming a new writing variety that they need to learn besides learning writing in Arabic script (see Figure 2).

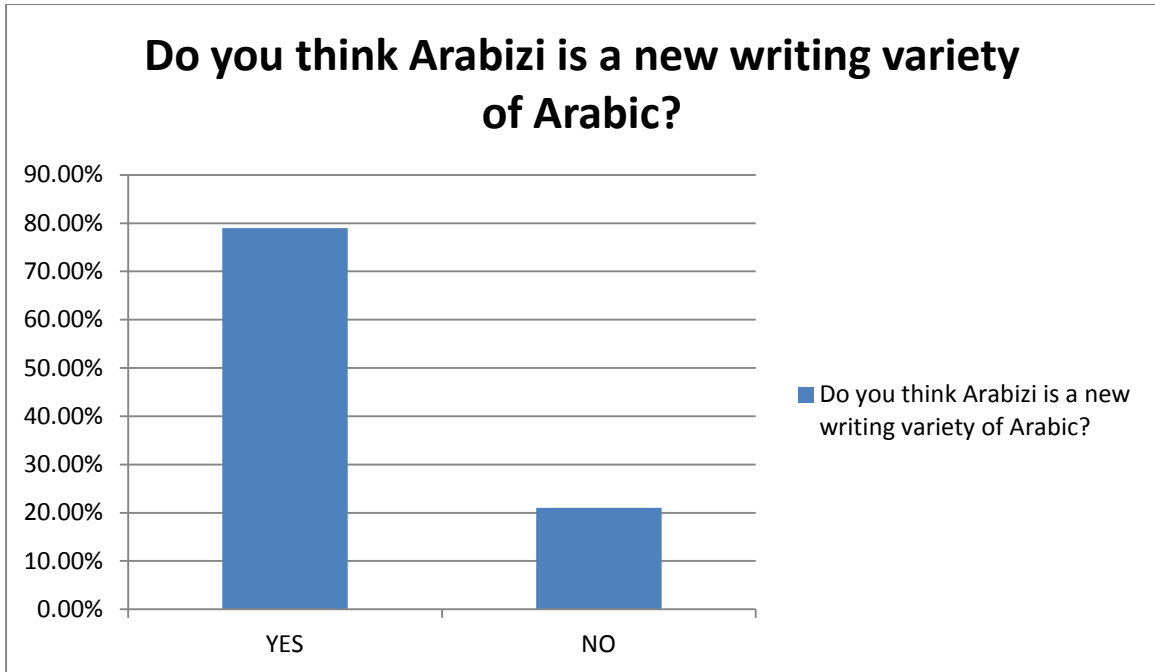


Figure 2. Arabizi is a new writing variety of Arabic.

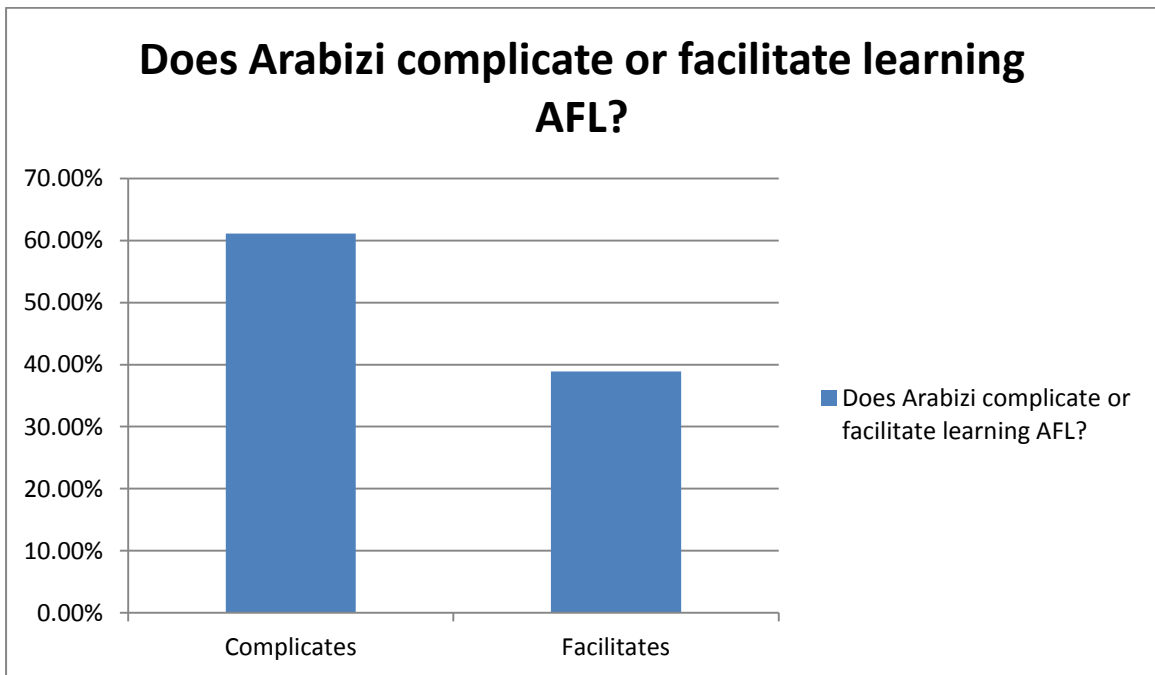


Figure 3. Arabizi complicates AFL learning.



As far as learning AFL, 61.11% finds Arabizi complicating their learning of Arabic (see Figure 3). The reasons some of them mentions include that Arabizi hinders Arabic learners to learn the Arabic script by relying on the Latin-written Arabic, also the fact that Arabizi is not standardized makes it even more confusing. Some of them think that Arabizi makes remembering Arabic spelling harder. One of them simply says “I dont like transliteration”, and another one thinks that at the beginner level, it is already difficult to read or understand normal Arabic script, and writing in Latin characters and Arabic numerals adds to this difficulty.

On the other hand, the 38.89% who think that Arabizi facilitates learning Arabic state that this is because reading Arabizi is like speaking the dialect as it is closer to the features of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA). Another student agrees that Arabizi helps learn the spoken language saying: “Because if I learn the way young people speak, it will be easier to communicate with them. [Arabizi] is mostly used by younger generations so there is a lot of slang in it and I think it's very important to learn that aspect of a language”. Two more students echo the same opinion that Arabizi gives them bigger chance to communicate in slang and learn more vocabulary. One of the participants adds that learning to type in Arabizi is easier than learning the Arabic keyboard in order to communicate on CMC. However, he argues “But, in my opinion, it's just catering to the laziness of Westerners”. However, one student finds an advantage and a disadvantage saying that “It would help in pronunciation but may complicate spelling in Arabic script”

In response to an open-ended question on the advantage and disadvantages of Arabizi, some of the participants think that Arabizi is westernizing the Arabic language and it is a kind of a disassociation from the Arabic language. One of them reports that some of the native Egyptians

he knows do not know how to spell some words in Arabic letters especially in ECA. Some echo that transliterating Arabic as it is in Arabizi is confusing because it is not consistent. Learners raise the concern that typing in Arabizi does not enable them to learn typing in Arabic script. Other participants add that this phenomenon may slow down learning Arabic as a foreign language and may generate wrong pronunciation. Others say that this way Arabic will lose its “purity”, and the spread of this phenomenon implies that English is the language of online communication pushing Arabic backward as a more traditional and classical language not suitable for modern technology. They also state that it is faster to read Arabic in Arabic script than Arabic written in Latin characters. Finally, another participant says: “the written Arabic language is beautiful--it seems a shame to use Latin letters in a way that's less intelligible in the long term”.

As for the advantages of Arabizi, some of the participants find Arabizi, if learnt, quicker in typing than normal Arabic script. Another related advantage is that it can be used on any keyboard and not necessarily one that supports Arabic characters. Some of the students believe that Arabizi saves them the trouble of switching keyboard scripts every now and then. Another reported advantage is that the vowels are clearer in Arabizi, especially for beginner levels. Another participant finds it easier for foreigners to read than normal Arabic script. One of them also says that CMC devices have been designed for English as the primary language. Though this is slowly changing, Arabizi may still be useful on CMC devices.

From the above, the pilot study disproves the hypothesis that AFL learners find reading and understanding Arabizi easier than normal Arabic script. The results show that the majority of AFL learners, 63.1 %, think that Arabizi hinders an effective communication with native

Egyptians on CMC, as they find difficulty in reading and writing it, and 61.11% think that it has negative implications on learning AFL. Hence, the researcher thinks that a larger-scale study is needed to delve into more details of the views of AFL learners and to better understand its effects on teaching and learning AFL.

### **The Present Study**

The present study tries to target a larger sample and obtain more information on the research questions. The study attempts to attain more data on the attitude of AFL learners regarding the phenomenon of Arabizi and to highlight any effects it has on TAFL.

#### **Methodology and participants.**

For purposes of this study, the above mentioned questionnaire is amended where some background questions are deleted as they were found useless during the pilot study and time consuming to the participants and caused some of them to quit the questionnaire. At the same time, more questions are added to elicit more information on the views of AFL learners towards Arabizi. The researcher has also inserted 10 Likert- scale items in order to confirm the data obtained from the questionnaire. (For the amended questionnaire, see Appendix C).

The questionnaire is sent via email to students enrolled in the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad (CASA), the Arabic Language Institute (ALI) at The American University in Cairo (AUC).

In total, 23 participants responded to the questionnaire. Almost 60.87% of the participants have studied Arabic for more than 3 years, 4.35% from 2 to 3 years, 17.39% from a year to 2 years, and 17.39% for less than a year and. Almost all of the students have studied both MSA and

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ECA and 6 have studied other varieties, such as Levantine, Moroccan or Palestinian Arabic. All respondents study Arabic in Egypt with 91.3 % of them studied it also in the USA. As for their proficiency levels, 8.70% are in the elementary of MSA, 39.13% are in the intermediate and 52.17% are in the advanced; while 54.17% are in the elementary level of ECA, 37.50% in the intermediate and 8.33% in the advanced. English language is the mother tongue of 90 % of the participants.

Table 2

### *Percentage of MSA and ECA Proficiency Levels of the Participants*

Arabic Variety	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
MSA	8.70%	39.13%	52.17%
ECA	54.17%	37.50%	8.33%

## **Results.**

Out of the 23 participants, 73.91% say that they communicate in Arabic on CMC such as Facebook, Twitter, emails, and SMSs. Also 75% communicate with Egyptians, where 46.88% communicate with them in English, and 53.13% communicate in Arabic. Moreover, 56.52% say they type Arabic in Arabizi, whereas 43.48% say they don't use it at all (see Figure 4). A percentage of 91.3% confirm they see Egyptians use Arabizi. As for reading and writing Arabizi, 43.48% say that they can type it easily but find it difficult to read, 13% can read it easily but find

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it difficult to type, 21.74% can type and read Arabizi easily and also 21.74 % find it difficult to both type and read.

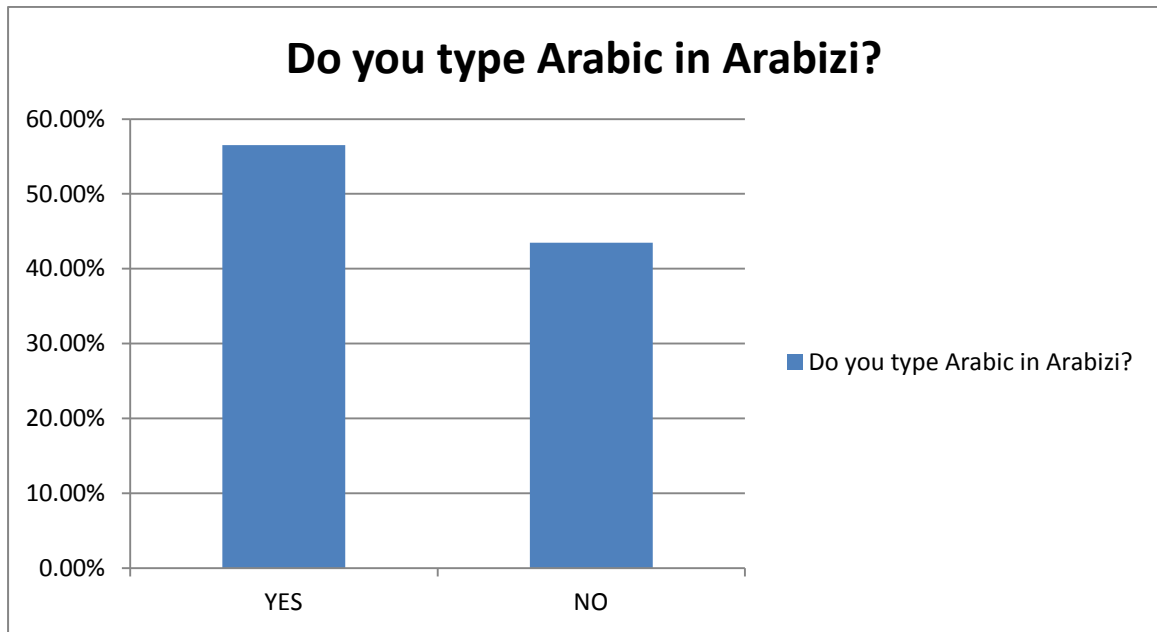


Figure 4. *AFL learners using Arabizi*

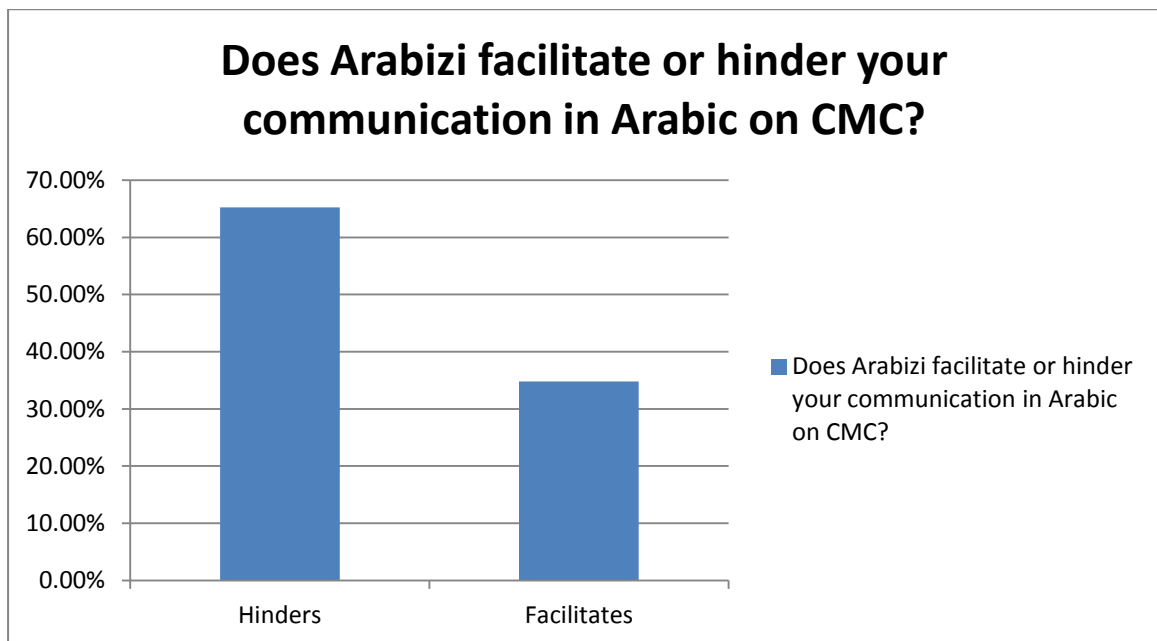


Figure 5. *Arabizi hinders communication in Arabic on CMC?*

The results of the present study support the results obtained from the pilot study. The majority of the participants in this study, 65.22%, feel that Arabizi hinders their communication in Arabic via CMC (see Figure 5). According to the participants, the complexity of communicating in Arabizi is caused by the fact that it is not standardized causing each person to understand it differently. Moreover, the participants report that Arabizi takes them longer to be read and thus to be understood. It is not surprisingly, then, (as clear from Figure 6) that 82.61% of the participants think that Arabizi is a new writing variety of Arabic language and an equal percentage express their need to learn Arabizi in order to establish an effective communication with Egyptians (see Figure 7). Some, however, relate the difficulty to communicate with Arabizi to their incompetency in ECA. They see Arabizi directly linked to ECA proficiency level as one of them sees his low level in ECA the reason why Egyptians cannot understand his Arabizi. He says: “the way I speak ECA as a foreigner is different from how an Egyptian does, and that is clear on CMC”. To sum up their views, Arabizi causes “difficulties with communication/understanding”, as one participant puts it.

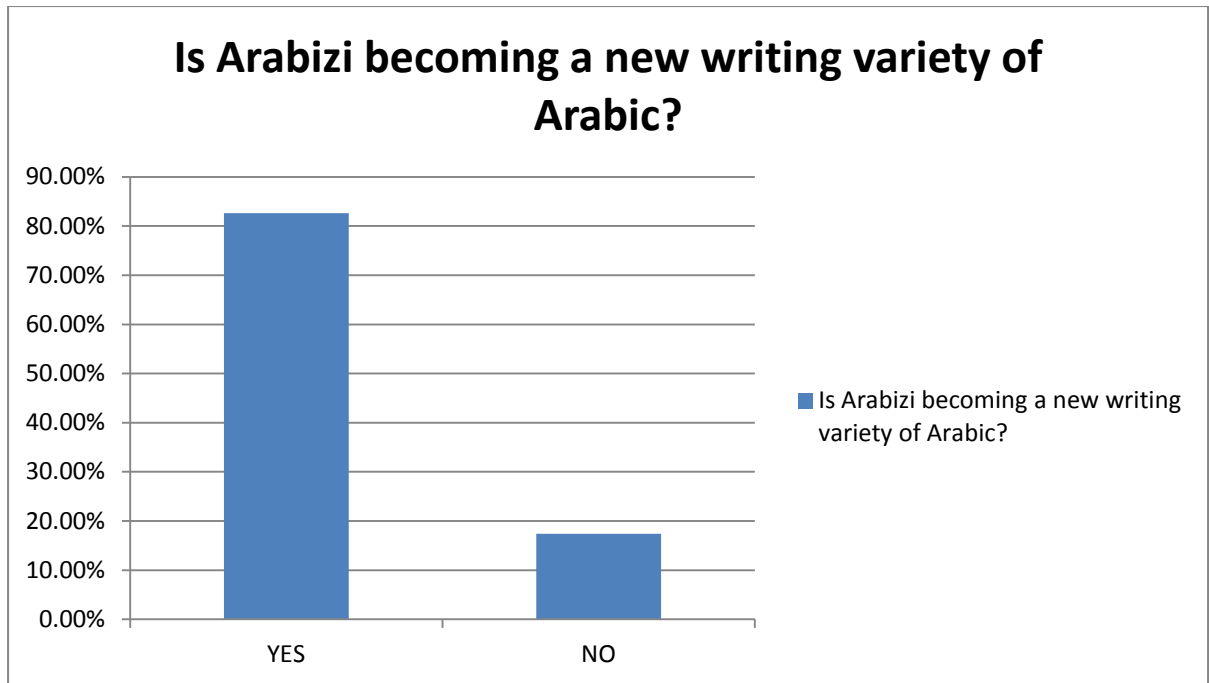


Figure 6. *Arabizi is a new writing variety.*

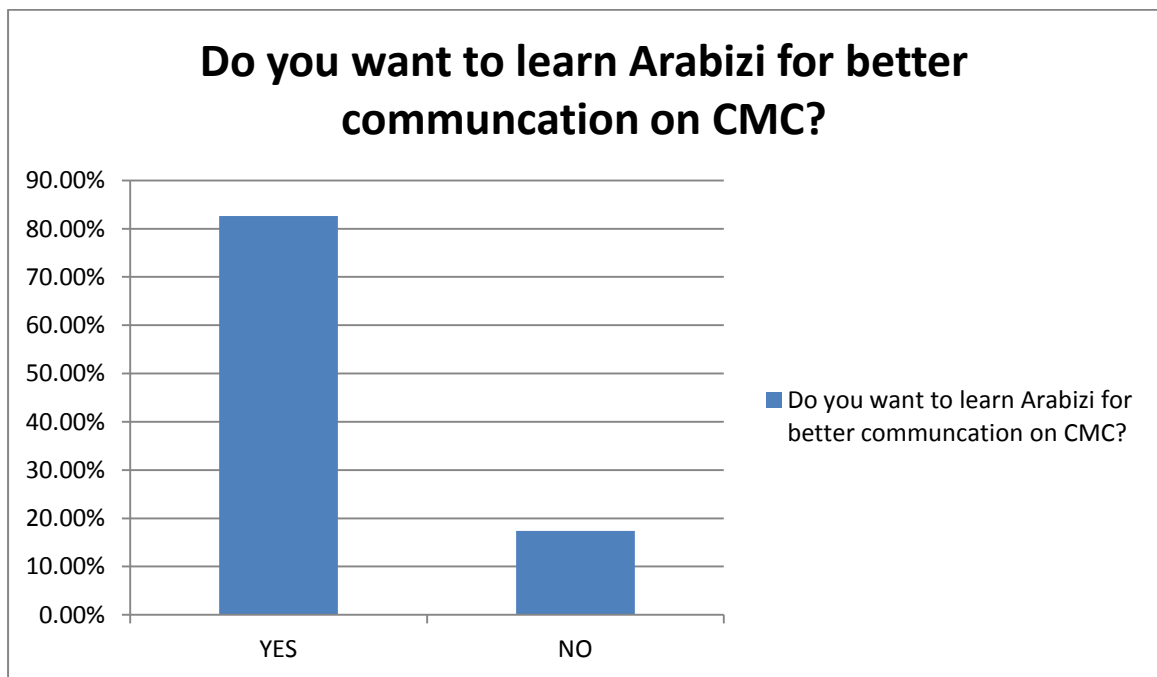


Figure 7. *AFL learners and learning Arabizi.*

Almost 70% (69.57%) believe that this writing variety complicates their learning of AFL (see Figure 8). On one hand, participants who think that Arabizi complicates the process of learning AFL believe that Arabizi is a new form of the language, if not a new language altogether, which still needs to be learnt. According to them, Arabizi delays their learning of Arabic spelling and typing. One of them says: “It forces my mind to consider new ways to visualize and understand the Arabic language”. They also raise a concern that learning normal Arabic script is already complicated to them, so to have a new writing code to learn adds more complication to the process of learning AFL. Moreover, to AFL learners who already learnt the normal Arabic script, Arabizi introduces a new writing system that needs to be learnt from anew. AFL learners believe that Arabizi is difficult to read especially with the inconsistent use of Latin letters to represent vowels and consonants. Transferring Arabic words to English letters causes some parts of the meaning and pronunciation to be lost. They also draw the attention that, besides being a new language to learn, they think it employs characters that are of no sense in English. Some of them also assume that it will not only be difficult to learn, but also difficult to teach. Another student expresses that it is sad to see Arabic alphabet being Anglicized.



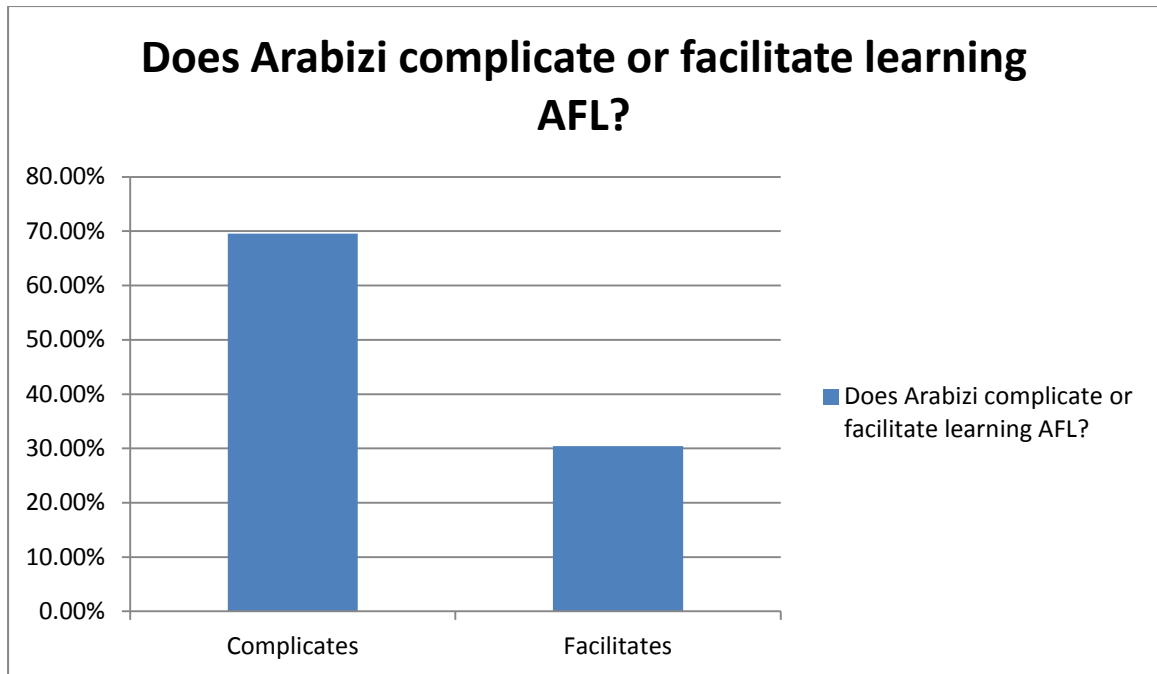


Figure 8. *Arabizi complicates AFL learning.*

However, some of the participants do see some advantages to this code that cannot be disregarded in this study. They argue that by reading Arabizi they can easily learn speaking, especially slang vocabulary. To them, Arabizi actually matches spoken Arabic or ECA. Another point that is mentioned is that Arabizi saves them the trouble to learn the Arabic keyboard. For those participants, Arabizi is easier to type than normal Arabic script and it can be used on any computer system. They also think it is easier to be read by those who do not know Arabic script. Interestingly, and to quote their own words, they consider it “a great asset” as it helps communication with Egyptian youth “in a world increasingly dominated by electronic communication”. They also hail Arabizi because it does not depend on diacritic marks, or *Tashkeel*. They believe that when the vowels are represented with letters, Arabic becomes “less of a guessing game”, as one of them puts it.

The results of the Likert scale questionnaire support the above results. Yet, one item of the Likert scale questionnaire is found confusing yielding vague results; therefore, it is excluded from the analysis. The results of the Likert-scale questionnaire show that 33.33% of the participants strongly disagree and 28.57% disagree to the statement that Arabizi helps them pronounce Arabic better, and 23.81% are neutral (see Figure 9). Moreover, 38.1% agree and 9.52% strongly agree that vowels are clearer in Arabizi than normal Arabic script.



Figure 9. Arabizi does not help in Arabic Pronunciation.

Interestingly still, and similar to the results of the questionnaire, 42.86% agree and 4.76% strongly agree that Arabizi helps them acquire more Egyptian slang vocabulary since Arabizi is mainly a reflection of ECA, (28.57% are neutral) (see Figure 10).

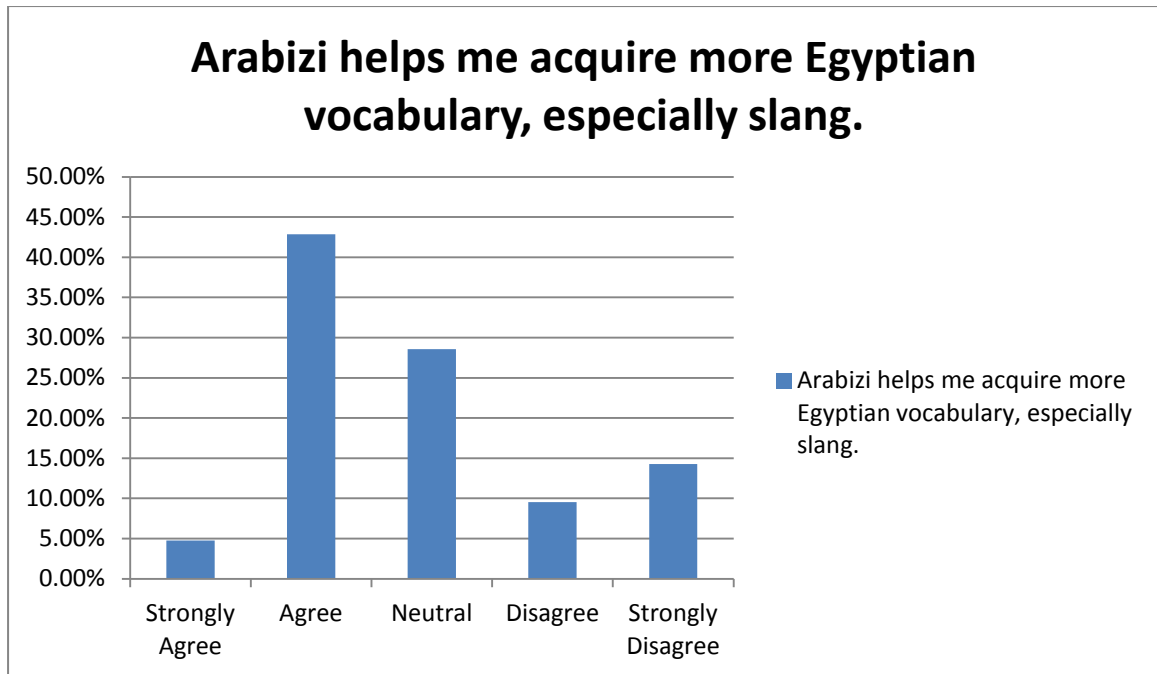


Figure 10. *Arabizi helps acquire more Egyptian vocabulary, especially slang.*

Also 38.10% strongly agree and 42.86% agree that Arabizi is confusing because it is not standardized either in vowels or consonants (with 9.52% neutral). A percentage of 33.33% strongly agree and 14.29% agree that Arabizi is confusing because they have already learnt to read and write normal Arabic script (with 38.10% are neutral). While 23.81% strongly disagree and another 28.57% disagree that Arabizi will harm the Arabic language, 47.62% agree and another 28.57% strongly agree that by learning Arabizi, they will be able to communicate better with Egyptians on CMC (see Figure 11). From a different point of view, 52.38% agree and another 9.52% strongly agree that Arabizi is a good way to adapt languages not written in Latin script to technology.



Figure 11. *Learning Arabizi will help a better communication with Egyptians on CMC.*

### **Answer to the Research Question**

From the results of both the pilot and the present studies, the answer to the research question can be deduced: a. AFL learners think that Arabizi hinders their communication with native Egyptians on CMC. b. AFL learners believe that Arabizi complicates their learning of Arabic. The implications of these views in relation to TAFL will be the focus of the following chapter.

### **Discussion and Implications on TAFL**

This study agrees with previous research: Arabizi is becoming a phenomenon that cannot be disregarded on the Egyptian online scene. Even beginner learners of AFL are exposed to it, if not using it. Though previous research show that the phenomenon is not shrinking but expanding, more research is still needed in order to determine the social space of Arabizi among native Egyptians and Arabs. Meanwhile, the views of foreign learners of Arabic are of highly importance as they not only help understand the complications of this phenomenon faced by AFL learners, but also help understand the scope of this phenomenon and reflect on it from a non-native point of view. The implications of the views of AFL learners on the field of TAFL will be the focus of this chapter hoping to contribute to further research on the phenomenon from both native and non-native perspectives.

The effects of the views of AFL learners expressed in this study on the field of TAFL can be seen in the following five areas: the benefits of CMC on AFL, Arabic writing system and an emerging situation of digraphia, acquisition of ECA vocabulary on CMC, and the level of ECA used in Arabizi. After discussing these points, recommendations for teachers' role are given highlighting the significance of raising the awareness of AFL learners' on this phenomenon.

#### **Arabizi Diminishes the Benefits of CMC to AFL**

Facebook and Twitter and other CMC have become an important means to follow the news and everyday life of Egyptians. Foreign learners of Arabic are especially more interested to follow the developments on these means of communication after the Arab Spring that is thought to have been initiated, organized, and discussed on these social networks. However, this study reveals that communication between AFL learners and native Egyptians on CMC and especially

on Facebook and Twitter cannot be fully established due to the existence of a new writing code of Arabic.

It should be noted, however, that CMC investigated in this paper are mainly social networks, such Facebook and Twitter, and SMSs. There are other means of CMC which are not affected by the phenomenon of Arabizi since CMC as a field is larger than social networks, emails, and SMSs. Crystal (2011) notes the broadness of this term in the first chapter of his book *Internet Linguistics: A Student Guide*. He says the term includes all kinds of communication done by a computer, including music, photographs, line drawings, and videos, beside language in its narrow sense (p. 1). He discusses other terms and proposes the term “Internet Linguistics” to refer to the study of language on the internet. Though he draws the attention to the use of language on mobile phones, he is not clear whether his new term will include SMSs and other ways of communication that are digitally transmitted. Therefore, I will keep the broader term, Computer-mediated Communication (CMC), to be used in this study making it clear that the main focus is on social networks and SMSs, especially because Crystal himself says the new terms are still evolving and it is not clear yet which one will be established (p.3).

Thus, within the scope of this paper, it can be argued the benefits of CMC on acquiring a FL cannot be fully applied to AFL. Students cannot build their independency on CMC with their feeling that there is a new writing system they need to learn. The majority of the participants, 100%, of the pilot study and 91% of the participants in the main study are exposed to Arabizi. This, in turn, deprives students from the most important linguistic benefits that Hamza (2004) summarized in his review above. Arabic written in Latin-script as it is in Arabizi cannot be considered a beneficial text-based medium of Arabic language. This code does not provide

students with linguistic forms to focus on. This means students are not allowed to personally identify linguistic errors in this text and be able to produce quality output. Students dealing with Arabizi on CMC are deprived the benefit to reflect and pay close attention to their L2 production and by such, they lose some level of independency in learning AFL.

Another consequence of exposure to Arabizi is that some of the participants, as the results reveal, are faced with a feeling of insecurity and disappointment in their level of ECA. They relate mastering Arabizi to their level of competency in ECA. To them, failing to be understood in Arabizi means failure in communicating with ECA. Teachers of AFL should be aware of this point whenever they send their students to communicate in the virtual world in Egypt. An emphasis should be made that there is a code of writing which is relatively standardized to natives (Blommaert, 2011), but very difficult to be decoded by non-natives, especially beginner learners of Arabic.

Although previous research argues that Arabizi is a reflection of the spoken language, there is still another dimension which plays an integral part in communicating with this code; namely the way of how it is written. Natives depend heavily on context and their knowledge of native dialect language to decode Arabizi which, even to them, is still not standardized (Yaghan, 2008; Bjornsson, 2010; Blommaert, 2011). Natives on social networks discuss a wide array of topics in an informal, formal, humoristic, sarcastic, or offensive way. Their knowledge of the language, as mentioned before, enables them to do a lot of guessing to read Arabizi. Although in most of the time this guessing is correct, it takes longer to be mentally processed (Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al, 2011). Yet, there are times when natives themselves, like me, struggle to read some of the texts in Arabizi and sometimes cannot get the message.

The case for foreign learners should not be compared to that of natives though. AFL learners struggle even for decoding ECA in Arabic script, and of course a new inconsistent written code adds to this difficulty as expressed in the results of this paper. Foreign learners of Arabic are not only taught the language in a systematic structured way, but they are also taught in a different script than Arabizi, namely the Arabic script. Reading the Arabic script, AFL learners are trained to see the difference between emphatic and non-emphatic letters/sounds, guess the root of the word, and think of the word class, to finally be able to analyze the text and achieve reading comprehension (strategies that are done automatically and unconsciously by natives). Reading Arabizi, all these strategies are lost, and AFL learners try to systematically analyze Arabizi and, apparently, they cannot, simply because it is not consistent. Asking students to decode Arabizi the way natives do - relying only on context and previous knowledge of the language - is asking them to practice AFL away from its logic and structure that they have been introduced to inside the classroom. This separation between Arabic in the classroom and in the virtual and digital world may cause AFL learners to feel insecure and struggle while practicing the language. This feeling of disappointment affects their attitude towards learning Arabic and deprive them the full opportunity of autonomous exploration of Arabic on CMC.

Another point that might be of concern to teachers of AFL is that almost 57% (56.52%) of the participants, who are already in contact with native Egyptians, start using Arabizi and find it a good way to adapt Arabic to technology. They say it saves them the trouble of switching the keyboard or learning the Arabic keyboard from the first place. This is again another negative consequence of Arabizi on learning AFL; not practicing to type Arabic characters on the keyboard. The keyboard has been recently integrated as an effective tool to learn Arabic script, especially for beginners.



With all the difficulties of learning the Arabic script – a right-to-left text direction, the similarity between shapes of letters, joined or separate letters, and the different scripts of Arabic like *Ruk'a* and *Naskh* - computer keyboard with the help of word processing is found to offer a lot of help to AFL learners. By typing on the keyboard, students can easily recognize different shapes of the letter, connected and separated, they can choose different fonts from the computer and see how the shape of the letter is changing, and with the help of the spell-checkers they can identify some of their spelling and writing errors. Hence, the keyboard and typing on computers have a lot of advantages for independent practice to learn Arabic writing. However, typing Arabic in Latin script deprives students of all these advantages. This in fact, as mentioned by some of the participants, caters to the laziness of the students not to learn Arabic typing and the Arabic keyboard. Students report that typing Arabic in Latin characters is easier and faster. As a teacher of AFL, I can say this indicates lack of motivation and need to learn the Arabic keyboard. Students should be urged, encouraged, and be well-trained to use the Arabic keyboard as will be suggested later.

From the above, it seems that Arabizi is negatively affecting the benefits of CMC on AFL teaching and learning. AFL learners are deprived from a text-based medium of the spoken language that would help them develop and progress in their AFL production. They also have a feeling of insecurity and disappointment from their inability to communicate with Arabizi with native Egyptians blaming it back to their level of ECA. All this leads students to lose part of their independency while discovering the language used by natives on social networks and SMSs. Finally, students are also not motivated to learn the Arabic keyboard because to them it makes communication harder and slower.

### **Arabic Writing System: A Situation of Digraphia?**

Though it was hypothesized that reading Arabizi would be easier for foreign learners because of its similar orthography to Latin languages, AFL learners find Arabizi a new writing variety that rather complicates the process of learning AFL. This paper finds it striking that AFL learners believe that Arabic is acquiring a new writing variety which they need to learn. Not only they view it as a new writing system, but some of them go far to consider it a totally new language. As a teacher of AFL, I echo the concern raised by the participants of this paper that learning Arabic script is already complicated to foreign students, and the existence of such a new code of writing adds more complication to the situation.

In addition to this, taking into consideration the desire of AFL learners to learn Arabizi and the results of both Essawy (2010) and Abdel-Ghaffar, N., et al (2011) that even natives do not find a reason to stop using Arabizi as long as it is efficient, economical, and, above all, mutually comprehensive, the paper raises the question whether Arabic is currently facing a situation of digraphia. Grivelet (2001) adopted Dale (1980:5) definition of digraphia as “the use of two (or more) writing systems for representing a single language (or varieties thereof)”. (p. 5). The current situation of Arabizi can more specifically be described as “synchronic digraphia” which Dale specifies as “more than one writing system used contemporaneously for the same language” (Grivelet, 2001). However, it is not clear from Grivelet discussion whether the two writing systems should be standardized or recognized by the whole society. Most research written on digraphia describes the existence of two writing systems either for ethnic (Magner, 2001; King, 2001; Enwall, 2001), religious (Fishman, 2001; Enwall, 2001), or ideological (Grivelet, 2001) reasons. However, in the case of Arabizi, internet users adopt it to accommodate Arabic

language to CMC. Of course, further research is still required to know the space which Arabizi occupies among native Egyptians in order to have a complete picture of the situation and whether the term “digraphia” can be used to label the current situation of written Arabic on CMC.

Yet, from a pedagogical point of view, the situation of teaching AFL is already complicated with the existence of a diglossia where high and low varieties of the language function together in each Arabic speaking country (Ferguson, 1971). Now the question is how would the situation be with the case of a “digraphia” as well? As a native speaker of Arabic and teacher of AFL, I can claim that Arabizi is by any means will acquire a standardized or prestigious status among Arabs. Hence, teachers and learners of AFL are faced by the dilemma of the existence of a writing code that learners want to learn but nobody would be convinced or know how to teach it.

### **Arabizi and ECA Vocabulary Acquisition**

Another interesting, but unexpected, result is that AFL learners find Arabizi helpful in acquiring new vocabulary, especially slang ECA, even when they find it difficult to pronounce and read.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that what students mean by “Arabizi” as a helping tool to acquire vocabulary is rather CMC interaction generally done on social networks. This terminology mix-up, I can assume, highlights the scope of Arabizi on CMC in the minds of AFL learners. Arabizi is, as such described, is a code of writing that is widely used on CMC. To speak about the means of communication in terms of the written code used in it, might mean, that both are part and parcel of the whole process in the minds of the learners. However, due to the

difficulty to hold interviews with the participants as will be explained later, this assumption could not be totally confirmed.

Nevertheless, based on informal discussion with the participants who were handed the questionnaire, an informal assumption can be formed. Acquiring new vocabulary from Arabizi is easier to AFL learners who have passed their beginner level and showed a relative mastery of ECA with native Egyptians. Students who take Arabizi to mean CMC and claim that it helps them learn vocabulary are those who are already familiar with using it to interact with native Egyptians (the 56.52% mentioned in the results), or at least those who can read it easily but not necessarily can type it. In case this assumption proved correct, it may support Yaghan's (2008) description of Arabizi that for reading Arabizi on CMC, users rely more on context and their previous knowledge of the language which may put them in the same level as native speakers. Further research is still needed, however, to know at which proficiency level this can occur, the circumstances in which AFL learners use Arabizi, and how Arabizi helps students acquire new vocabulary.

From another point of view, this last point raises more question marks. How can AFL learners find Arabizi useful to learn speaking and acquire ECA vocabulary especially when it does not help in pronunciation? The spoken dialects of Arabic across the Arab world are usually better learnt by listening and speaking. Yet, in the case of Arabizi, AFL learners are actually reading and typing. This is indeed not the aim of ECA classrooms which focus mainly on developing listening and speaking skills for teaching the dialects and its vocabulary.

Moreover, the fact that Arabizi encourages students to avoid using the Arabic keyboard and is found helpful in acquiring ECA vocabulary raise another concern to TAFL. From a

pedagogical point of view, typing and reading Arabizi is in fact not leading to either learn how to speak ECA or how to type or read MSA. This, as well, puts the linguistic skills learnt by Arabizi into question. The text which students type in Arabizi is not leading to learn written Arabic, or as explained earlier, not even spoken Arabic. So the question now is: which linguistic skills do AFL learners acquire while interacting with Arabizi? The paper as well wants to highlight this point as it is indeed of a paramount importance not to consider Arabizi an absolute tool for practicing ECA or Arabic in general based on the views of AFL learners voiced in this paper.

### **Arabizi on Badawi's Continuum of ECA**

The above results support Essawy's (2010) and Warcheure's (2001) conclusions that Arabizi provides Arabic dialects with broader realms. It can be added, though, Arabizi is different than literature written in ECA in Arabic script, which usually depends on literary factors. Taking the current affairs in the Arab world into consideration, and the eagerness of the whole world to follow the events mainly via CMC, it can be argued that Arabizi is thus occupying a more important position than ECA literature written in Arabic script. After the Egyptian revolution, Arabizi is also used in political and religious discussions on the internet, fields that have been always discussed in MSA. Arabizi, as such, is the everyday language that students need to learn and interact with. Although this makes Arabizi more relevant to ECA learning, it also puts AFL learners in a situation where they are exposed to a plethora of everyday language, important to their learning but too difficult to decode.

The situation gets more perplexing when the level of ECA used in Arabizi is considered. Previous research done describe the users of Arabizi as a subcategory of Internet users in Egypt; educated Egyptians who are familiar with foreign languages (Yaghan, 2008; Essawy, 2010;

Bjornsson 2010). This makes Arabizi or Arabic used on CMC in general a reflection of what Badawi (1973) calls Educated Spoken Egyptian Arabic, or *عامية المثقفين*. Thus, contrary to what foreign learners of Arabic assumed, what they are acquiring is the vocabulary of the Educated Spoken Egyptian and not the slang variety. This point relates Arabizi even closer to the ECA classroom since this is the variety targeted by most ECA curricula.

When linguists hailed Arabizi for providing a text-based medium of the dialects (Warschauer, 2002; Palfreyman and al-Khalil, 2006; Yaghan, 2008; and Essawy's, 2010), they did not think about analyzing this text medium. It is hailed as a code used to represent a spoken dialect always thought to be unworthy to be written down. Yet, this code is inconsistent and, if it can be claimed, never will be consistent or standardized. Its register is relevant to teaching and learning the dialect, but its code is not compliant with systematic linguistic analysis.

### **Teachers' Role and the Importance of Introducing Arabizi to AFL learners**

Teachers of AFL should be aware of the presence of this phenomenon on social networks and mobile phones, where their students are interacting with native Egyptians. Teachers should prepare their students for this variety and give them brief introduction on the whole situation. This may delimit the negative consequences of this phenomenon, especially in relation to learners' attitude towards Arabic Language and the possible feeling of disappointment that might occur from their failure to communicate with Arabizi. It has to be said that teachers need to be honest about the scope of this phenomenon and it is advised not to belittle its importance in the eyes of the students, especially since it is already significant to them as shown from the results. In light of the points discussed in this chapter, an emphasis should be made to the students that typing Arabizi hinders their learning of AFL.

Practical assignments can also be given to the students. Teachers should encourage their students to type some of their assignments in Arabic to increase the use of the Arabic keyboard. Teachers can also design tasks for students to go explore Arabic written in Arabic script on CMC, increasing their attention to Arabic script and decreasing that to Arabizi. A virtual community can be established on Facebook and Twitter where students communicate only in Arabic in Arabic script. Teachers are also advised to invite natives to participate in this community and interact with students. Students who are found to write in Arabizi can be “punished” by doing extra assignment in Arabic script. This may decrease learners’ feeling of insecurity on CMC and the feeling that they need to learn Arabizi to communicate on CMC. Teachers can also design games or light assignments to make students acquire vocabulary from CMC. They can initiate a topic of discussion on CMC or suggest a topic to be explored on Facebook, for example “elections”. The task for the students is to list some of the new vocabulary they encounter in the discussion around this topic in Arabic script and bring in to the class. This again will help students focus more on Arabic script written on CMC whenever they encounter it, and limit their focus on Arabizi.

Raising students’ awareness of this situation by explaining it and assigning tasks on CMC is thought very important. This will prevent students from creating a kind of private secluded world of practicing Arabic away from the supervised guided instructions in the classroom. This preparation and guidance make students develop conscious awareness whenever they come to type Arabizi and will put them in charge of the learning process, restoring some of the independency lost due to their exposure to Arabizi. Discussing the pedagogical negative consequences of Arabizi with AFL learners, hopefully, leads to diminish its use if not stop using it altogether. Sharing this knowledge with students gives them a feeling of responsibility for their

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learning while left alone in the virtual and digital world. Last, letting students know that Arabists are aware of the situation of Arabizi may delimit any negative attitude towards the difficulty of learning Arabic language and towards the native speakers of this language.



### **Conclusion**

This exploratory study reveals that communication between AFL learners and native Egyptians on CMC cannot be fully established due to the existence of a writing code widely used by Egyptian Internet users. The existence of this writing code has found its way outside the virtual world in Egypt in advertisements, banners, and print newspapers and books. AFL learners do believe that Arabic is acquiring a new writing variety that, although complicates the process of learning AFL, is important to be learnt in order to have effective communication with Egyptians on CMC.

As far as Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language is concerned, the results present more challenges to the field. Teachers of AFL should take into consideration the existence of this code on CMC before taking for granted all the benefits discussed in literature of CMC on teaching and learning a FL. This study reveals that AFL learners are deprived some of the advantages that CMC can offer to the field of TAFL. The study raises an alarm to Arabists that current research done on the phenomenon of Arabizi is directed to point at a situation of digraphia that is being shaped on the virtual sphere. A situation which not only complicates learning how to write Arabic, but also it adds to the already existing difficult linguistic situation of Arabic as a diglossic language.

From a different perspective, the study also reveals unexpected, and so far not totally explained, results that AFL learners can acquire ECA vocabulary with the existence of Arabizi. This result is unexpected especially because AFL learners find Arabizi difficult to read or pronounce. It also put the linguistic skills they think they are learning into question. Acquiring ECA vocabulary requires practicing speaking and listening, while with Arabizi, students are

actually typing and reading Arabic in an inconsistent unstandardized code. Therefore, they are also not getting closer to learn the important skills required for MSA, reading and writing or typing.

The situation will be more like a dilemma if the relevancy of Arabizi to the ECA classrooms is considered. The study agrees with previous research that this written code gives the everyday dialect of educated Egyptians wider realms being now text-based. Although CMC provides a raw corpus of everyday spoken language of native Egyptians, Arabizi makes it difficult to be fully linguistically analyzed due to its different and inconsistent writing code.

This situation is actually not only affecting teaching AFL, but also the status of Arabic language in the eyes of foreign learners. Taking into consideration how Arabic is already perceived as a difficult complicated language, this added perception of difficulty might increase the negative attitude towards learning Arabic. Teachers of AFL should be aware of the current space that Arabizi occupies on CMC and among Egyptians in commercials and print books. This exploratory study tries to warn teachers of a situation which they may not be aware of and which hinders the process of learning Arabic as a foreign language. Whether Arabizi is to be considered a written variety or not, at least from the perspective of AFL learners, Arabizi is indeed a reality that should be dealt with. This paper does not suggest teaching Arabic in Arabizi; rather a brief introduction to the situation in the classroom is thought necessary.

Crystal (2011) argues that language on the Internet may shatter all previous research done so far on linguistics. Arabic linguistics is not an exception and Arabists should be aware that Arabic language is changing as fast as technology is. This paper calls for a rapid attendance to an emerging, and alarming, situation that may lead to having a situation of digraphia in Arabic, even

if it is not standardized or recognized. The paper also echoes Essawy's (2010) call to language planners to find ways to integrate Arabic script into CMC and, more importantly, to technology planners to find platforms and systems that encourage the use of the Arabic keyboard instead of the English.

## **Limitations and Further Research**

### **Limitations**

Due to security precautions during the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution in Egypt, foreign students had to leave the country during The Spring and Summer semesters at the AUC during the academic year of 2011. For that reason, the sample collected for this study was too few to allow for the generalization of the results to other samples. The sample was also too small to reflect a discrepancy in the results in relation to AFL learners' proficiency level. Moreover, the majority of the participants answered negatively when asked if they would like to be interviewed after answering the questionnaire, the fact that prevents the researcher from probing further into more details when felt required.

### **Further Research**

The role of CMC to develop language proficiency and independency to AFL learners is yet to be reviewed and evaluated by AFL researchers. The results revealed from this exploratory study raise more questions to the field of TAFL. First, how could it be possible for students to practice Arabic on CMC? What are the writing system(s) that AFL learners should be equipped with in order to carry out CMC with native Egyptians? If AFL learners type Arabizi, are they practicing speaking ECA or typing a new writing system? How far typing ECA in Arabizi helps AFL learners build their vocabulary? Finally, what is the social space which Arabizi occupies among native Egyptians in Egypt?

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## Appendix A

### Arabizi on Facebook


These samples show that Arabizi is not only used in informal context, but also in formal ones such as disputing religious issues and offering condolences.

 Masada2ty khlesty men akhoky 2olty ama ashof 7aly ana ba2a ;-) loooooool. Bas 7elween ya monmon  
November 12 at 12:19pm · Unlike ·  1

 bagy wallah we mesh ba3raf awsalek enty lessa fi belad elkhawagat  
14 hours ago · Like

 Ezay betro7o te2ablo Rabena akher el youm fi salatom ba3d el kalam elly bet2olooh 3al adian dah?, ana ashok enoko tekono betsalo, la2enokom law betkalemo Rabena fa mosta7eel tetala3o kalam zai dah 3ala kotob feeha esm Rabena sawaa kan el engeel aw el kor2aan. El wa7ed beiesta7ram yermy wara2a maktoob feeha esm Allah, ezay ento ba2a 3amaleen tesebo we teshtemo fi kotob maliana esm Rabena, 7ata law konto mesh beto2meno bel otob di, 3ala el a2al feeha esm Rabena. Allah yesame7ko ento el etneen.  
April 20 at 4:31am · Like ·  1 person

---

  
El Baka2 lillah ..  
please pray for kareem's mother ..Rabbena yer7amha w ye3'ferlaha.  
9 minutes ago · Like · Comment



ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

**Arabizi in Commercials, Banners, and Posters**



ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

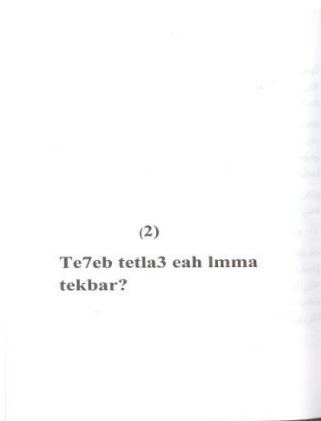


ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?



**Arabizi in Print**

**Omar Taher's *Captain Misr*, Dar Atlas, 2007.**



15

Hya kelmet saye3 mesh kanet shetima  
zaman ?

**Al-Ahram post revolution supplement, *Ta7rir*.**



## Appendix B

# Arabizi as a written variety and AFL learners -

## Introduction

This questionnaire is part of an MA thesis in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language, at The American University in Cairo. The researcher is mainly concerned with the phenomenon of writing Arabic in Latin alphabet and Arabic numerals spreading among native Egyptians on computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as: Facebook, twitter, chat rooms, emails, and mobile SMSs. For example, an Egyptian may type "saba7 el7`eir 3aliko" instead of صباح الخير عليكو (good morning to you). The aim of this survey is to investigate whether learners of Arabic as a foreign language think they need to learn this written variety (referred to as Arabizi) in order to better communicate with native Egyptians via CMC.

This questionnaire consists of five parts:

Part I: Arabic Language Study.

Part II: Computer-mediated Communication (CMC).

Part III: Education and other foreign languages.

Part IV: This Survey.

## Part V: Personal Information.

The whole survey consists of *30 questions* and is not expected to take more than *10 minutes*.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!



## Part I: Arabic language study

This part investigates your current level of Arabic language.

1.

How long have you been studying Arabic?

Less than 1 year

1 year - 2 years

2 years - 3 years

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

More than 3 years

[Reset](#)

**2. Which variety(ies) have you been studying? (You can choose more than one answer)**

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)

Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA)

Both

Other

[Reset](#)

**Please specify:**

**3. Where have you been studying Arabic? (You can choose more than one answer)**

USA

Egypt



ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

Other

[Reset](#)

Please specify

4. How long have you been studying each variety?

	Less than 1 year	1 year - 2 years	2 years - 3 years	More than 3 years
--	------------------	------------------	-------------------	-------------------

MSA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

ECA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

The other variety (if any)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-------------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

[Reset](#)

5. What is your current proficiency level in each?

	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
--	------------	--------------	----------

MSA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

ECA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

The other variety (if any)

[Reset](#)

## Part II: Computer-mediated Communication (CMC)

This part is on your interaction with Arabic language via computer-mediated communication (CMC).

6. Do you communicate on Facebook, Twitter, email, or mobile SMS in Arabic?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

7. Do you communicate with native Egyptians via these means of communication?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

8. If yes, what language(s) do you use with native Egyptians on these means of communication? (You can choose more than one answer)

English

Arabic

Both

Other

[Reset](#)

Please specify.

9. Do you use Arabic in Latin script, for example typing "ana fi elgam3a" for أنا في الجامعة (meaning: I am at the university)?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

10. Do you see Egyptians use Arabic in Latin script when communicating on CMC?

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

11. Can you read or write easily in Arabic written in Latin script?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

12. Do you think you need to learn how Egyptians write Arabic in Latin script in order to be able to communicate more effectively with them on CMC?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

13. Do you think Arabic written in Latin script is becoming a new writing variety that you need to learn besides learning writing in Arabic script?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

**14. In your opinion, will Arabic written in Latin script as it is on Facebook, Twitter, and SMSs facilitate or complicate your learning of writing and reading Arabic, and why?**

Facilitate

Complicate

[Reset](#)

**Why?**

**15. In your opinion, why do Egyptians use this way of writing? (You can choose more than one answer)**

It is easier and faster

Arabic letters are not computer friendly

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

They don't like their Arabic language

They want to appear more westernized

Other

[Reset](#)

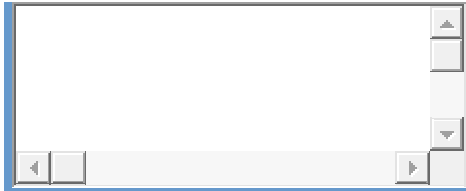
**Other**

**16.**

**In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of writing Arabic in Latin script on CMC?**

**Advantages**

**Disadvantages**



## Part III: Education and other foreign languages:

This part wants to know your education background with special focus on foreign languages.

17.

What is your degree?

Undergraduate

University graduate

MA student

PhD student

[Reset](#)

18.

**What is your field of specialization?**

Political Science

Middle Eastern Studies

Arabic studies

Journalism

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

**19. What other foreign languages have you studied? (You can choose more than one answer)**

English

Spanish

French

German



ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

Other

[Reset](#)

Please specify (number them if more than one)

20. What is your proficiency level in each? - please match the numbers for other (if any) with your answer in 19.

	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
French	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
German	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other1 (if any)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other2 (if any)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other3 (if any)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[Reset](#)

## Part IV: On This Survey

**Almost finished!**

**This part records where and how you have received this survey.**

21. Where are you doing this survey?

At home

On campus

At office

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

22.

How did you receive it?

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

From the researcher

From a colleague at school/work

From a professor/teacher at school

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

23. In case of need, would you mind being interviewed by the researcher?

Yes

No


[Reset](#)

24. If yes, what is your preferred way to be contacted? (You can choose more than one)

Mobile

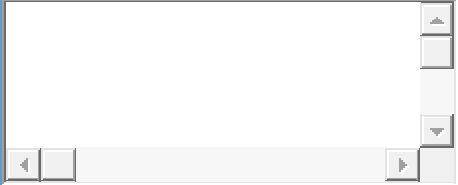
Email

Facebook

 Skype

[Reset](#)

**Would you provide it (them) please?**



<< Back    Next >>

1328618943\_145

eNrtI-tP2zAQw D-

## Part V: Personal Information

**Hurraay, last part!!!!**

**This part is as important to my study as the previous ones, so please dont ignore it!**

25.

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

**Name:**

**26.**

**Age:**

20-30

31-40

41-50

Above 50

[Reset](#)

**27.**

**Gender:**

Male

Female

[Reset](#)

28.

**Nationality(ies): (You can choose more than one answer)**

American

Egyptian

German

Japanese

Other

[Reset](#)

**Please specify**

29.

**Mother tongue:**

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

English

Spanish

French

German

Japanese

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

**30.**

**Current place of residence:**

USA

Egypt

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?



<< Back

< Finish Survey >

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eNrtmFFv0zAQg.





## Appendix C

# Arabizi as a written variety and AFL learners –

## Introduction

This questionnaire is a part of an MA thesis in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language, at The American University in Cairo. The researcher is mainly concerned with the opinion of learners of Arabic as a foreign language, more specifically those who studied Egyptian colloquial Arabic, on the phenomenon of "Arabizi": writing Arabic in Latin alphabet and Arabic numerals. Arabizi is spreading among native Egyptians on computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as: Facebook, twitter, chat rooms, emails, and mobile SMSs. For example, an Egyptian may type "saba7 el7`eir 3aliko" instead of صباح الخير عليكو (good morning to you).

This questionnaire aims to find out whether learners of Arabic as a foreign language think that this way of writing hinders their communication with native Egyptians on CMC applications like Facebook, Twitter, SMS, or even emails and whether they think that Arabic is acquiring a new writing variety. From a different perspective, the researcher is also concerned to know how foreign learners see this phenomenon with respect to Arab identity.

The whole survey consists of 37 questions and is not expected to take more than 10 minutes. Though no deep personal information is required, any personal data provided will be kept confidential only to the researcher for her analysis and will not appear in the final results of the study.

## ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

This questionnaire consists of three parts:

Part I: Arabic Language Study (5 questions).

Part II: Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) and learning of Arabic (23 questions).

Part III: On this survey and background information (9 questions).

**Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation!**



### **Part I: Arabic language study (5 questions)**

**This part investigates your current level of Arabic language.**

1.

**How long have you been studying Arabic?**

Less than 1 year

1 year - 2 years

2 years - 3 years

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

More than 3 years

[Reset](#)

**2. Which variety(ies) have you been studying? (You can choose more than one answer)**

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)

Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA)

Other

[Reset](#)

**Please specify:**

**3. Where have you been studying Arabic? (You can choose more than one answer)**

USA

Egypt

Other

[Reset](#)

Please specify

4. How long have you been studying MSA and ECA?

	Less than 1 year	1 year - 2 years	2 years - 3 years	More than 3 years
--	------------------	------------------	-------------------	-------------------

MSA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

ECA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

[Reset](#)

\* 5. What is your current proficiency level in each?

	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
--	------------	--------------	----------

MSA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

ECA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

[Reset](#)

## Part II: Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) and learning Arabic (23 questions)

**This is the main part of the questionnaire. There is no correct or incorrect answers, the researcher wants to know your input as it is. The part has two components: the first consists of 12 multiple choice questions and one open-ended question, while the other consists of 10 Likert-scale questions.**

**Component 1:**

**6. Do you communicate in Arabic on Facebook, Twitter, email, or mobile SMS?**

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

**7. Do you communicate with native Egyptians via these means of communication?**

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

8. If yes, what language(s) do you use with native Egyptians on these means of communication? (You can choose more than one answer)

English

Arabic

Other

[Reset](#)

Please specify.

9. Do you type Arabic in Arabizi, for example typing "ana fi elgam3a" for أنا في الجامعة (meaning: I am at the university)?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

10. Do you see Egyptians use Arabizi when communicating on CMC?

Yes

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

No

[Reset](#)

\* 11. Is it easy for you to read or type in Arabizi?

I read Arabizi easily but I find it difficult to type.

I type Arabizi easily but I find it difficult to read.

I type and read Arabizi easily.

I find it difficult to type or read Arabizi.

[Reset](#)

\* 12. Do you feel that Arabizi hinders your communication in Arabic via CMC?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

Why? (for either "Yes" or "No")

\* 13. Do you think you need to learn how Egyptians write Arabizi in order to be able to communicate more effectively with them on CMC?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

\* 14. Do you think Arabizi is becoming a new writing variety of Arabic language?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

\* 15. In your opinion, does Arabizi facilitate or complicate your learning of Arabic, and why?

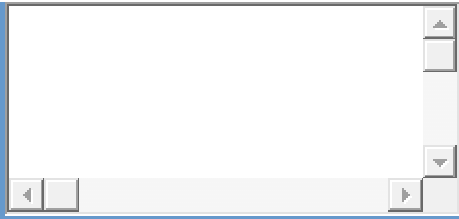
Facilitate

Complicate

[Reset](#)

Why? (for either answers)

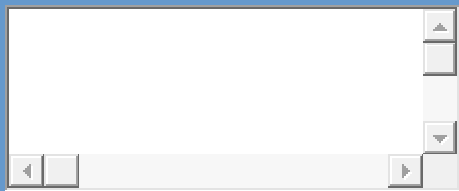




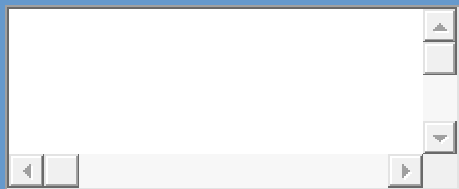
16.

In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using Arabizi in CMC?

**Advantages**



**Disadvantages**



\* 17. In your opinion, why do Egyptians use Arabizi? (You can choose more than one answer)

It is easier and faster

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

Arabic letters are not computer friendly

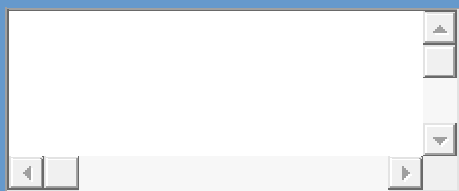
They don't like their Arabic language

They want to appear more westernized

Other

[Reset](#)

**Other**



**\* 18. In your opinion, does using Arabizi by Egyptians is related to their sense of identity?**

**(You can choose more than one answer)**

Yes, they want to disassociate themselves from their Arab identity.

Maybe, they want to look more westernized or modern.

No, they are just adapting their language to technology.

No, not at all! They have a great sense of pride in their Arabic language and Arab identity.

[Reset](#)

**Other**

<< Back   Next >>

eNrtm91u2zYUx€

Kwik **Surveys**



## Part II continued

### Component 2:

This part collects more details on how you find Arabizi helping or hindering learning Arabic as a foreign language.

\* 19. I think Arabizi helps me pronounce Arabic better.

Strongly Agree

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

\* 20. I think vowels in Arabizi are clearer than normal Arabic script.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

\* 21. I think Arabizi is confusing because I have already learnt to read and write normal Arabic script.

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

**\* 22. I think Arabizi is confusing because it is not standardized, either in vowels or consonants.**

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

**\* 23. I think Arabizi helps me acquire more Egyptian vocabulary, especially slang.**

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

**\* 24. I think Arabizi helps me practice the vocabulary I learnt but not helping me gain new vocabulary.**

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

**\* 25. I think if I learn Arabizi, I will be able to communicate better with Egyptians on CMC.**

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

**\* 26. I think Arabizi is a good way to accommodate languages not written in Latin characters to technology.**

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

\* 27. I think Arabizi harms the Arabic language.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

\* 28. I think Arabizi is a reflection of the Arab identity. Egyptians do not want to be identified as Arabs and want to be more connected with westerners.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral



Disagree

Strongly Disagree

[Reset](#)

## Part III: On the survey and background information (9 questions)

**Almost finished!**

This is the last part! It records how you have received this survey and where you have done it. It also gathers some educational background that the researcher think is useful for her research.

29. Where are you doing this survey?

At home

On campus

At office

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

30.

How did you receive it?

From the researcher

From a colleague at school/work

From a professor/teacher at school

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

31.

Name:

32.

What is your field of specialization?

Political Science

Middle Eastern Studies

Arabic studies

Journalism

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

33.

What is your degree?

Undergraduate

University graduate

ARABIZI: A WRITING VARIETY WORTH LEARNING?

MA student

PhD student

[Reset](#)

34.

**Mother tongue:**

English

Spanish

French

German

Japanese

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

35.

**Nationality(ies): (You can choose more than one answer)**

American

Egyptian

German

Japanese

Other

[Reset](#)

**Please specify**

36.

**Current place of residence:**

USA

Egypt

Other, please specify

[Reset](#)

37. In case of need, would you accept being interviewed by the researcher?

Yes

No

[Reset](#)

If yes, please mention your best way to be contacted.

You are done.

Thank you!

In case of need, you can contact the researcher at [monafarrag@gmail.com](mailto:monafarrag@gmail.com)