

## Introduction

*This Issue of Arab Journal of Applied Linguistics reflects the Status of English Research in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).* It contains three articles and two book reviews. Together, they echo five major concerns: (i) reducing the gap between what Salager-Meyer (2014, p. 79) calls "domestic peripheral journals" and their "mainstream center" counterparts (ii) improving novices' academic writing skills, (iii) developing learners' pragmatic competence, (iv) relating teaching, learning, and testing, and (v) keeping up with the latest developments in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and English Language Teaching (ELT) practices.

A closer scrutiny of the three articles in this Issue reveals that there is a tendency among researchers in the MENA region to opt for approximate replications (Porte, 2012) of studies conducted by leading experts in the field. The authors of the three approximate replications published in this Issue lived, studied, and worked in different countries, including Algeria, Britain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the US. Their replications were informed by works conducted by John Swales, Ken Hyland, and Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and Zoltan Dorneyi. These scholars also lived, studied, and worked in countries such as Britain, Hong Kong, Hungary, Libya, New Zealand, and Sudan, and their corpora

and informants came from different parts of the world. By analysing data from the contexts in which they are working, by comparing their findings with other findings in other contexts, and by proposing theoretical adjustments and making practical suggestions, researchers in the MENA context are making their contribution to global knowledge more and more tangible, if not ineluctable.

The three articles in this Issue reinforce *AJAL*'s commitment to reducing the centre-periphery divide. Indeed, the Journal is devoted to elucidating the often prejudiced and discriminatory dichotomy *local, non-native* versus *international, native* by advocating more focus on the value of the work a researcher produces and the contribution they make. *AJAL* sees itself as contributing to an expanding discourse community (community of practice) of "*linguists without borders*" (Abdesslem, 2017, p. ii) and advocating a more sophisticated discourse community membership in a world where "science is ... increasingly global" (*The Royal Society Report*, 2011, p. 5).

*AJAL* enjoys responsible autonomy. As stated in its home page, its main aim "is to provide a unified forum for researchers and practitioners interested in applied linguistics issues, with special reference to the Arab context". As a double-blind peer-reviewed, online, free-access, and *non-fee payment* journal, *AJAL* engages its staff, contributors, and readers in transactions where the hardest of currencies, *Knowledge*, is exchanged, cumulated, and, hopefully, invested in *AJAL*.

A brief account on the stages the papers published in this Issue went through may be enlightening in so far as it sheds additional light on the *Status of English Research in the Middle East and North Africa*, the title the Guest Editors for this Issue chose.

In line with the Journal's mission, the Guest Editors and the reviewers, together with the Journal Editorial Team, worked on this Issue for more than 8 months. Around 30 abstracts and typescripts were submitted. The Guest Editors pre-selected 15 typescripts and the Book Review Editor pre-selected 3 typescripts. The 15 typescripts were then forwarded to reviewers. Five typescripts received conditional acceptance. The Editorial Team accompanied the authors of the five typescripts, once an originality report conducted by one of its members, proved to be positive. The Team commented on the authors' work and provided advice and support. To maintain anonymity, the correspondences were conducted through the Section Editors, who acted as mediators. The revision and editing processes lasted for about three months, at the end of which the Editorial Team approved the publication of 4 papers and 3 book reviews. The authors of two typescripts (an article and a book review) did not succeed to finalise their work in accordance with the recommendations they had received, and their work was not included.

This brief account reveals that a lot of the research work produced in the MENA context is gathering dust on the shelves of many university libraries. Some of it is good quality research, but it needs thorough editing to satisfy

gatekeepers' standards. Supervisors and supervisees often part company on the viva's day for reasons the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this introduction. One consequence of this separation is that good quality research often drowns into what is referred to as "lost science". Not only ought revisions proposed by examining committees to be duly implemented, but novice researchers need to have further training in producing a research article and in extracting a publishable paper from their thesis. *AJAL* has tried in this Issue on *The Status of English Research in the Middle East and North Africa* to rescue what it could.

Despite the progress researchers in the region made in terms of worldwide visibility and output (*The Royal Society Report, 2011*), they are still, and for those working and living in conflict zones even more, disadvantaged. *AJAL* is determined to remain an open window for researchers on the global academic world and aspires to have original ideas published in its pages.

## References

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