

## **Introduction**

### **A Trilogy of research papers**

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*Arab Journal of Applied Linguistics* proposes for its readers in this Issue a trilogy of research papers on: (i) Tunisian trilingual students' rhetorical skills in writing argumentative essays in English, (ii) Bahraini bilingual students' lexical complexity in conventional (face-to-face) classes and in conventional classes complemented by students' online discussions, and (iii) Emirati children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) learning English as a second language.

Najoua Ben Hedia analysed Tunisian students' rhetorical skills in English. She engaged first year students and final year students in writing argumentative essays in English, French, and Arabic on a culturally neutral topic. Ben Hedia identified transfer from French and Arabic into the students' English essays. Rhetorical transfer was at different levels, namely text coherence and cohesion, argumentation (thesis-anti-thesis), digression, paragraphing, direct questions, and repetition. The author also noted that grammatical inadequacies and lexical paucity contributed to the difficulties students had in getting their meaning across.

Research work on trilingual speakers such as Ben Hedia's extends the scope of contrastive rhetoric and interlanguage research. The world is indeed moving towards multilingualism and linguistic pluralism. Second Language Acquisition research, this well-established field of inquiry in Applied Linguistics, may have to reconsider its scope and revise its predominantly binary theoretical bases.

Diana Al Jahromi investigated online incidental learning of vocabulary through noticing among students of English at the University of Bahrain. She used objective and well-defined tools to measure three levels of lexical complexity, namely variation, density, and richness. Her results show that online discussions enhanced students' lexical complexity.

Al Jahromi's study confirms the positive role modern technology can have in education. The author did not adopt the common blended teaching-learning procedure where a portion of teaching is conducted online. The procedure she adopted may be considered a variant of blended learning in which face-to-face classes prepare the ground for subsequent online learning. Such procedure gives learners a sense of direction and allows them to go beyond the limits of the syllabus, the textbook unit, and the teachers' lesson plan. It may represent a challenge for teachers and educationists to make even more room for their students' untaught and "unthought-of" ideas.

Manar Bakhsh reported on the views of mothers of children with ASD on the acquisition of English as a second language in the UAE, a de facto bilingual country. Her review of the literature revealed no significant differences between monolingual and bilingual children with ASD in many contexts, including the UAE. Bakhsh's interviews with children's mothers showed that mothers have a positive attitude towards English and are keen to

help their children learn it as a second language to ensure "their well-being, success, and acceptance in the society", the author concludes.

Bakhsh's study reveals the dearth of research on children with speech disorder. It reminds the reader of the little help and guidance badly-off parents receive and the stigma families still suffer from in many countries in the Arab world.

The three papers dealt with three different issues in three different Arab countries, but their concerns are shared in the Arab world. I hope this trilogy gives rise to further research from the Arab world and beyond. I hope it will find its way into AJAL's future publications.

As Editor-in-Chief of this emerging journal, I would like to congratulate the three authors for their dedication, cooperation, and patience. I am grateful to the reviewers, Prof. Mounir Triki and Dr Salah Shaalan, and the Editorial Board members for their valuable input. I am particularly grateful to Sahbi Hidri who played instrumental roles in bringing this Issue on your screen.

Perfection is unattainable, but we did our utmost.

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