Online Mini Lectures on Arabic Grammar
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Arabic has a very complex grammatical system and neither the textbook we are using (Al-Kitaab) nor reference grammars have been adequate in helping our students reach advanced levels of accuracy. We have tried to remedy this problem by developing an Advanced Arabic Grammar Review course that we have been offering for the past five years, reorganizing the grammar content and sequence in our First, Second and Third Years of Arabic, and developing a packet of handouts with grammar explanations and exercises that we give to our students for every chapter. Though helpful, none of these solutions have proven totally effective in eliminating the lack in linguistic precision that hampers our students’ progress to high levels of proficiency. In addition, and as a result of the inadequacy of materials available, grammar explanations in class and office hours have been time consuming at the detriment of other tasks and aspects of the language training to offer. This inevitable necessity is in conflict with our pedagogical philosophy that centers on dedicating class time to meaningful practice and active learning not to lecturing.

Yet it is this “live” and interactive way of explaining grammar and providing feedback on precision that has proven to be the most efficient method of teaching and learning grammatical concepts.

As a solution to this problem, we propose to create a series of mini lectures on grammar in which the use of video and graphics would allow the students to learn the concepts through a visual, oral and aural approach. These mini lectures will be put online and assigned to students in preparation for class. In other words, they will be integrated in our syllabus. These lectures are part of a larger project we launched a year ago to develop a new modular syllabus for our Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced courses. This decision was due to our and the students’ dissatisfaction with the Al-Kitaab series as newer editions of the book were published. The book has departed in many ways from its original philosophy and our vision of how to teach Arabic. We have already revamped First Year Arabic as well as Third Year and made headway in developing their listening, vocabulary and reading components. Shahid, developed by Profs. Bettaieb and Faraj is one of the blocks of this new curriculum.

A few such lecture series on Arabic grammar already exist online, but most of them
target the very young native or heritage speaker, and the rest are poorly done. We believe that such a project will be beneficial primarily to a non-native student of Arabic in and outside of Columbia and even beyond the USA.

The grammar mini lectures project will have three phases spanning over three years, each year dedicated to one of the three levels of instruction. The mini lectures will be uploaded on a website made accessible to Columbia and non-Columbia students. The website will have graded grammatical concepts colored and arranged by level. Each of these stages will involve three steps: first, organize materials and script the lectures; second, film and record the lecture; third create the graphics and upload the lectures online. The funding from this grant will be devoted to the first two steps. Additional funding will be provided by MESAAS, MEI and Summer Session to carry out the third step.

Each lecture will focus on a grammatical concept that is presented specifically for one level, and some of the complex concepts will be divided into a number of lectures that are spread over levels. Each lecture will vary in length from 5 to 15 minutes. The explanation will be in English with examples from Arabic that will use graphics, including colors, shading, diagrams, etc. The examples will be sentences, paragraphs, or short texts that are rich in content and which illustrate how integral grammar is in expressing meaning and style. At a later stage when other components of the curriculum are developed, students will be able to download PDFs with handouts for explanation and exercises for practice.

The project needs a set of skilled people: a camera/sound professional and someone well versed in graphic design and internet protocol. I believe that the LRC can provide help with uploading the materials online. I have already secured a Research Assistant through MESAAS who will help me coordinate the logistics of the project. The materials are ready and I have already published most of them in a book Developing Writing Skills in Arabic and have tried them for many years in our Advanced Arabic Grammar Review course as well as our various levels of Arabic. (Please see sample)

Once the mini lectures are available to our instructors and students, we will evaluate them in several ways. We will test a few of them in and outside of class, seek feedback from instructors and students, and finally compare students’ output in homework, quizzes and exams to an extensive record we have been keeping for the past decade. These records of students’ output have been instrumental in a systematic error analysis we have been conducting for many years. We believe that a typology of students’ errors is one of the
founding blocks of our syllabus. We have also been working on an online test, which will provide us with thorough quantitative data about the frequency and types of errors. In addition to improving students’ accuracy, we believe that these lectures will free more time in class for practice and other skills.

**Budget**

Notes:

1. I apologize in advance for asking for the maximum amount that the grant allows for, as the project will cost more. As mentioned above, the project will be feasible by (a) securing funding from other sources, and (b) doing it in stages.

2. I am including my remuneration only out of principle, as I believe that lecturers should be compensated for these projects.

3. The goal is to film one mini lecture for each hour of filming.

4. The figures and hours are partial, especially for the graphic design part, and funding from MESAAS, the MEI and Summer Session will provide the balance.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Film/Audio</td>
<td>$100 per hour x 20 (partial)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
<td>$50 per hour x 10 (partial)</td>
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<td>Faculty Compensation</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td><strong>$4,000</strong></td>
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**Sample**

The sample included covers several grammatical concepts that are essential for the function of comparing objects or people. It contains very brief and clear explanations, examples, and some exercises for practice. The written format, however, is only the basis for the filmed lectures and is not a completely efficient tool of instruction as is.

(Please see ODT file)