

MESA

APPLYING MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE TECHNOLOGY TO TRANSFORM ARABIC PEDAGOGY

The emergence of smart mobile digital devices has made it possible to significantly enhance the language learning experience in hitherto unavailable ways. This paper describes a series of iOS mobile applications designed to aid learners master Arabic in an effective manner, with special focus on a dictionary application.

The first, an Arabic-English dictionary designed to meet the special needs of learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL), takes advantage of the superb features offered by smart mobile devices and the latest advances in digital publishing technology. Pedagogical lexicography was leveraged to create a new genre of Arabic learner's dictionary that includes such features as corpus-based lemma selection, part-of-speech codes, alphabetical ordering, a user-friendly interface, illustrative examples for each sense, and accurate senses ordered by importance. Four characteristics of this dictionary have a major impact on its effectiveness: (1) the illustrative examples were specifically written to help learners understand the individual senses of each headword, contradicting the conventional but counterproductive wisdom of directly quoting examples from sources; (2) the lemmata were not selected mechanically on the basis of raw corpus frequency alone, but also on the basis of their "pedagogical usefulness" as judged by the lexicographer, with special emphasis on communicative vocabulary; (3) word senses were established on the basis of actual occurrences, not merely on the authority of other dictionaries; and (4) detailed grammatical information includes precise part-of-speech codes, the root, the imperfect, the passive and active participles, verbal noun(s), feminine forms and both regular and irregular plural forms.

The second is an application designed for smart tablets that promises to change the face of learning Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) by introducing a groundbreaking new platform for L2 acquisition (dubbed LIBERA) that combines the strengths of traditional bilingual parallel texts with the mostly untapped educational potential of the smart tablet platform. The paper also briefly describes an effective Arabic verb conjugator for the smartphone platform that provides instant access to comprehensive conjugation paradigms, and an innovative phonemic transcription system designed specifically for learners.