Leveraging 'I+1' Comprehensible Input Theory to Enhance Acquisition of Arabic Language

Ahmad Labeeb Tajudeen, PhD
Islamic University of Minnesota, Bloomington, USA

Gamal Nasir Zakaria, PhD
Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam

KEYWORDS

Arabic language, i+I input model, Malay language, Noticing, Schemata activation.

ABSTRACT

This short Communication is part of a proposed research project that aims to fill some gaps in Stephen Krashen's i+1 comprehensible input theory and pave way for its effective classroom application which is hitherto problematic. Although the theory was postulated to apply to all forms of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the primary objective of the project is to apply i+1 input model in Arabic Language Teaching (ALT), as a way to answer a clarion call sounded by His Majesty, the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, for innovation of new methods in teaching Arabic language skills. This Communication is a conceptual research paper that aims to demonstrate, albeit partially, a suggested pedagogical framework that is innovated to teach the Arabic language to non-native speakers, whose mother tongue has considerable similarities with the Arabic language, such as Hausa language, Malay language, Urdu language, Yoruba Language, etc. For a demonstration of the suggested pedagogical framework, Malay language is used as a case study. The novelty of this paper lies in demonstrating the possibility of applying i+1 comprehensible input theory to enhance acquisition of the Arabic language skills by the Malay learners, and to show a unique way of strengthening the bondage between the Arabic language and the Malay language, as espoused in the national philosophy and identity of Brunei Darussalam.

Introduction

The influence of Arabic language and its words that are loaned to many languages around the world is well documented in the literature (e.g. Abdullah &Ad-Dajjany, 2014; Ali, 2013; Chik, 2007; Ibrahim, 2005, Uni, 2015; Versteegh, 2001). Malay language is one of such languages which adopt many words from Arabic language (Chik, 2007; Ibrahim, 2005, Uni, 2015). According to Chik (2007), Malay language contains more than three thousand Arabic loan words which are used in both oral and written forms on daily basis (Ali, 2013, Zaidan et al, 2015). More importantly, there are considerable areas of similarities between Arabic language and Malay language in terms of vocabularies (Ali, 2013; Ibrahim, 2005; Shaheed, 2013; Zaidan et al, 2015)

and grammatical rules (Abdullah & Ad-Dajjany, 2014; Mat et al, 2014). In Zaidan et al's (2015) study of Arabic loan words in a Malay dictionary, 'Kamus Dewan', the result shows that there are 1791 Arabic loan words in the dictionary chosen for the case study, 70.4% of which retain their original Arabic meaning and pronunciation in Malay language usage, while 29.6%, (about 297 words) only changed phonemically. The study also showed that 56.1% of all Arabic loan words in the dictionary are still being used commonly in current Malay speaking and writing.

Moreover, Arabic scripts had been adopted earlier as the standard way of writing Malay language (Salehuddin, 2013), and Arabic language is the second largest donor language to Malay vocabulary

after Sanskrit (Jones et al, 2007, cited by Uni, 2015). Many Arabic words that are used in everyday Malay communication originate from Arabic language (Uni, 2015), and are inevitable for daily interpersonal communications. For example, Malay words for all days of the week come from Arabic, except "Sunday" which has both Arabic and non-Arabic terms: hari Ahad and hari Minggu. Minggu ("week; Sunday") comes from Portuguese domingo ("Sunday"), while in Arabic, Sunday is called Yawmul-Ahad, where 'yawm' means day and Ahad means ("one") hence hari Ahad in Malay means day one of the week (Uni, 2015, p. 666).

In Brunei Darussalam, Malay language and Arabic scripts are integral part of the three sacrosanct trio of the National philosophy and identity, called Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB). As *Negara zikr* (a nation of Allah's remembrance), Arabic language is accorded a special importance. *Jawi*, an adopted Arabic script, is used with roman scripts for many official religious writings, and conspicuous labeling of public places, such as streets, supermarkets, shops, private enterprises, public offices and departments, etc. Recently, in October 2019, His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien, Sultan of Brunei Darussalam announced, during a convocation ceremony, the establishment of a *Jawi* studies center to promote the Malay-Arabic script that "represents the nation's soul and identity" (Abu Bakar, 2019). This promises a continuous strong bondage between Malay language and Arabic language in the sultanate of Brunei Darussalam.

There are several theories that have suggested that closeness and similarities between first language and second language usually influence the acquisition of the latter (e.g. Celaya, 1989; Hao & Chi, 2013; McAllister et al, 2002; Ringbom, & Jarvis,2009; Swan, 1997; Wang, 2014), and that mother tongue may provide linguistic schemata for the processing of the second language (Butzkham, 2003; Hattan et al, 2015; Ringbom, 2007; Schally et al, 2015, Uni, 2015). Ahmed et al (2018) argue that the Holy Qur'an also encourages the instrumentation of mother tongue in language teaching-learning process. This is also the case in Uni (2015) study which concluded that the explicit presentation of Arabic-origin Malay loan words containing one or more modified consonants or vowels and their etymologies benefits Arabic speakers who are learning Malay as a foreign language.

However, the many similarities between Arabic language and Malay language have not yielded the expected positive cross-linguistic influence in the acquisition of Arabic language in the Malay world (e.g. Haron et al, 2010, for quick review on cross linguistic influence, see: Shea, 2008), and learners in Brunei Darussalam are not leveraging the areas of commonalities between the two languages. In His Majesty's *titah* (official speech), at the Brunei Religious Teachers' University College's (KUPU SB) graduation ceremony, in the year 2016, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam, expressed his dissatisfaction with the poor performance of students in Arabic language, despite their mastery of English language, which is relatively farther from Malay language in terms of syntax similarities. His Majesty lamented thus: "… there is hearsay that the students are unable to master the Arabic language despite its name. In other words, they can't speak properly in the Arabic language (when) compared to English" (BruDirect.com, 2016). After nearly four years, the problem remains unsolved. Consequently, on 17 September 2020, His Majesty reiterated his dissatisfaction with the weakness of students in Arabic language skills, and categorically call for innovation of new methods for teaching Arabic language in Brunei Darussalam (Radio Television Brunei RTB news, 17 September 2020).

Several reasons may be advanced for this weakness in Arabic language skills. However, it is a well-known fact that no language is difficult to acquire in the face of innovative and suitable pedagogy. Therefore, efforts should be directed towards innovating enabling pedagogical frameworks that could leverage the strengths of the learners, and ameliorate their weaknesses. This poses a serious challenge for academics in the field of teaching Arabic language, especially those that are conversant with the Malay world. It should be noted that many of the existing Applied Linguistics theories that are applied in the teaching of Arabic language skills to non-native speakers currently, are majorly adopted from the West, with little or no modification (Facchin, 2019; Versteegh, 2006). Although cross-borrowing of useful and efficient educational principles and practices are inevitable in the modern time and it is well encouraged in Islam, there is a need to always look inwardly to see if there could be better solutions from our own traditional pedagogies, to redesign more befitting pedagogical frameworks that are derived from our own cultural strengths and peculiarities.

The thrust of this paper lies in providing a theoretical framework that could help in answering the following research question:

How could Malay learners leverage Malay language in the acquisition of Arabic language?

In the following paragraphs, we shall discuss i+1 comprehensible input theory and other adjoining theories which could be used in the designing of a pedagogical framework in this respect.

STEPHEN KRASHEN i+1 INPUT MODEL: A SYNOPSIS

Stephen Krashen postulated five theories to explain language acquisition. These theories are collectively referred to as monitor model in the Applied Linguistics literature (see for more details of these theories: Krashen, 1981, 1987, Krashen & Terrell, 1983 and more recently, Krashen, 1992; 2004; Rodrigo, Krashen & Gibbons, 2004). Krashen used these theories to, arguably, answer many questions that have remained vague in the field of second language teaching (Schmidt, 1993 p. 206). He argued that his Monitor Hypothesis "sheds light on nearly every issue currently under discussion in second language theory and practice" (Krashen, 1992, p. 3). Among these theories, comprehensible input theory holds a special place as the most important in Second Language Acquisition today (Zafar, 2011 p. 143); it attempts to address the very nature of Second Language Acquisition, by providing an answer to a fundamental question: How do we acquire language? (Krashen, 1980 p. 168).

Paraphrasing comprehensible input theory, it states that a second language is acquired when an acquirer is able to understand or comprehend a second language input or intake that is just a level above acquirer's present level in that language (Krashen, 1981, p. 103). Such an input is denoted by i+1, where 'i' represents the initial or present level and '+1' represent a higher language level that an acquirer is expected to gain in the target language. Krashen (1992) emphasized that "we acquire language by understanding messages, that 'comprehensible input' (CI) is the essential environmental ingredient in language acquisition" (p. 409). According to this theory, a second language acquirer is bound to acquire new language when he is exposed to a language input which may not be initially known by him, but made comprehensible to him by context and cues (Krashen, 1985).

Krashen (1992) further differentiates between language acquisition through oral and print comprehensible inputs: when an acquirer is exposed to an oral language input, Krashen (1992) argued that such an acquirer would reach the saturation level earlier than an acquirer who is being exposed to print language input (ibid). This is, perhaps, due to the complexity and diversity of print language texts, compared to oral language. In addition, Krashen (1992) postulates that an acceleration in the level of acquisition through print input (i.e. literacy) could be enhanced through narrow reading. This is further explained in Krashen (2004) that an acquirer would keep to reading several books by one author, or read about a single topic of interest in many books written by different authors. Here, i+1 model is supporting communicative approach to language acquisition, where the main focus would be on the familiar and relevant topics (Payne, 2011).

Krashen (1992) cautions that comprehensible input alone is not sufficient for language acquisition, but necessary. He argued further that methods of language teaching that involve more comprehensible input have consistently win in method comparison (p. 410). He posited that " in the first language (L1) development, comparison studies have also shown that classes containing more comprehensible input (CI) in the form of stories read aloud to children and free reading (e.g. sustained silent reading) are more effective than traditional skill-building approaches when the treatment are allowed to run for a sufficient length of time" (Krashen, 1985, 1989 cited in Krashen, 1992 p. 419).

Krashen (1992) added that there are many studies that prove that anxiety-free classes are more effective for language acquisition. There are evidences, Krashen argued, that show that CI-based activities are less anxiety-provoking, and that students in CI-based classes report more confidence for future success in acquiring the target language and are more interested in continuing second language acquisition (Krashen 1992, p. 426). The implication is that foreign or second language teacher should detect learners' level of competence and devise suitable teaching materials that will be of i+1 quality so that students receive "comprehensible input" in "sufficient amount" and "right quantities" (Krashen, 1985 p. 2). This will ensure that learners move from 'i' level which represents initial non-native stage to i+1 level, which later become 'i' for a subsequent level of language acquisition until an acquirer reaches a native-like stage.

For the sake of this paper, we summarize the gradual acquisition of language according to i+1 in the following chart.
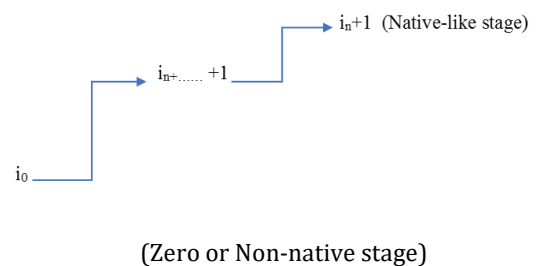

i_n+1 (Native-like stage)

$i_{n+\ldots} +1$

i_0

(Zero or Non-native stage)

Fig. 1. *Language acquisition chart based on i+1 comprehensible input hypothesis*

We use figure 1, to demonstrate gradual language acquisition according to Stephen Krashen's i+1 input model. It shows that language acquisition occurs in a predictable manner (Krashen, 1985 p.2), which continues until an acquirer receives no more i+1 input (Krashen, 1992, pp. 411-412) called saturation stage. In fig. 1, i_0 refers to the initial zero stage of an acquirer who is acquiring the language as a foreign language or second language. In this figure, i_{n+} represents a gain and progress in language

acquisition which continues until an acquirer reaches the i_n stage which represents native-like stage. At i_n stage, language acquirer would have been familiar with nearly all vocabulary and grammar of the target language to the extent that only few things would be totally new to him/her in the foreign or second language. Consequently, he/she would have acquired the native-like competency.

The time required to reach native-like stage, according to Krashen (1992), is expected to be shorter for oral communication than the time required for written language. Therefore, mastery of oral communication skills would be earlier than mastery of reading and writing skills. This variation can be further substantiated and explained by Cummins' distinction between communicative language which he called BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communications Skills) and academic language which he called CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Several studies show that learner can develop conversational fluency or BICS between two to five years, while proficiency in academic language or CALP which is always in a written form may take four to seven years depending on several factors (Cummins, 1981, 1996; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997).

Another point of equal importance is the quality of learner's language output. Although Cummins stressed that the length of time is a major factor for an acquirer to reach the saturation stage (as claimed by Krashen 1992), a recent empirical study, however, suggests that it is the type of language input which a learner is exposed to, not the length of time, that has direct relationship with the learner's quality of output (Bahrani, et al, 2014). In other words, the quality of a learner's language output and the standard of language he/she would produce depends on the kind of language input he or she is exposed to. This further emphasizes the importance of language input, and the need to select the one that can best enhance language mastery in accordance with language learning objective.

Stephen Krashen's comprehensible input theory has been criticized on three major grounds. First is the vagueness and loose definitions of the constructs contained in the theory. Krashen's definition of comprehensible input, Liu (2015) argues, lacks consistency and it is counter-evident. It did clearly draw boundary between comprehension and acquisition. Secondly, it was criticized for lack of empirical evidence and inability to be experimented. Thirdly, there is overclaim about the comprehensible as the sole factor required for language acquisition, ignoring other internal and external factors (Liu, 2015). There have been attempts to apply i+1 input model to teach different foreign languages other than English; such as German language, Thai language (Brown & Palmer, 1988) and French language (Payne, 2011). However, the classroom applications have always faced some pedagogical setbacks, and many critics have blamed Krashen for vaguely postulating a model without taking cognizance of its pedagogical applications (see for example: Brown & Palmer, 1988; Gregg, 1984; McLaughlin, 1984; Payne, 2011).

Although Stephen Krashen's input theory is severely criticized, there is near consensus among Applied Linguists that the theory is plausible (Bahrani, 2013; Liu, 2015; Payne, 2011). Looking inwardly, many of the pedagogical deficiencies raised against Stephen Krashen's model can be arguably ameliorated by the theory of language Mastery that has been earlier proposed by Ibn Khaldun (d. March 17, 1406) a fourteenth century Muslim historian, sociologist and philosopher. In fact, it is arguably safe to say that Ibn Khaldun's Language Mastery theory would be very useful in modifying Krashen's i+1 input model, to pave way for a suitable classroom application (see for review of Ibn Khaldun's Language Mastery theory: Abdellah & Haridy, 2017; Osman, 2003). A detail critique of i+1 input model as well as detail study of Ibn Khaldun's Mastery theory goes beyond the scope of this paper. We shall be concerned here with some complementary theories which further explain i+1 input model and could answer the research question that drives this research paper.

SCHEMA THEORY

Schema (plural: Schemata) simply refers to general previous knowledge and experiences that a learner may use for understanding a language input. This term, schema was first used by Barlett in 1932 and it was further developed by subsequent scholars (Anderson, 1984; Carrell, 1981, 1983; Hudson, 1982; Kramsch, 1993; Rumelhart, 1980). Paraphrasing An (2013), schema was introduced into the study of language literacy by Rumelhalt (1980), Carrell (1981) and Hudson (1982). They all stressed the role of schema or background knowledge as an instrument that enhances comprehension of language input.

According to Anderson (1984), schema theory states that "a reader comprehends a message when he is able to bring to mind a schema that gives a good account of the objects and events described in the message" (p. 243). In other words, schema theory points to the fact that every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world developed up to that point. According to Axelrod (1973), schema theory is all about how a person processes information and tries to make sense out of it (p. 1249). It explains how rliteracy competency (especially reading) differs from one person to another as a result of differences in the level of schemata development.

However, Anderson (1984) argued that learners do not spontaneously integrate what they are reading with what they already know (p. 254). In fact, literature abounds on the need to activate learner's schemata to support comprehension (Anderson, 1984; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Hattan et al, 2015). As stressed by Carrell and Eisterhold (1983, p. 80) "one of the most obvious reasons why a particular content schema may fail to exist for a reader is that the schema is culturally specific and is not part of a particular reader's cultural background". Therefore, both good readers and poor readers may not use schemata appropriately, and may not be aware of whether the information they are reading is consistent with their existing knowledge. There are shreds of evidence that learners who do not use schemata as they read may engage them if such schemata are activated through explicit instructions prior to reading (Alvarez & Risko, 1989, p. 2).

This calls for activation of learner's schemata so as to notice the familiar aspect of the second language which may in turn enhance comprehension. This noticing of similarities is further elucidated in the subsequent section.

NOTICING THEORY

Schmidt argued that learner's exposure to language input may not alone guarantee that he/she would acquire the language through the input. He then postulated Noticing Hypothesis. This hypothesis was later adopted and modified by many Applied Linguists (Truscott, 1998). Schmidt opines that a second language learner may not begin to acquire some language features incidentally or unintentionally until he/she is aware of, and notice those features in the input he/she is being exposed to (Schmidt, 1992 p. 208).

Paraphrasing Logan (1988), Schmidt (1992) argued that "most psychological models of memory hold that the allocation of attention is a necessary and sufficient condition for encoding a stimulus into long-term memory and that sufficient retrieval depends on both the quantity and the quality of attention at the time of encoding" (p. 209). Schmidt (1992) cited Silmani (1987; 1992) and refers to her experiment which confirms that majority of what second language learners acquired were the ones they focused upon during instruction. Referring to Scovel (1991) and Van Lier (1991), Schmidt (1992) further argued that attention to input is necessary for input to become intake which would be available for further mental processing (p. 209).

Truscott (1998) criticized noticing hypothesis on the ground that it lacks empirical supports from cognitive psychology, but agreed to the fact that noticing is necessary for the acquisition of metalinguistic knowledge, and essential for enhancing metalinguistic features. Zhisheng, (2008) gave mentioned at least four empirical studies that support Noticing hypothesis. After critical review of the arguments and counter arguments on Noticing hypothesis, Buriro and Kakepoto (2013) concluded that there is no doubt that noticing is crucial to language development of a learner, as indeed to human development.

In summary, while schema theory emphasizes the importance of previous knowledge and activation of such knowledge to enhance language input comprehension, noticing theory emphasizes that language learning can be enhanced when learner's attention is drawn to notice some aspects of the input. According to Gass and Mackey (2006), a learner is likely to acquire language by noticing some parts of the input as a result of frequency, prior knowledge and attention. This partially alludes to schema theory. Further, Spada and Lightbown (1999) opine that there is a need to provide learners with explicit information on how their first language contrasts with the target language especially in classes where all learners share the same first language. As we have argued earlier, drawing attention to the areas of similarities is also essential as it is a form of augmented schemata activation.

SIMPLE ILLUSTRATION OF THE PROPOSED PEDAGOGIC MODEL

The common way among teachers of Arabic language to non-native speakers is to present Arabic language inputs to learners as if they are totally new, whereas there may be some words which they are familiar with in their mother tongue such as Malay language. Learner could decode those words by scaffolding through schemata activation, as well as augmented schemata activation. Schemata activation, as detailed earlier, is to draw learner's attention to words that he or she might have known before. Augmented activation is a cautious method whereby a learner is pre-informed explicitly that his or her prior knowledge may be different from the text. It is to highlight the possibility of encountering incongruent information which may be different from prior knowledge (Hatton et al, 2015), which in this regard may be in the form of correct pronunciation or usage of some Arabic loan words which have been differently pronounced or used for slightly different meaning in the mother tongue. Hatton et al (2015) further assert that learners whose schemata were activated by augmented activation outperformed their counterparts who only underwent activation-only (p. 480). Such a teaching method is the one that would make total utility of the Arabic loan words contained in the mother tongues (e.g. Malay language) in the process of Arabic language acquisition.

In the proposed pedagogical framework, we define comprehensible input as any Arabic language input that contains Arabic loan words which are used regularly in the learner's mother tongue or first language (L1) and used in a sentence in a way that is partially or totally similar to L1 grammatical rules of sequencing of words. Schemata activation and augmented schemata activation and noticing would make it a comprehended input. Thus; the input is denoted with "i", while the new words and forms are denoted with +1. (This is tentative, we shall amend the formular in later research works, in the bigger research project). Simply put, areas of similarities are denoted with "i" and areas of differences are denoted with +1. By this, we have stayed aloof of the vagueness surrounding the comprehensible input hypothesis. Using this pedagogical framework in its simplistic form, we present in the following paragraphs, a simple illustration for teaching Arabic language to learners whose mother tongue is Malay language.

Consider the following examples:

i) *Muhammad hadir* (meaning: Muhammad is present).

ii) *Muhammad hadir fil-Masjid* (meaning: Muhammad is present in the mosque).

The two Arabic sentences above are sentences which a Malay learner who has never learnt Arabic language can understand when made comprehensible, in accordance with i+1 input model. Both sentences contain Arabic loan words which form linguistic schemata in the learner. For instance, Muhammad is an Arabic name that is common among the Malay, and the word '*hadir*' is an Arabic loan word that retains its Arabic meaning in the Malay language usage. The word arrangement or syntax in the two sentences is the same in both Arabic language and Malay language. If a learner's attention could be drawn to notice these areas of familiarity (i.e. schemata activation), he or she would be able to interpret the sentences.

Consider the following example,

iii) Kam umuru-Ka? (Literally meaning: How much is your age? Or old are you).

The number of loan word in this sentence is just one; Umuru (meaning age), and the word arrangement is also the same in both Arabic language and Malay language, while the new words Kam (how much) and Ka (you) can be made comprehensible by body gesticulations as a means of scaffolding (see detail in Gibbons, 2015). This kind of input is denoted with i_0+1. Let us look at the following sentence,

iv) Kayfa khabaru-Ka? (Literally meaning: how is your affair or condition?)

This sentence contains a loan word; "khabar", and two non-loan words: "kayfa", and "Ka", while "Ka" has been earlier acquired in the previous examples, a Malay learner of Arabic language may be challenged with the help of scaffolding and augmented activation to guess the meaning of the whole sentence. This sentence could be termed i+1.

It is evident from these examples that Arabic loan words in a mother tongue (L1) such as Malay language, can enhance the acquisition of Arabic language as supported by Schema theory (Anderson, 1984). However, theories discussed here suggest that such loan words alone may not have any significant impact on Arabic language acquisition until learner's attention is drawn to notice them (Schmidt,1992; Gass & Mackey, 2006) and demystify the nuances between Arabic and Malay usage and pronunciation of such loan words (Spada & Lightbown, 1999).

What we have demonstrated so far is just a caricature of the pedagogy that we aim to innovate, and not the real pedagogical framework. As mentioned earlier, it is a holistic project that involves painstaking and careful pedagogical reform to stay aloof of controversies that surround i+1 comprehensible input model. Rigorous empirical experimentations must also be used as preliminary checks for the modifications and formulation of the innovative pedagogical framework.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the discussions so far that i+1 comprehensible input theory can be utilized to enhance acquisition of Arabic language. However, i+1 input theory cannot be applied alone in this respect, it must be amended and strengthen with some other theories and models, such as Ibn Khaldun's language mastery theory, Schmidt theory of Noticing, Schema theory, Vygotsky and Bruner's Zone of Proximal Development ZPD, Variation theory, Coyle et al model of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and other relevant theories which could form a pedagogical framework. In the interim, unlike the 'business-as-usual' where Arabic language passage is presented to Malay learners as a totally new input, it is advised that Arabic language passages should be treated based on tripartite model of language teaching (Coyle et al, 2012), prior to their presentation to learners. In the treatment, the loan words contained in the passage should be identified, and a schemata activation, augmented schemata activation and scaffolding would then be applied in the teaching process.

This suggested pedagogical framework, when finally established, would not only enhance learning of Arabic language as demonstrated in this paper, but also create "I can do" mindset in the learners of

Arabic language, thereby reduce phobia and anxiety towards Arabic language learning which some learners wrongly believe to be too difficult.

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