



Investigating the Existence of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) in the Language Learning Context

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ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Many scholars have discussed Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA), especially concerning its structure and comparison with Standard Arabic, Modern or Classical. However, whether it is a phenomenon of language variation (diglossia) or it could be a language deviation from the Arabic grammatical rules has not been specifically explored. For this reason, this paper examines the ECA concerning its emergence and existence in Arabic language learning. Literature studies on several reference books and articles about ECA were carried out to present the views of experts regarding this discussion. Based on the results, it can be noted that there are two significant opinions regarding the existence of ECA in the language learning context. The scholars who posit that the ECA is a language deviation inherited the paradigm from the prescriptive study of language adopted by traditional linguistics schools. This perspective appeared as a consequence of the emergence and development of Arabic grammar, as well as the standardization of the language applied at that time. Meanwhile, the scholars who consider the ECA as a phenomenon of language variation tried to objectively portray and describe this language as they learned from the results of research on Egyptian sociolinguistics. This paradigm is in line with structural or modern linguistics which is more focused on the object of study. The results of this study can be used by Arabic language institutions & lecturers as consideration whether to include colloquial language elements in their Arabic teaching or not.

Keywords: *Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, Diglossia, Language Deviation, Language Learning*

INDONESIAN ABSTRACT

Para ahli telah banyak membahas tentang Bahasa Arab Amiyah Mesir, terutama mengenai struktur dan perbandingannya dengan Bahasa Arab Standar, baik Modern maupun Klasik. Namun demikian, pembahasan seputar perdebatan antara

kemunculannya sebagai fenomena variasi bahasa (diglosia) atau sebagai penyimpangan bahasa dari kaidah tata bahasa Arab, belum digali secara khusus. Untuk itu, tulisan ini mengkaji tentang fenomena Bahasa Arab Amiyah Mesir, mulai dari kemunculannya hingga eksistensinya dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab. Studi literatur terhadap beberapa buku referensi dan artikel tentang Bahasa Arab Amiyah Mesir dilakukan untuk menyajikan pandangan para ahli pada pembahasan ini. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa terdapat dua pendapat yang berlawanan mengenai keberadaan Bahasa Arab Amiyah Mesir dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa. Para ahli yang berpendapat bahwa kemunculan bahasa tersebut sebagai penyimpangan bahasa mewarisi paradigma dari studi preskriptif yang diadopsi oleh aliran linguistik tradisional. Perspektif ini muncul sebagai konsekuensi atas kelahiran dan berkembangnya kajian tata bahasa Arab, serta pembakuan bahasa yang berlaku saat itu. Sementara itu, para sarjana yang menganggap Bahasa Arab Amiyah Mesir sebagai fenomena variasi bahasa mencoba mengelaborasi dan menggambarkan bahasa ini secara objektif seperti yang mereka pelajari dari hasil-hasil penelitian sosiolinguistik Mesir. Paradigma ini sejalan dengan linguistik struktural atau modern yang lebih fokus pada objek kajian. Selanjutnya, hasil penelitian ini dapat digunakan sebagai pertimbangan oleh institusi maupun pengajar bahasa Arab apakah perlu memasukkan unsur regionalitas dalam pengajaran bahasa Arab mereka atau tidak.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Arab Amiyah Mesir, Variasi Bahasa, Diglosia, Penyimpangan Bahasa, Pembelajaran Bahasa

Introduction

Currently, Arabic is one of the languages with the most native speakers worldwide (Mitchel 1962; Versteegh 2007; Bale 2010; Horesh and Cotter 2016). There are approximately 313 million native speakers of all the current forms of Arabic, making it the fifth most frequently spoken language in the world after Mandarin, Spanish, English, and Hindi (De Swaan, 1991; Bale, 2010; Benrabah, 2014). Given the rapid development of the Arabic language, it is not surprising that international organizations such as the Arab League, the Organization for International Cooperation, the United Arab Emirates, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the United Nations (UN) have declared Arabic to be their official language. World Arabic Language Day is celebrated by the international community to recognize Arabic, the sixth official language of the United Nations, which was established on December 18, 2006.

According to Mithcel (1962), it is a popular misconception that Arabic refers to a unified language that unites speakers from geographically dispersed nations such as Iraq, Egypt, and Morocco through bonds of mutual comprehension. This is not the case. Speaking and writing are essentially separate aspects of linguistic activity, and the first has always preceded the second, both in the process of human evolution and in the

sequence by which the individual child acquires a complicated set of listening and speaking habits long before he sets an eye to paper. The colloquial Arabic spoken in various Arab societies today and by which they primarily communicate differs greatly between Arab nations in the same way that languages that are now known by various names, such as Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, do as a result of normal linguistic development (Holes, 2018; Bakalla, 2023).

Arabic is frequently assumed to have distinct 'spoken' and 'written' forms (Holes, 2004; Gadalla, 2000). The 'spoken' refers to the many Arabic-speaking nations, while the 'written' refers to Standard Arabic, which is taught in schools and understood by all educated Arabs. It is true that most conversations are held in colloquial Arabic, whereas most written materials are written in Standard Arabic. However, the formality of the circumstance (formal/informal) is more important than how the message is presented when deciding which is employed. A mother can write a letter to her children in slang (Wightwick & Gaafar, 2003). On the other hand, a high-level broadcast political debate would almost certainly be conducted in Standard Arabic, whereas a soap opera would be colloquial. Where languages are mutually unintelligible, communication across various Arab ethnicities tends to incorporate at least some aspects of Standard Arabic (Wightwick & Gaafar, 2003).

Of all the spoken dialects of Arabic, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) is arguably the most vivacious and widely known. Egypt is the hub of popular Arab culture, exporting movies, soap operas, popular shows, songs, and commercials to fill the ever-growing airtime of Arabic TV channels (Mitchel, 1962; Armbrust, 1996; Hammond, 2007; Danielson, 2008). The more formal the subject matter, the less there is a distinction between colloquial and standard. Vocabulary is usually the most impacted area, even at the most fundamental level. The structure of the language is still discernible (Wightwick & Gaafar, 2003). The introduction of colloquial language is therefore seen by teachers as being very significant in the context of studying Arabic, aside from the obvious variations of Standard Arabic, both classical (Classical Arabic) and modern (Modern Standard Arabic).

The study of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) has attracted the attention of many academics (Yoyo et al., 2020; Albirini, 2014; Stadlbauer, 2010; Ma'nawi and Ma'ruf, 2015). Briefly, their research topics are divided into two categories, they are (1) the

status or position of ECA among other language variations, as well as (2) the grammatical structure of the language and its comparison with standard Arabic.

Regarding the status of ECA, Yoyo et al (2020) have observed the tension between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic (CA) in the contemporary Arab world. Using the theoretical framework of Ferguson (1959) on high and low cultural varieties, they attempted to confront the existence of Amiyah Arabic and Fusha Arabic in various contexts. The results show that *Fusha* (Standard) Arabic is seen as a representation of "High Variety" because it is the language used in religious literature and other official writings. Meanwhile, Amiya (Colloquial) Arabic is seen as "Low Variety" because it is only used as a medium of ordinary communication. Although this study discusses the *amiya*, which is positioned as a low culture, it does not conclude that this is a form of deviation.

Moreover, Albirini (2014) used case studies on traditional (heritage) Arabic speakers to investigate the effect of the Colloquial variations in the learning of Standard Arabic (Fusha). The findings showed that, whereas primary Arabic heritage speakers had an edge over their second language counterparts when they joined the Modern Standard Arabic classroom, they had patterns that were equivalent to those of second language learners. The advantages they have may be obtained from non-formal sources (such as television or other electronic media). The advanced heritage speakers, unlike their second language counterparts, showed both positive and negative transfer effects from colloquial Arabic. The findings are explored in the context of first-language transfer theories into a third language, as well as their pedagogical implications for Arabic language teaching and learning.

Stadlbauer (2010) also reviewed research on language ideologies in Egypt's current Arabic diglossic context, focusing particularly on the linguistic and cultural ramifications of language ideologies related to Classical Arabic (CA), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA), and English in the Cairo region. This study demonstrates how linguistic ideologies are structurally expressed in Arabic diglossia language variants and how Egyptians strategically employ these language varieties to access the symbolic potency of these ideologies. According to Woolard (1998), language ideology mediates the relationship between linguistic traits and social processes. Consequently, the study of language ideology, linguistic traits, and discursive

interactions cannot be isolated from the study of Arabic diglossia in Egypt. This is so that speakers can alter various language aspects for communication purposes, in addition to using a number of language philosophies that are appropriate for different contexts.

On the other side, concerning to the grammatical comparison to MSA, Ma'nawi and Ma'ruf (2015) examined the morphological patterns in Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA). The data in this study were vocabulary usually used by speakers in Cairo and Ismailiyah in their daily conversations. This study uses consonant (C) and vowel (V) patterns to explain the existing patterns. By utilizing the distributional method, the results show that the words in the ECA have several patterns, including CV, CVC, and CVVC, but there are no words with CCV or CCVC patterns. In conclusion, there are two types of Arabic in Egypt: Arabic that meets the standards of Modern Arabic (MSA) and Amiyah (ECA). Morphologically, ECA has several patterns of word formation that have not been mastered by many people outside Egypt. However, this research is limited to discussing the morphological patterns of words in ECA, which is one of the vernacular variations of Arabic.

Based on the results of the review, it is known that no one has explored the positioning related to ECA, whether it is a language deviation because it violates the standard rules of a standardized language or just a linguistic variation phenomenon that is produced due to language contact with the local culture of the Egyptian people who grew at that time. Therefore, this paper attempts to objectively map out the perspective of the position of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic in learning Arabic, especially in Indonesia. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to address concerns about whether Egyptian Amiyah Arabic (Egyptian Colloquial Arabic) is a language variation or a language deviation that must be corrected, and how ECA exists in the context of Arabic teaching and learning in Indonesia.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach by relying on literature studies regarding the emergence of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) and Standard Arabic (Modern and Classical). Furthermore, the research steps are presented in **Figure 1** as follows:

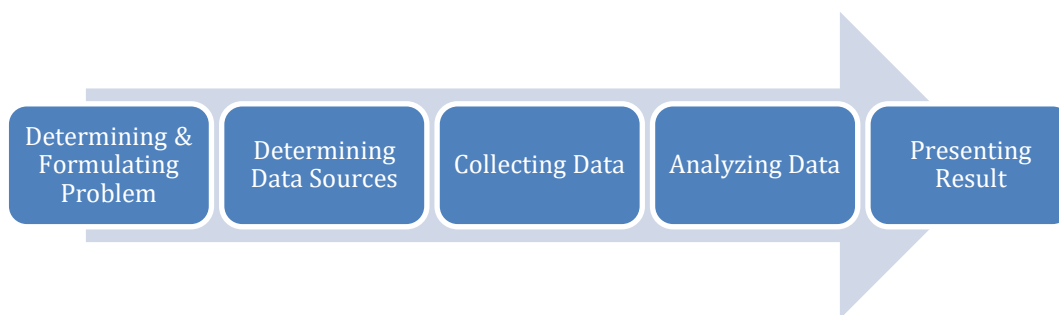


Figure 1: Research Steps

As stated in the introduction, there are two conflicting assumptions regarding the existence of the ECA. The first assumption considers ECA as a variation and the second considers it as a deviation from the official variance. Thus, the idea gave rise to three research questions that were discussed in this study, they are: (1) How is ECA assumed to be a variation of Arabic? How is ECA assumed to be a deviation from the official Arabic language? What is the position of ECA in the context of learning Arabic?

Therefore, the research data were obtained from several books and research including (1) History of the Arabic Language books, (2) Standard Arabic grammar books, (3) Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) grammar books, (4) research results about Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA), and (5) curriculum documents of several Arabic study programs. In the process of data analysis, content analysis is used to find out whether ECA is a variation of the Arabic language, or its existence is considered a deviation from the standard one (modern or classical). Furthermore, the presentation is done informally with ordinary words but still pays attention to the principles of descriptive, explanatory, and exhaustive adequacy.

Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) as Language Variation

Language variation is a central discussion in sociolinguistic studies (Meecham & Rees-Miller, 2001), and so is the relationship between language and the society in which it is used. There are various ways to say the same thing in language, which is a general trait of it. Grammar, word choice, and pronunciation can all vary amongst speakers. However, despite the range of variation, there appear to be limits to it; for example, speakers rarely drastically alter the word order of sentences or introduce unique sounds that are wholly unrelated to the language they are speaking (Wardough, 2006). Even

though linguistic diversity is not the same as grammatical irregularity, speakers are still (often unconsciously) aware of what is and is not permissible in their home dialect.

The most frequently spoken vernacular Arabic dialect is Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) (Ondras, 2005; Wightwick & Gaafar, 2003; Sawe, 2017). The Egyptian Coptic language, which was the native language of the great majority of Nile Valley Egyptians before the Muslim invasion, affected the grammatical structure of Egyptian Arabic (Bishai, 1962; Nishio, 1996). Foreign and colonial European languages like as French, Italian, Greek, Ottoman, and English later affected the dialect to a lesser extent (al-Bathawi, 2017). The 100 million Egyptians speak a variety of dialects, the most significant of which is Cairene. Due to widespread Egyptian influence in the region, notably through Egyptian movies and Egyptian music, it is also intelligible in most Arabic-speaking nations. These characteristics contribute to it being the most frequently spoken and studied Arabic dialect (Asante, 2002; Wightwick & Gaafar, 2003; Richardson & Jacobs, 2013).

Based on the previous research which is seen from the point of view of a language variation, it can be noted that there are at least four posits generated by experts regarding the existence of this language, they are (1) as a “low” variety, (2) spoken, (3) non-standard, and (4) non-formal. To clarify these positions, the following **Table 1** is a comparison of the variations of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) based on the context of the speech situation. These four posits arise because of a linguistic phenomenon called diglossia a language situation in which there is a functional division of language variations or languages that exist in society (Ferguson, 1959).

Table 1: Comparison of MSA and ECA in the Context of Speech

Context of Speech	Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)	Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA)
User Level (Class)	High	Low
Form	Written & spoken	Spoken (Mostly)
Convention	Standard	Non-Standard
Situation	Formal	Non-Formal

ECA As a "Low" Variety of Arabic

As a variation of Arabic is considered "low", this language is generally used to communicate in lower-middle-class Egyptian society (Yoyo et al, 2020). In addition, this variation is also not taught formally in the classrooms - it does not get a significant portion of learning, both in Arab countries and in non-Arab countries. Somehow, this language variation is still used in some lectures because the social environment influences it, or it is deliberately used to create a learning atmosphere that is not rigid.

Based on the level of Arabic expressed by Elgibali & Badawi (1996, see also Hinds and Badawi, 1986), it is known that there are five Arabic languages spoken by modern Egyptian society: (1) Fusha at-Turats (Classical Standard), (2) Fusha al-'Ashr (Modern Standard), (3) 'Amiyah al-Mutsaqqifin (Intellectual-Colloquial), (4) 'Amiyah al-Mutanawwirin (Enlightened-Colloquial), dan (5) 'Amiyyah al-Ummiyyin (Illiterate-Colloquial). Based on this level, it can be concluded that ECA is seen as a low-level language variety, which is generally used by people with low academic levels.

ECA As a Non-Standard Arabic

The process of establishing and maintaining standard forms of a language is known as language standardization (Nordquist, 2019). Standardization can occur naturally in a speech community or since members of the community attempt to impose one dialect or variant as the norm. Language standardization is essentially defined by the interaction of power, language, and views on language, all of which are intimately linked throughout human history (Parakrama, 1995; Millar, 2005).

Although Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) is very well known to the Arabic-speaking community (Mithcel, 1962) and is used in a variety of communications, it is not a standard variation used in various educational institutions to be taught or used in formal situations. In addition, it has no official status and is not officially recognized as a language even though it has its own ISO (International Organization for Standardization) language code (Warschauer, et al, 2002; Tabloni, 2019).

ECA As a Non-Formal Arabic

While Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the official language used for teaching at schools, or for writing anything formal like work reports and so on, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) is a vernacular language that is often used in daily activities by the Egyptian community, such as at the market, public transportation, or in other informal situations. Therefore, ECA is also referred to as non-formal, unofficial Arabic, or 'Arabic slang' (Ma'nawi & Ma'ruf, 2015).

ECA As Spoken Arabic

Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) is generally used in spoken situations, not in written form although it is often used as a social media language by youngsters. Although ECA is mostly a spoken language, it is also written in novels and poems (sometimes known as vernacular literature), comic books, advertisements, some newspapers, and song transcriptions. While Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is utilized in the majority of other printed publications, as well as in radio and television news reporting. MSA is a standardized dialect of Arabic based on classical Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. For local use, the Egyptian vernacular is nearly always written in the Arabic script, however, linguistics texts and textbooks designed to instruct non-native learners frequently transliterate it into Latin letters or the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) as Language Deviation

Considering ECA as a language variation that arises because of the diglossia phenomenon, there are some views of the experts that oppose this point of view, which they consider ECA as a language deviation. This view arises because indeed ECA and Standard Arabic have some quite striking differences, especially in terms of grammar and the sound of some of the letters. Thus, there is a kind of concern among experts that the emergence of ECA will be able to "damage" the standardized Arabic variant. One expert who considers that the emergence of ECA is a deviation is Syauqi Dhaif (1994) through his book entitled "*Tachrifat al-'Amiyah li al-Fuscha: fi al-Qawa'id wa al-Binyat wa al-Churuf wa al-Charakat* (Deviations of the colloquial language of Standard Arabic: in grammar, structures, letters, and vowels)".

In this book, Dhaif (1994) conveys several deviations that occur in the use of ECA. Among these deviations are: (1) Ignoring grammatical rules, especially regarding the "i'rab". (2) Deviations in several forms of verbs and other derived nouns. (3) Deviations in the form of *ism mutsanna* (dual) and *jam'* (plural). (4) Deviations in the form of *ism mudzakkar* (masculine) and *mu`annats* (feminine). (5) Substitution of sounds of some consonants and vowels; and so forth

Based on some of these deviations, it is not surprising that the existence of ECA is considered something that has the potential to damage the established rules of Arabic, especially if ECA is used in language learning at schools or universities. Therefore, Dhaif (1994) in his book advised preserving the use of the official Arabic language (al-'Arabiyyah al-Fushca) in any activity.

Existence of ECA in Arabic Language Learning Context

It can be said that the Arabic language taught in various institutions across the world is mostly the standard one, both the classical for studying ancient texts such as the Quran, Hadith, and some classical Arabic poetry, as well as the modern for elaborating texts of mass media, speeches, literature, and also Arabic that used in various other formal situations. Then a question arises concerning how the colloquial or vernacular variant of Arabic is generally used for daily (informal) communication with the local community. Does it have no place in the Arabic language learning context?

Although there are some experts who consider it a deviation, it cannot be denied that this language variation is also a real linguistic phenomenon that should also be known (or even mastered) by Arabic language learners all over the world. If students enroll in Arabic classes with the goal of learning the language the way a foreign student learns it (English, Mandarin, German, and so on), which is usually for communication in the four skills, then Arabic vernacular dialect, particularly ECA, should be an integral part of the Arabic courses, according to Younes (2006) and Soliman (2014). One of the aim of teaching ECA is to introduce the treasures of local Arabic variations that are used in everyday conversation.

The result of the investigation regarding the existence of ECA in the Arabic language learning context can be seen from four things, they are (1) the emergence of books on ECA grammar, (2) the existence of special courses on Amiyah Arabic (including

Arabic dialectology), (3) being discussion points in courses about Arabic Cultural Understanding, and (4) the influence of lecturers from alumni of Egyptian universities who bring the nuances of ECA in learning communication in the classroom. The following is an explanation of each of these points:

The Emergence of ECA Grammar Books

Currently, many books on ECA grammar have been compiled and published with the aim of introducing this variation to the general public, primarily Arabic learners around the world. From the search results, several grammar books about ECA were found, including:

- **“Colloquial Arabic”** by T.F. Mithcel in 1962
- **“Cairene Egyptian Colloquial Arabic”** by J.O. Gary and S. Gamal-Eldin in 1982
- **“A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic: Arabic-English”** by M. Hinds and E.S.M. Badawi in 1986
- **“Colloquial Arabic of Egypt: The Complete Course for Beginners”** by J. Wightwick and M. Gaafar in 2003
- **“Kallimni ‘Arabi - An Intermediate Course in Spoken Egyptian Arabic”** by Iman A. Soliman and Samia Louis in 2007; and so forth

From these books, it can be seen that ECA is also studied in various institutions as one of the variations that are still alive and widely used by Arab society in general and Egyptian society in particular. In addition, this also shows that the introduction and learning of dialect variations is an integral part of learning Arabic as a foreign language (Soliman, 2014).

Emergence of Colloquial Arabic Course at Arabic Learning Program in Higher Education

Arabic language teaching at the university level in Indonesia is generally divided into two study programs, they are Arabic Language Education and Arabic Language and Literature. Although both study Arabic, especially in terms of language proficiency, both have characteristics and relatively different graduate competency standards. The first aims to produce scholars who are experts in the field of Arabic

language education and teaching as well as master the material and methodology, while the second aims to provide knowledge in the field of classical and modern Arabic, communicative Arabic language skills, familiar with literary Arabic expressions, and have extensive knowledge, both related to the history of Arabic literature and culture. Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that the Colloquial Arabic course will be found mainly in Arabic language and literature study programs.

Based on observations on academic documents (distribution of courses) of Arabic study programs at several universities in Indonesia, several specific courses related to Colloquial Arabic with several nomenclatures were found. For example, there are courses "*Bahasa Arab Amiyah* (Colloquial Arabic)" at the Arabic Literature Study Program at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) and Sebelas Maret University (UNS), as well as "*Lahjah Arabiyyah* (Arabic Dialect)" at the Arabic Language and Literature Study Program at the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (UIN-SUKA).

Becoming the Discussion Point in Arabic Sociolinguistics and Cultural Understanding

As a cultural entity, regional variations, or dialects of the language of a society become objects of learning in intercultural understanding. This is because sometimes we cannot understand culture by only studying the formal or standard language used in official communications, but we also need to understand the language of daily communication. In this context, Colloquial Arabic, especially in Egyptian society, is the highlight of an important discussion in the Arabic Cultural Understanding course. In addition, the discussion related to ECA is also found in the Arabic Sociolinguistics course which teaches a lot about regional dialects and their use in society.

The Influence of Egyptian College Alumni As Arabic Language Teachers

It is undeniable that the alumni of Egyptian universities, especially Al-Azhar, who teaches Arabic in various institutions also bring with them the local Egyptian dialect that they use daily while studying there. Its use is not significant, but sometimes it is inserted into certain expressions, such as asking about one's condition, asking for one's name, and so on. Even though they know that the

variation of Arabic they use is colloquial, its use is intended to lighten the mood and to introduce 'another version' of Arabic itself.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it is concluded that there are two main currents related to perspectives in viewing the existence of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA), either as a variation or as a deviation. Therefore, the scholars who consider the ECA as a phenomenon of language variation tried to objectively portray and describe this language as they learned from the results of research on Egyptian sociolinguistics. This paradigm is in line with structural or modern linguistics which is more focused on the object of study. Meanwhile, the scholars who posit that the ECA is a language deviation inherited the paradigm from the prescriptive study of language adopted by traditional linguistics schools. This perspective emerged because of the birth and development of Arabic grammar, as well as the standardization of the language applied at that time. Furthermore, the results of this study can be used by Arabic language institutions and lecturers as a consideration whether to include colloquial language elements in their Arabic teaching or not. However, this research is still limited to literature studies from various relevant sources, not yet at the stage of direct observation in the community regarding their perspective regarding the ECA, especially in the context of Arabic language learning.

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