

**LEARNING THROUGH SHARING :
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Graffiti in Post Revolutionary Egypt

Using Graffiti as a Language Source in the AFL Classroom

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Abstract

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The aim of this paper is to explore how graffiti, as an increasingly wide-spread phenomenon in post January, 25 Egypt, may be utilized as an authentic language source in the AFL classroom.

The term graffiti (s. graffito), meaning a drawing or scribbling on a flat surface, originally referred to those marks found on ancient Roman architecture. (Suzan, 1996) “Graffiti has a long history in Egypt and features on temples and tombs throughout the Pharaonic period – messages which can be seen today.” (Fildes, 2005) As such it is an age-old, globally pervasive means of expression to convey messages of a religious, social, political and commercial nature.

With the de facto lifting of the virtual ban on graffiti during the Mubarak era, there has been an explosion of graffiti on the streets of Cairo, especially that “... of an overtly political nature.” (Noshkaty, 2011) Visually impressive, linguistically vibrant and creative, this phenomenon is a veritable treasure trove for the Arabic language teacher who aims to use authentic sources to enhance learning.

For beginning classes, I propose to use select samples of graffiti for the reinforcement of lexical items, as well as syntactic and morphological features introduced. For the intermediate levels, graffiti which manifests examples of code-mixing and code-switching may be utilized to shed more light on the ever-changing relationship between Modern Standard Arabic and Egyptian Colloquial, the implications of which for actual language use pose great challenges for AFL learners at all levels.

It has been posited that the transformation that has taken place in the use of this 'art form' since the January 25th revolt reflects the popular demand for governmental accountability and has been triggered by the lifting of the fear of authority, a fear which previously encouraged self censorship. (Ramadan, 2011) Advanced students grappling with wide-ranging discussions on cultural, social and political issues in Egypt can thus also benefit from the study of this innovative medium and the complex social developments it embodies.

Finally, the increasing use of English in Egyptian graffiti may be explored. An obvious reflection of the language phenomenon of borrowing, students may be encouraged to reflect on graffiti writers' perception of the impact of their creations on a wider audience in the age of globalized mass media.

References:

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