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**Graffiti in Post Revolutionary Egypt**

**Using Graffiti as a Language Source in the AFL Classroom**

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Graffiti has a long history in Egypt, dating back to the Pharoanic period; its legacy can be seen on temple walls the length of the Nile, where generations of Egyptians, and foreign travelers, have made their marks.

In contemporary Egypt, graffiti — an ancient art form involving the inscription of lettering and/or images through the etching, marking, or painting of surfaces — and street art typically take the form of hastily prepared messages of a commercial, electoral, religious or personal nature. In modern day Egypt, the most prevalent forms of graffiti are hand-painted, spray-painted, or stenciled onto innumerable walls across the country, including commercial advertisements for plumbers, marriage registrars, driving instructors, private tutors, and slogans in support of football teams.

Religious graffiti is also common, including depictions of pilgrimages to Mecca — with a drawing of the Kaaba, along with an airplane or ship. While the two words Uzkor Allah (mention God) are graffitied on countless walls and surfaces across the country. Personal graffiti is universal — including the painting of signatures, stylized name “tags,” amorous messages (i.e. an arrow-pierced heart between two inscribed names) along with sexually oriented graffiti written or scratched onto bathroom walls, often accompanied with telephone numbers.

In the wake of the 2011 revolution, graffiti is once again flourishing, on the streets of Cairo. During the Mubarak era, graffiti was illegal, classified as a misdemeanor. However, this did not stop Egyptians from expressing themselves on public and private buildings. Two graffiti artists from the opposition grouping known as the April 6 Youth, Ahmad Maher and Amr Ali, were arrested for spray painting political slogans on Feb. 17. Maher said he and Ali were spray painting — in Giza, Dokki, Agouza and Imbaba — for two nights prior to their arrest.

Their messages were of a religious, commercial and social nature: commercial advertisements for plumbers, slogans in support of football teams, and illustrations of the pilgrimage to Mecca (Charbel,2010). The Egyptian authorities may object to such graffiti, but what they did not tolerate is graffiti with a message of opposition. Most of artists' graffiti has been painted over since their arrest. Graffiti during and after the January 25 Revolution has a different meaning, however. "I remember that before the revolution, when we tried to write political graffiti we would do so in groups of three: two to do the graffiti and the third to watch out for the police





During The 25<sup>th</sup> of January, the people of Egypt were struggling to reclaim their country as their own while remaining peaceful. Some have used the can to disperse their message while others use their art .The 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution however has catalyzed a change in graffiti. It is now of an overtly political nature (Noshokaty, 2011); see photos below. The reemergence of this political graffiti is one manifestation of the freedom of expression in the immediate post-revolutionary period.

With the fall of Hosni Mubarak's regime, Egyptians are experiencing freedom of expression through various art forms, one of which is graffiti. People were posting of messages on the streets in order to raise political awareness amongst the Egyptian people. They want to express our opinions openly where everybody can see them, and call for democratic change. .

Graffiti in Cairo today is dominated by anti-Mubarak messages on city walls, military tanks, and smartly-written signs carried by frustrated people, and it is taking over the streets and being used to protest against the current government. The tanks of the military are being used as billboards for graffiti. The clean, yellowish vehicles are now spotted with slogans cursing the current





President, asking him to leave the Egyptian people alone, or asking for the support of the army.

These graffiti, in political perception, were much like statements proclaimed by the leaders of non-violent protest movements. They were mature, vigilant, and passionate, street art forever shedding light upon political spontaneity and patriotism, as in the words, “25 January, oh, how sweet is my country.” They represent the true beat of the streets, all over, free as air, sending a message to all ( Hala Hussein). After the revolution had begun, graffiti in multiple colours started to dominate street walls, opening the door to more political graffiti.

The day after Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak resigned, 26-year-old Maya Gowaily noticed cleaning crews in downtown Cairo enthusiastically painting over revolution-themed graffiti in an effort to beautify Egypt for a fresh start.



The language has also changed. Colloquial Egyptian is the lingua franca of today's graffiti, in part a reflection of the expansion of the graffiti movement beyond a group of educated elite to the general public, who are no longer afraid to express themselves. English is also increasingly making an appearance in graffiti forms in Egypt, in part to communicate the new politicized message to the wider world through pictures and video on social media.

Graffiti forms have also changed. Graffiti now includes multi colored graphics, despite the high cost of such materials. And graffiti now has a ubiquity lacking before the revolution; it can be found on the sides of army tanks, metro stations and government buildings, off-limits before the uprising ( Salah El-Dein, 2011).The streets around Tahrir Square have become a graffiti gallery, turning the center of Cairo into a cultural hub in a state in turmoil.



Teachers cannot avoid using graffiti in their classrooms because students are surrounded by graffiti everywhere from high schools' bathrooms to the university water towers. (Calvin. Lisa) tourists who come to visit any country love to take photographs of well- known, attractive places and other photos of anything portray Egyptians' lives. Teachers consider graffiti authentic materials which reflect culture and language at the same time which cannot avoid its' usage.

Some teachers think that graffiti could be used with high and advanced students because of their ability to produce the language easily than those in lower levels. However, the use of graffiti can be adapted to all levels of learners. Students can be asked to interpret graffiti texts to the L2, to understand the cultural aspects, to acquire new information on the native language which is not available except through the real and authentic materials.



**Possible activities could be used in elementary and beginners levels:**

Learning Arabic is very difficult language and challenging which need students to concentrate and focus during the lesson. Teachers need to make classes fun and effective as much as they can. Making classes fun requires using a lot of activities and games and creative supplementary materials. Using graffiti is one of these authentic materials and activities which make students happy and enthusiastic about learning Arabic. Students who come to learn Arabic want to understand culture too. Students want to see the revolution, understand it which could be happened through exposing to graffiti.



The following activities may teachers use:

First, language task through bringing to the class some graffiti and preparing list of questions like:

Do you find a nominal sentence or verbal sentence?

What vocabulary you can guess the meaning?

What is the context behind this graffiti?

Second, cultural task through asking questions like:

What issues this graffiti deal with, women or men issues?

Do you discuss this kind of issues in your country?

Who do you think draw this graffiti women or man and how you can tell?

**Activities may be used in intermediate classes:**

Most of students from this level learn both Modern Standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial Arabic. They learn both codes to enable them to read and write and communicate with Arabs. Students know in this level see that most of Egyptian make code-switching when they speak especially in formal interviews or when they speak about serious topics. Graffiti reflect this phenomenon as it is an aspect of life. The teacher can choose some graffiti which have both codes (Modern standard Arabic & Egyptian Colloquial Arabic) or (Arabic & English).

Teacher could ask students to identify the reasons behind this phenomenon depends on what

they see. Teachers may ask also what words people use in colloquial and others in Modern standard and why they shift between them? And when?



Another activity:

The teacher gives an article in the class for reading or an audio file in their listening class, the teacher may ask students to draw images about a text they are reading in class or about their opinion or reaction on an issue, text they have read or news they heard about. Using graphics help students to make meaning as they read, write, and act, [which] is firmly rooted in current thinking about how the mind works (Claggett, 1992)

In Cairo there are many squares and sites where people had different experiences with the authority. People in these areas had left behind many messages on the walls to express their experiences and their feelings. Like, first; Tahreer square where the people of martyrs hang and draw graffiti asking for revenge. Second; In Mahammed Mahmoud Street where you can see graffiti on the wall asking army to leave the authority after the clashes happened between the Army and people who tried to burn the ministry of interior affairs. Third; on the wall in front of “Masbero” the Egyptian TV building where Christians had clashes with the Army and security and left behind injured and killings. Teachers may ask students to go to different squares in Cairo and take photos to different graffiti and bring them to class to discuss with the whole class. Then students will be asked to explain the graffiti which are brought to class and ask students to guess where these graffiti are drawn? How they can tell?

**In advanced classes:**

Teachers may initiate their classes with asking students what is graffiti?

Who are the people draw graffiti in the streets?

Do you have in your country this kind of arts?

Do your governments forbid graffiti in the streets? Why?



Then teachers may divide students into pairs to discuss these questions within groups and then out to the class. These kinds of activities develop students' abilities in talking and using their Arabic. In this activity teachers provide students with lists of vocabulary to help them to express their ideas and talk freely. These vocabulary lists should be provided to students in advance before the class starts in order to pronounce the words correctly and using them in right structured sentences. Teachers also should prepare vocabulary exercises to help students to activate and use them correctly in the sentences. Exercises like filling gaps with bank of vocabulary or re-arrange the order to create sentences may be effective and useful for students.

Teachers then should be ready with collective graffiti pictures to show in class. These graffiti should be chosen by the teacher based on students' levels and knowledge. In addition to that, graffiti samples should be selected according to the teacher's grammar focus in the class and on what teachers want to demonstrate in class. Students are given a handout contains 6 graffiti of teacher's choice, then they are asked to analyze the vocabulary used answering the following questions:

- What words are used in the graffiti in the handouts?

- What was it mean?
- Can you categorize them?
- What culture points are reflected from them?
- What messages are delivered in them?
- Who might write them? And why?

After the discussion and the analysis, students are asked to reflect on these pictures verbally and in written. This kind of activity is considered focused on many skills; reading, writing, speaking in addition to understand the culture of the target language.

Calvin added that these kinds of questions take students beyond the translation and the meaning of the message to envisioning its setting and creator, even with students with limited vocabulary.

At the end students are asked to discuss with the teacher what they have learned concerning the new culture. This discussion would clarify to them that searching for the new meaning of the words and understanding them could be adventures generations of options and would help them to arrive to logical, judgmental understanding.

In summary, the lesson starts with given lists of vocabulary to enrich their knowledge and increase their input. Then teacher practiced this vocabulary with them from context, use, form sides and aspects. After teachers make sure that students are well –used the new vocabulary and structures through given exercises and practices, the second step comes.

Second, through discussion with the teacher and with the classmates, students are learned in indirect way on how to use the vocabulary in correct structured sentences. Third, students are asked through elicitation to react emotionally and rationally on the topic which leads them to articulate their knowledge, learning and cultural critical thinking.

In addition to that, teacher may take students to the site where they can meet with the professional drawers who draw graffiti on the walls and discuss with them the messages they wrote on the walls. Students may also go to some squares and see unprofessional people who draw graffiti and see their educational level, the language which is used on spot, topics they talk about and messages they want to deliver.

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