Appendix 3.1

Background Variables and Arabic Student's Reading and Listening Comprehension Scores on the CAL Arabic Proficiency Test

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Summary of Findings

As part of the on-going Arabic Language Learning Framework, we have been collecting data on 1st- and 2nd-year Arabic students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension proficiency. These students take a shortened version of the Arabic Proficiency Test, available from the Center for Applied Linguistics. We report here the results of the analysis of the reading and listening comprehension scores of the 132 1st- and 2nd-year Arabic students sampled thus far.

The test consisted of sections I and II of reading and listening comprehension (the first 35 out of 50 items). Part III was deemed "cruel and unusual punishment" for students at this level. The students were from six institutions: three universities, one four-year college, one two-year community college, and the Middlebury intensive summer program. Students took the test at the end of their academic year, except in the case of Middlebury College students who took it at the beginning of their program. In addition to the usual data collected on the CAL machine-

scoreable answer sheet, students filled out a questionnaire giving detailed information on their background. For example, they were asked about their nationality, native language, if they are of Arab ancestry, if they are Muslim, what textbooks they used, how many hours per week their Arabic classes met, if they had studied a colloquial variety, and whether they had had other exposure to Arabic in addition to their formal study of the language.

Variables Found to be Non-Significant

- Age

- Sex

- Year in College

- Home Language

- Nationality (Western vs. non-Western)

- Religion (Muslim vs. non-Muslim)

- Major Field of Study: Middle Eastern Studies students were not significantly better than other students.

- Colloquial: Students who had studied a colloquial variety of Arabic did not perform significantly better on the listening comprehension test than other students, but there was a trend in this direction (see below).

- Arabic Textbook Used

Variables Found to Be Significant

- Arab Ancestry: Students of Arab descent performed better in both reading and listening comprehension than others.

- 1st/2nd Year: 2nd year students were better than 1st year students

- Other Study: Students with additional Arabic classes in addition to their regular first and second year course(s) did better on the test.

- Colloquial: Students who had studied a colloquial variety of Arabic performed better on the reading test than other students. There is also a trend (though not significant) indicating that students who had studied a colloquial variety of Arabic performed better on listening comprehension.

- Exposure: Students with exposure to Arabic (travel, family, friends) outside of the classroom performed better in both reading and listening comprehension.