

# Preface

It is customary in promoting a book to talk about an existing lacuna in the field to which the book belongs. This may or may not in fact be the case, but this tradition does indeed match the reality in the field of Arabic linguistic studies as far as this volume is concerned. Studies of Arabic literacy are meagre and they remain marginal in Arabic linguistics, in spite of the undisputed importance of this topic in understanding the language at the crossroads of psycholinguistics and language acquisition, educational linguistics, sociolinguistics and cultural studies. The multifaceted nature of this topic is reflected in the content of this volume of essays which report the findings of new research, or bring together the major insights of existing work to map aspects of Arabic literacy studies for use as a platform for future research. The net result is a volume of great reach, depth and interest. It describes, explains and offers empirical and quantitative conclusions which can help interested scholars reflect, comparatively, on literacy in Arabic and other languages from theoretically-informed perspectives.

In recent years, Arabic literacy has emerged as an issue of great educational importance in the Arabic speaking world. PIRLS results during the past few years have consistently placed participating Arab countries at the bottom of international achievement levels. Arab policy-makers and pedagogy experts have been exercised by this and are on the look-out for ways to understand the problem and to devise solutions. Arabic language teaching reforms in Arab countries during the last decade are an expression of this endeavour (I know this to be the case from my long experience in this field). Although the essays in this volume are not offered as a solution to this problem, they nevertheless provide a basis from which an understanding of it can be developed. This understanding is bound to be complex and may speak in different inflections, depending on disciplinary perspective.

This is an excellent volume and the first of its kind. It will be the first port of call for those who wish to learn about Arabic literacy. The editors and contributors are to be congratulated on this achievement.

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Handbook of Arabic Literacy

Insights and Perspectives

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