

# Professionalizing Community-based Arabic Language Education: Prospects and Challenges

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# This presentation

## The context:

Arabic as a community/heritage language in the international and Australian contexts

## The questions:

Existential questions that need to be addressed prior to any efforts to promote Arabic as a community/heritage language

## The way forward:

Efforts needed to professionalize the teaching of Arabic as a community language within the Australian context

# Arabic as a community/heritage language within the International Context

Recent waves of migration and immigration of Arabic-speaking and Muslim people to Europe, North America, and Australia have significantly increased the demand for Arabic for a variety of purposes including religious, cultural, professional, travel and family-related.

Despite this increasing demand and governmental efforts in some countries, teaching Arabic as a community and heritage language remains an area that is greatly lacking in vision, structure, research, and support.

# Need for Arabic within the Australian context: Demographics

Australian Muslims 604,240  
(3.0% of total population)

Arabic spoken by a person at home 321,728 (1.4% of total population)  
[3rd after English and Mandarin]

Australians born in an Arab country 265,224  
(1.0% of total population)

Source: *Australian Bureau of Statistics: 2016 Census figures*

# Existential Questions

1. What do we mean when we say “Arabic”?

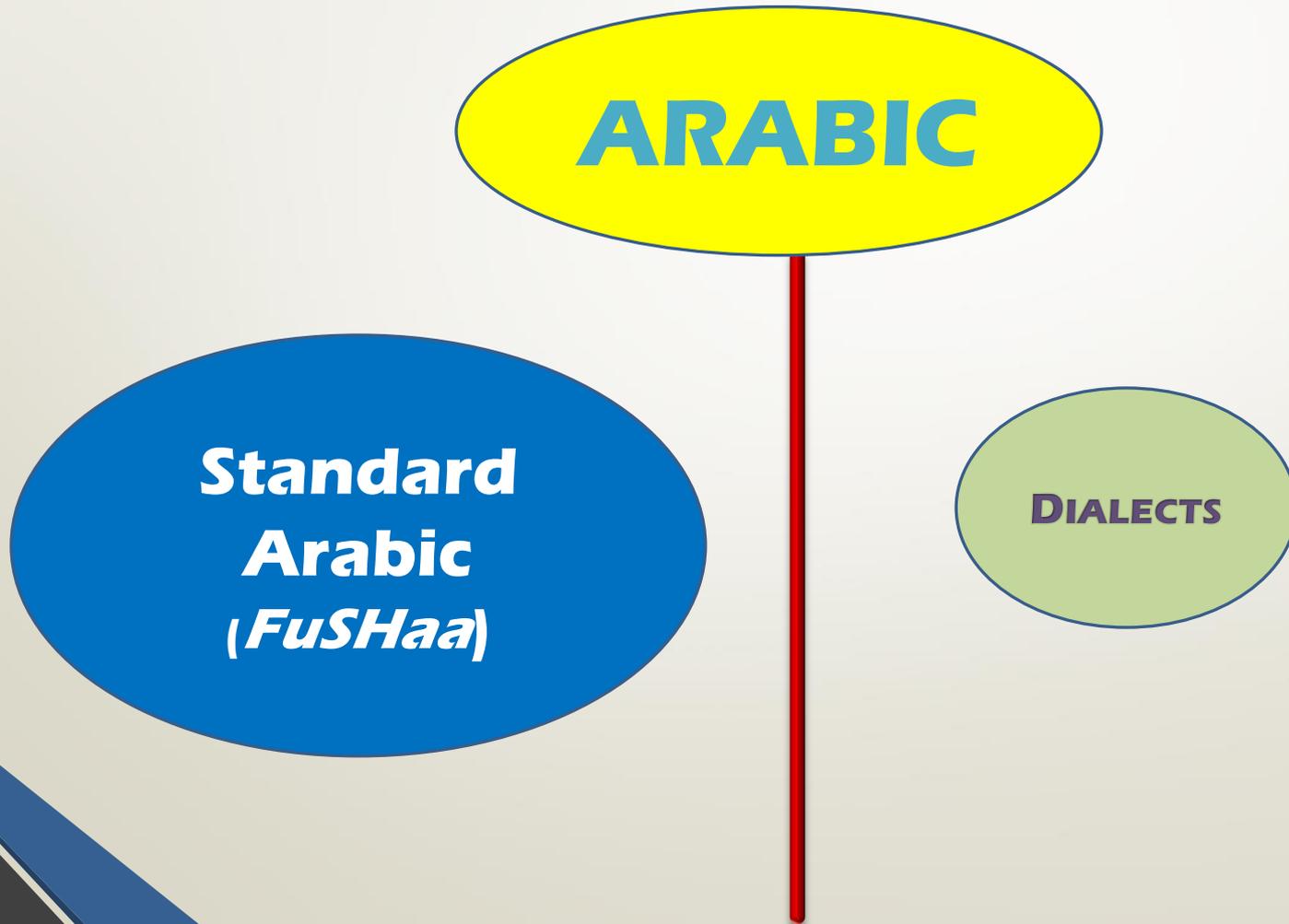
2. What are we teaching Arabic for?  
communication vs. performance

3. How relevant is the *local* context to the learning and teaching of Arabic?

4. What roles should families play in promoting Arabic community language learning?

5. What pedagogies are needed to promote and sustain more effective learning and teaching of Arabic?

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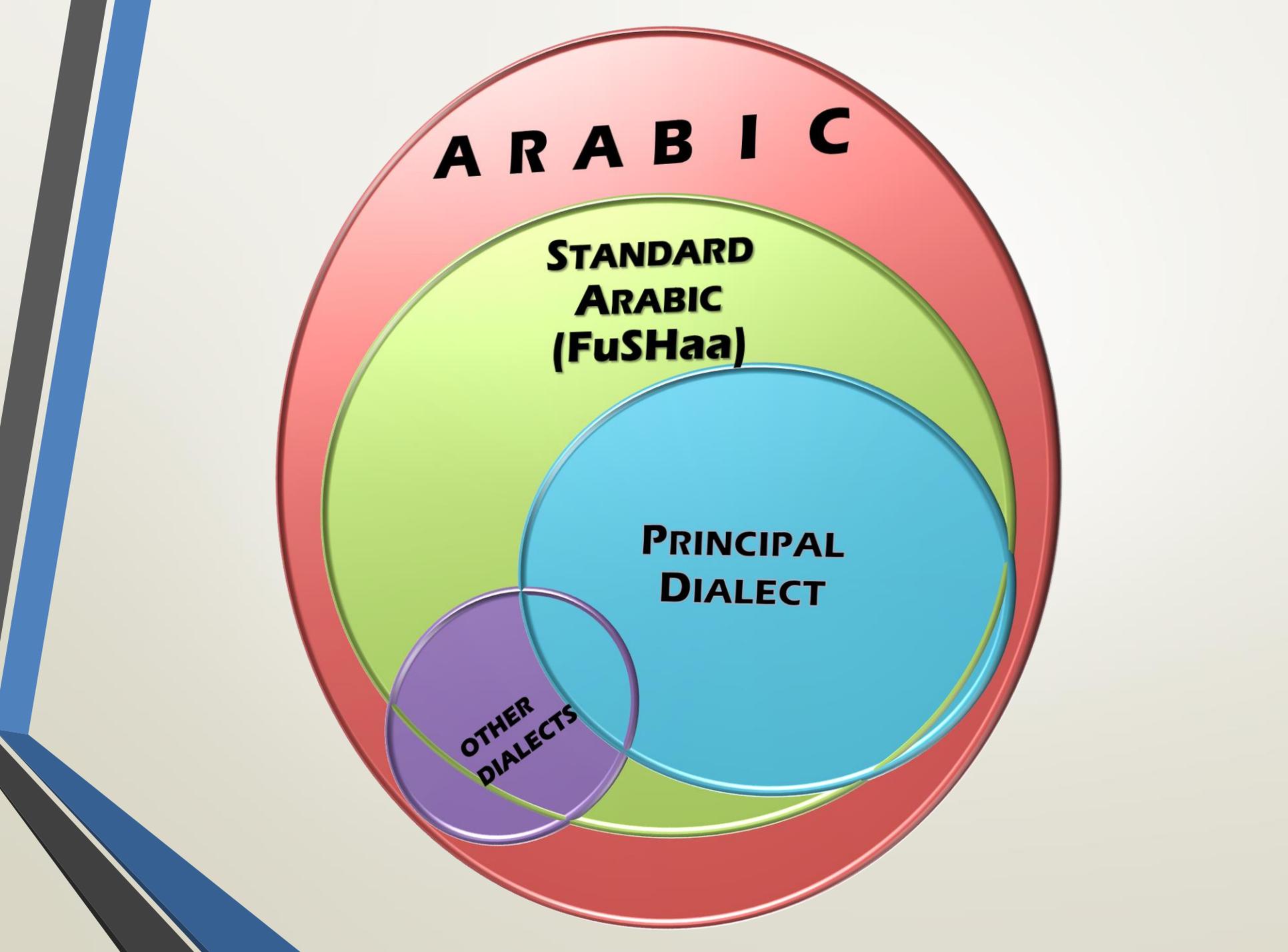


**A R A B I C**

**STANDARD  
ARABIC  
(FuSHaa)**

**PRINCIPAL  
DIALECT**

**OTHER  
DIALECTS**



## 2. What are we teaching for? Communication vs. Performance

Connection between Arabic and Islam has resulted in Arabic language curricula that places more focus on the language of performance (religious and literary)

Strong focus on the language of performance in Arab world curricula translates into heavy emphasis on advanced grammatical knowledge disconnected from real life functions

Focus on the language of performance is often driven by strong interest among some parents and educators in teaching religion through Arabic

### 3. How relevant is the *local* context to learning and teaching Arabic in community education?

Local context is essential in order to relate Arabic to the real world in which the learners live, not to an “imagined reality”

Need for textbooks and materials that reflect both the home/heritage context and the local context and present Arab and Australian characters.

Need for *Australian-born* teachers to participate in Arabic community centers

Role of family is crucial in providing additional, constant meaningful input to children

Need for a positive attitude towards the richness of diversity in Arabic and Arab culture to help incentivize learning, which will not be successful without a local community

First generation parents need to accept that their children's experience in learning Arabic will be different from theirs

Need to be partnering with local authorities to jointly seek ways to provide support for community education

**4. What roles should families play in promoting community language learning?**

## 5. What pedagogies are needed to promote and sustain effective Arabic community language education?

Arabic community language education needs to depart from the traditional pedagogies that are still prevalent in many schools in Arabic-speaking countries, and instead:

- Look to current pedagogies of modern languages, which focus on learners, learning outcomes, collaborative learning, integrated skills
- Focus, first and foremost, on communication not performance standards
- Embrace all varieties of Arabic in the classroom as ingredients of 21<sup>st</sup> century Arabic language proficiency

# The way ahead: Professionalizing Community- based Arabic Language Education in Australia

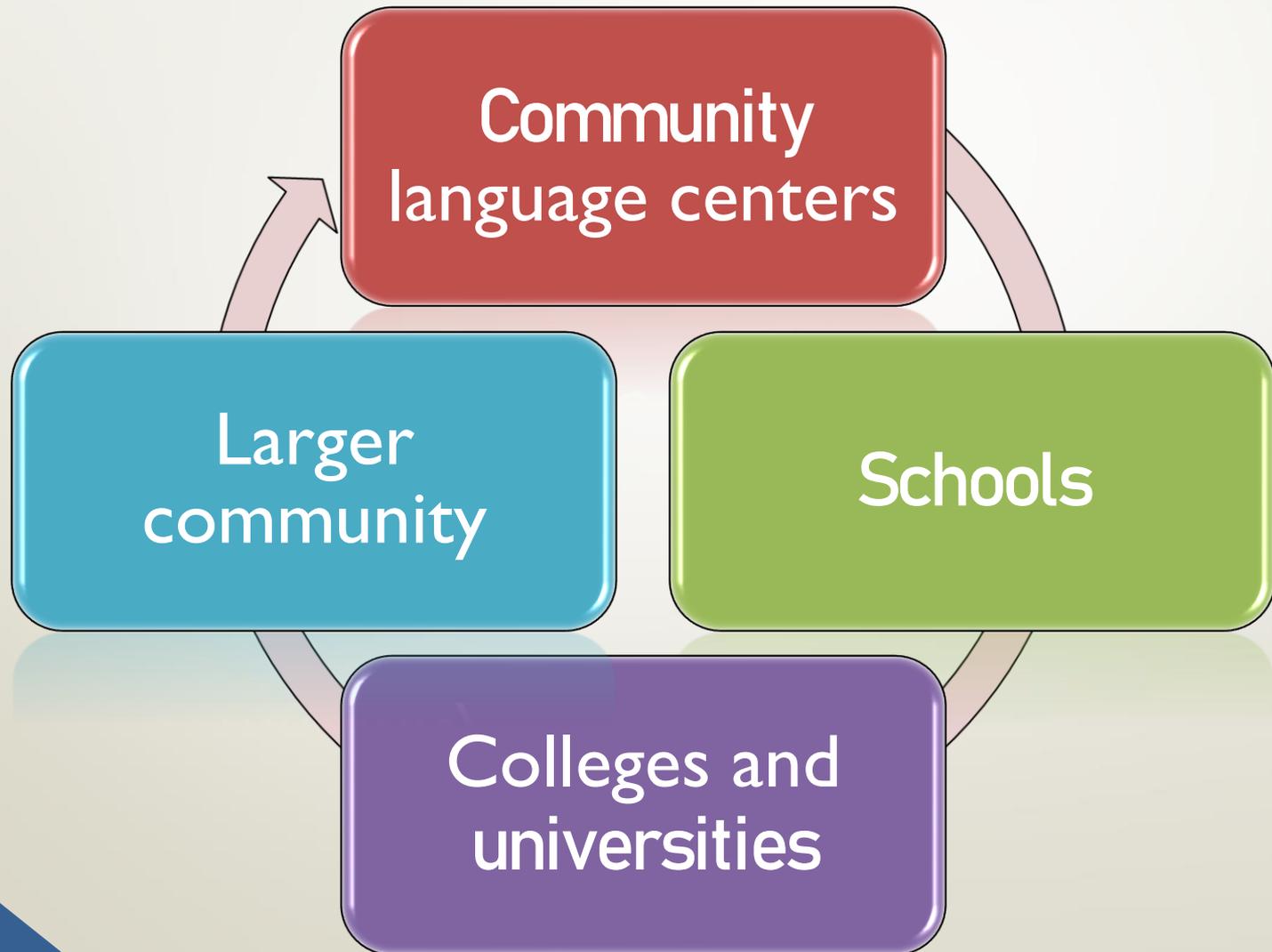
The way ahead requires a great deal of partnership and collaboration between the government and communities

Development of Arabic curricula with Australian “flavors” that serve the needs of learners in community centers and public schools that offer Arabic: Mainstreaming Arabic

Professionalizing the teaching of Arabic: Teacher training and certification, mentoring teachers

Professionalizing the learning of Arabic: Proficiency testing and certification throughout community centers, schools, and universities

# The Community Education Cycle



## Arabic community language education: Toward an Australian model

- Australia has made some important strides in Arabic community language education.
- Efforts are needed to develop a national strategy for community languages (including Arabic) that will not only enhance the presence of Arabic within the Australian context and contribute to the mission of “developing intergenerational linguistic and cultural understandings,” but can also serve as a model for community-based Arabic education worldwide.