Mohsen: It is important to note that teaching foreign languages in Iran—which starts in middle school—is focused mostly on grammar from very early on. The first thing we lean is the grammar of a foreign language. We never learn to speak it. For example, even the Arabic teacher doesn’t speak Arabic in class. We only learn the Arabic grammar and how to read Arabic correctly. If we read a sentence in [colloquial] Arabic, we wouldn’t be able to know what it means. Well, in general the education system wants to enable students to understand the Quran and hadith¹ more than anything else. This is also the case for English. I don’t believe all my middle school and high school English teachers were able to speak English fluently. In class it was rare to find the teachers speaking English. Sometimes they even couldn’t speak English. We only memorized some words and grammatical points, but never spoke a word of English. We didn’t even have audio (tapes, for example) of the dialogues we read in books. So most students pronounced the words incorrectly since they have never heard [them] before—except a couple of times from the teacher. Well, we don’t have English TV channels in Iran either so that students could use foreign sources for listening.

¹ Compilation of narrations chronicling sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad.
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