

Linguistic Cultural Dualism in Arab Gulf Identity: A Socio-cultural Approach on the Emergence of a Gulf English Variety

Professor Nuha Suleiman Al-Shurafa^{1*}, Dr. Maather Al-Rawi²

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1. Department of European languages and literature, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
 2. Department of European languages and literature, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

* Corresponding Author's Email: nuhalshurafa@hotmail.com

Abstract – This is a socio-cultural account of linguistic identity in the six Arab Gulf States which constitute the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Through a corpus of the Gulf register, the notion of identity is analysed with reference to linguistic practices as socio-cultural means of communication. The existing register is a natural outcome which reflects the vast and fast process of modernisation. The analysis of the Gulf register seeks to provide an answer to how the Arabic Gulf native identity impacts the English linguistic practice, as an interdisciplinary and integrative part in the socio-cultural approach. Arabic meets with English as a global non-native variety of English and results in the new Gulf code. The result of the examination of linguistic practices confirm that identity in the Gulf reflects a cultural transformation and does not resist the new linguistic and socio-cultural system. The selected theoretical framework for the analysis is drawn from a variety of linguistic sub-disciplines and research traditions.

Keywords: identity; Gulf Arab states; linguistic practices; socio-cultural aspects; global English; Gulf register

1. INTRODUCTION

The present discussion is an account of the 21st century socio-cultural dynamics and the evolution of a unique English discourse in the GCC States. It also contributes to the discussion of the notion of identity in these countries through the linguistic analysis of a representative samples of speakers of Gulf English. The spoken variety of English by natives in the Gulf used in this research is one of the communicative linguistic systems besides standard Arabic and other spoken varieties. The new linguistic trend is an interdisciplinary and integrated approach of their native tongue (Ager 1999; Bauman 2000; Al-Halawani 2010; Jones 2007; Hassan 2010; Al-Batal 2002). Al-Batal (2002) refers to this type of identity in Lebanon as 'Lebanonism' which reflects within certain circles 'Arabism'. Thus, by analogy, we can argue that the English used in the Gulf by educated native Arab adults be called 'Gulfism'.

The data under investigation highlights specific socio-cultural phenomena that are reflected linguistically on the Gulf register character, i.e., the 'Gulfism' variety of global

English. Some of these socio-cultural linguistic characterisations which are represented in the linguistic structure include: gender attitude difference, plural centered structure, linguistics and ideology, multilingual creativity, and the free insertion of some Arabic neutral expressions to the Gulf-English. These interactive linguistic features are evidence demonstrating the retention rather than the loss of the native Gulf identity of the socio-cultural aspects in this vast and fast age of modernisation. The map below presents the location of the Arab Gulf States involved in the present discussion of this linguistic phenomenon:

Map 1: The Arab Gulf States. Source: Peck (2007)



Map 1 above includes the six Arab Gulf States of the GCC created on 25th May 1981. These are: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Standard Arabic is the official language of the GCC, and each State is distinguished by its own variety of spoken Arabic. English is the "lingua Franca" for communication and is taught at schools and universities as a second language and the language of science, technology, and other fields of knowledge (El-Sanabary 1992; Findlow 2006; Gordon 1985; Hassan 2010; Holes 1987; Jones 2007; Peck 2007).

1.1. Identity and Linguistic Dualism in the Gulf

The English variety used by the native Gulf Arabs mirrors the Gulf region and identity. However, there has been no socio-cultural analysis of this interesting linguistic phenomenon prior to this study. Research has been limited to other Arab countries such as Lebanon. In order to provide an insight into why people in the Gulf region identify with this variety of English, the present account benefits from previous research on the same

phenomenon in other countries. For example, Al-Halawani (2010) argues that language and nation are the identity of people. Thus, society at large, and the Gulf, in particular, is a case in point. In the view of Dhillon (2009), Kachru et al (2009), Valentine (2009), Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008), and Crystal (2004, 2007), culture determines identity. For Crystal (2004, p. 129), one of the purposes of language is to express identity, another is to foster mutual intelligibility. However, in terms of ethics, identity according to Pagliai (2002) is always shifting, bipolar or multi-polar, dual or multiple.

Individuals are members of the linguistic community, with language pointing to their identity. While socio-cultural research has been extensively engaged in the notion of identity, the present study offers a fresh insight in to the understanding this field of work through a theorisation hinged upon the analysis of the English corpus as used by natives of Arabic in the Gulf region.

Identity does not evolve at a single analytical level whether turn shape, code choice, or ideological structure. Identity, indeed, operates at multiple levels simultaneously. It works at an intellectual level in order to gain a social meaning. To achieve our research goal of describing the linguistic socio-cultural identity in the Gulf, scholars' view of identity will be referred to. According to Johnston (1996), identity is located primarily within the individual's mind so that relationship between identity and language use is for language to reflect the individual's internal mental state. Thus, the social ground is discounted where identity is formed inside the mind and is then expressed via discourse (Ager 1999; Bauman 2000; Jaff 2000; Butcholtz & Hall 2005; Johnston 1996).

In the Gulf region, Arabic meets with English and the description of the Globalisation of English as a non-native variety applies best here (Mesthrie & Bhatt 2008; Kachru et al. 2009; Al-Shurafa 2009; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). A modernised language variation according to Holes (1987, p. 19) is evidence of a coexistence and mutual communication of language system. This type of language represents a managed register that alternates with certain variety of English which leads to the use of the existing register in the Gulf.

Crystal (2004, p. 36) argues that new Englishes have arisen because of the need to express national identity. The making of these varieties of English world-wide is imposed by the need for identity. Thus, this linguistic diversity is essential to all kinds of environment because language lies at the heart of what it means to be human (Crystal, pp. 90-98). However, English in certain territories has public and administrative roles without formal colonisation like in Oman and Qatar (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008, p. 31).

Identity construction is a central part of this process which arises in the linguistic-cultural dualism within a set of hierarchies (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008, p. 143). The recognition of the fact that language has many functions is based on an intellectual basis on a global scale. The sense of local identity, in the view of Crystal (2007, p. 176) is reflected on the system of education and the socio-cultural communication with one another, among other things where the linguistic medium is English. For Findlow (2006), the resulting linguistic/socio-cultural dualism offers insights for potential cultural transformation that resists identity construction. A bilingual policy allows people in the Gulf to look both

linguistic-cultural ways which seems to be efficient to mark the Gulf identity of the 21st century.

English has become an increasingly pervasive language (Kachru et al., 2009; Langendoen 2001; Crystal 2007; Findlow 2006). Thus, it is a natural consequence for English to prevail in most educational institutions and schools as well as social and various contexts of situations in the Gulf. On a general scale, there is rarely any excitement involved in using or learning only Arabic (Hassan 2010; El-Sanabary 1992) as compared to English's creative and constantly updated approaches. English has become the language of the internet and of our entire intellectual make up (Crystal 2004, 2007).

2. RELATED LITERATURE

The present discussion of identity in the present work is based on a number of notions, such as:

- (i) social identity theory (Mayerhoff 1996; Mayerhoff & Niedzielski 1994; Tajfel & Turner 1997),
- (ii) models of identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985),
- (iii) local identity (Crystal 2004, 2007; Hassan 2010; Al-Halawani 2010),
- (iv) gender identities in sociolinguistics (Valentine, 2009), and
- (v) hybrid identity in bilingual linguistics and meta-linguistic cultural repertoire (Jaff 2000).

Similarly, Butcholtz and Hall (2005) have provided a framework for the analysis of identity in socio-cultural linguistic approach which is relevant to our socio-cultural investigation of the Gulf English variety. Butcholtz and Hall (2005) have provided five principles for the analysis of identity produced in a linguistic interaction. In their framework, identity is theorised as a broader inter-subjective phenomenon rather than simply an individualistic and deliberate action. Identity is defined as a relation between self and others of the overlapping aspects of the individual intentionality; thus, it can be in part intentional and in part habitual and less than fully conscious.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The selected theoretical framework for the analysis of linguistic discourse and socio-cultural aspects is drawn from a variety of linguistic research and sub-disciplinary traditions. Linguistic theories are relevant to the understanding of the construction of identity within the informal interactional contexts. Moreover, our theoretical framework synthesises key works on identity from a socio-cultural linguistic perspective where language, culture and society interact. Such interdisciplinary fields involve sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, and linguistically oriented socio-cultural and social analysis. The diverse approaches acknowledge language and identity as a central linguistic phenomenon.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The collected corpus is taken from various naturally occurring conversations of social contexts in the six Gulf States. Data provide a true reflection of the prevailing creative multi-lingual and global variety of English socio-cultural register. Educated adults, males and females, constitute the subjects. Also, the data collected is based on the author's personal observation and occasional recording during personal visits between 2003 and 2010 to the six Gulf States. The total number of data are six hundred clauses collected from the six States and are equal in size. Extracts from the data include the linguistic characters of identity. Based on the data gathered, it can be claimed that the socio-cultural aspects are shared phenomena in the Gulf.

The analysis of the data is exclusive to the examination of the socio-cultural notion of identity in the Gulf and how cultural transformations are reflected on the new linguistic and socio-linguistic system as a natural outcome of the social shift. The underlying theoretical constraint of Arabic language structure influences the internal structure of the Global English variety in the Gulf. Accordingly, identity is dealt with by people's awareness rather than resistance of the socio-cultural aspect of modernisation.

Our analysis investigates five major linguistic features related to the evolution of a Gulf English variety. These are: (i) gendered attitudinal difference and identity, (ii) plural-centered structure, (iii) ideology and the linguistic socio-cultural practices, (iv) multilingual creativity, and (v) free insertion of Arabic expressions. The selected extracts represent the linguistic production of the Gulf English variety. The characteristics selected for our discussion are believed to reflect the major features of identity in the Gulf English linguistic and socio-culture repertoire.

(i) gendered attitudinal difference and identity

The first feature is related to gender which has been widely discussed in socio-cultural linguistics (Bucholtz et al., 2005; Toth, 2015; West & Zimmer, 1987; Mayerhoff, 1996). Despite the fact that there are six Gulf States involved, this aspect of identity is found to be similar and the data include similar attitudinal aspects. The examples below occur in various Gulf States. For the sake of analysis, only the gender of the speaker is disclosed:

(1) **We all** have this common enemy. (female)

The female uses (**we**) (instead of (**I**)) in order to refer to herself. This self-consciousness has a frequent recurrence in the data. The above example also has (**all**) as a confirmation of the conscious attitudinal difference of gender which is mainly used by females (see Toth, 2015).

In contrast, the following utterance is produced by a male:

(2) Hello guys! And of course **I am** the only guy over here, and **I** feel lonely. (male)

The first person singular pronoun (**I**) occurs twice. The statement carries a strong and confident tone of the male confirming male dominance.

Similar examples are:

(3) Today's topic is something **we** actually didn't talk about before. (female)

(4) **You** go in the car and the guy is coming to **you**... (a male addresses all females)

(5) I'm doing something to save **our** memory. (female)

Statements (3) and (5) as used by females include (**we**) and (**our**) respectively where in both sentences the females have meant: (I) and (my). Sentence (4) has the masculine tone which firmly addresses the female addressees, where (**you**) occurs twice.

The following interesting exchange occurs between a male and a female:

(6) a. How are you X? (male)

(7) b. Hi! How are you? (Female)

(8) c. Pretty good! (same male)

(9) d. Yea! That's good! (same female)

The female is submitting to the gender attitudinal male dominance by not replying to the question in (6.b) whereas the male is sure and firm in his reply (6.c). The female is a recipient as in (6.b and 6.d) while he is the leader as in (6.a and 6.c). For more details on similar contexts of situation on world Englishes and gender identity, see Toth, (2015), Al-Halawani (2010, p. 1), Valentine (2009, p. 568), and Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 590).

When the speaker assigns social gender to another one, the masculine form is almost always selected no matter what the gender of the speaker is, as in:

(10) Suppose he (~they) will go shopping twice this week. (female)

(11) You can call me through the email now. (male)

(12) I'm taking about.... We're talking about... (female)

(13) Somebody cuts you off with a car. Do you get all mad? And ... what is he doing and he doesn't know how to drive? You are frustrated. You get down, and ... you are ready for a physical fight. (male addressing all females)

In similar contexts, as in (7) above, the reference varies between (**he ~they**) with the percentage of 57.3% ~ 42.7% respectively, according to a count carried out on the collected data. Females tend to go for the subconscious choice of (**he**) more frequently. The male in example (8) above has the masculine voice of confidence expressed by his order 'to call', using (**me**) and not bothering to insert any phrase of courtesy. A similar attitudinal aspect is realised in example (10) above where the same speaker addresses females only. He is presupposing that the driver is a male although the conversation took place in Qatar where both genders drive. Finally, the hesitant female in example (9) above once uses (**I**) but later on employs (**we**) in the same statement where she refers to herself.

Contemporary linguistic research on identity takes the perspective of gender as its starting point (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 588). Toth (2015) elaborated on 'The power of I students writings at all women's university in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, cases of gender identity illustrate in various ways the male dominant society where women and men hold different feelings which are reflected in their linguistic choices. Gender does make a

difference in language choice and in the construction of identity (Valentine 2009, p. 570), and the Gulf English variety is no exception.

(ii) plural-centred structure

The pluralistic, or the potential for pluricentricity, perspective tends to occur with females (Valentine 2009, p. 569). This feature occurs remarkably in our data. The view of the distinctive cultural identity or 'cultural emblems' (Kachru, 2000, p. 18) is found to be central to a continual re-evaluation not only in world Englishes but also in the Gulf variety of English. The linguistic pluralism is an accepted norm within the world Englishes paradigm where women creativity occurs (Valentine 2009, p. 568). Thus, terms such as 'pluricentrism' among others attest to those expressions of the global lingua franca (Valentine, 2009, p. 569). Below are samples from our data where females' speeches embody the pluralistic perspective, as in:

- (14) Welcome back to **our** wonderful cooking session. (female)
- (15) Can you help explain that to **us**? (female)
- (16) It came as a shock to many of **us** as others hated **us** . . . (female)
- (17) **He** is a well known artist. **He himself** came . . . (male)
- (18) **I**'ll give you fifty percent discount for this! (male)
- (19) Yes! A **man** who lost **his** son . . . (male)

All the female's extracts above involve the plural personal pronouns reference, namely: (**our**)in (11), and (**us**) once in (12) and twice in (13) where the speaker means to refer to her 'single' self. Whereas the male's utterances above, collected from different Gulf States, include a firm tone with singular pronoun references, such as(**He**)which occurs twice, and (**himself**)which occurs once in (14), as well as (**I**) in (15) above. In (16), the male's choice of gender is (**man/his**) which is related to point (i) above (gendered attitudinal difference and identity).

The two examples below are of potential pluricentricity choice:

- (20) Today, **we** have another couple of dishes . . . (female)
- (21) **Our** guest is umm-Khalid (*the mother of Khalid*) has just joined **us**. (female)

The female speaker uses all three first person plural inflections, such as (**we**) in (17), (**our**) and (**us**) in (18) above to refer to herself only. The data also include alternation between the plural and the singular third person forms with reference to both genders, as in:

- (22) ... and even if a **person** sometimes goes into the ... (female)
- (23) ... but **guys**, you are talking about ... (female addressing only females)
- (24) When **you** are talking about **someone** ... (male addressing only females)

The female employs the neutral reference (**person**) in (19), and (**guys**) in (20) to address the females. The male addresses the females by using (**you**)in (21) above. Both males

and females use **(person)**, **(guys)** and **(someone)** to address both genders and is accepted by all.

(iii) ideology and linguistic socio-cultural practices

Within the World Englishes' paradigm, language and ideology are integral in understanding the changing roles and functions in the global lingua franca (Valentine, 2009, p. 267; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 590). The Gulf variety of English is invaded by Islamic expressions. Elements of Gulf religious belief are drawn on by the natives of the Gulf in order to locate themselves within or against independent ideologies. The following are illustrative examples:

(25) **Wallah** (I swear by Allah) you'll feel a lot better.

(26) I'm confident **with God's assistance** (bi^cawn Allah) that the truth will come out.

(27) They will declare their engagement soon. **Insha'Allah** (God willing).

Three different expressions are used in each one of the above examples which are directly borrowed from religion. The expressions are commonly used in the Gulf locals' mother tongue and are directly interpreted and used in the Gulf English variety. These are: **(Wallahi**–I swear by Allah), **(with God's assistance**–bi^cawn Allah), and **(Insha'Allah**–God willing) in (22), (23) and (24) respectively.

Ideological idiomatic expressions are also used, as in the following:

(28) I mean, **honestly**, let's say ...

(29) **God knows** how.

The above expressions directly meet with the natives' Islamic beliefs. Religious expressions like **(Honestly)** and **(God knows)** in (25) and (26) respectively are direct interpretations of the socio-cultural identity using these linguistic expressions.

(iv) multilingual creativity

Emblematic (Kachru, 2000, p. 18) grammatical structures such as the zero copula among others (for a detailed syntactic discussion, see Al-Shurafa, 2009) are understood to belong to this categorised feature. These characteristics are also referred to as creative linguistic expressions. Below are representative samples:

(30) You and he **is** ready for a physical fight.

(31) **Himself, he** comes from nowhere! No origin!

The usages of **(is)** in (27) and of **(himself)** and **(he)** in (28) above are creations by the non-native English users in the Gulf of one variety of the world Englishes. Such a variety of Gulf English can be attributed to the impact of literal translation of native Arabic utterances on the Gulf English. The Arabic counterpart for (27) does not have an auxiliary verb because it is a nominal sentence, and the fronting of the pronouns **(Himself, he)** in (28) is a replica structure of Arabic. In the view of Valentine (2009, p. 567), 'the fluidity within the world Englishes framework allowed new approaches to bend and sway with the many expressions of English around the world.'

Below are more examples with different creations:

(32) Why [---] they do this to me?

(33) Why **is** this **is** the right place to do that?

While there is no verb in (29), two forms of the copula (**is**) are inserted in (30) above. The data has various examples and the above selected ones represent the central creativity of this linguistic feature of creativity.

(v) *free insertion of Arabic expressions*

Though limited to certain Arabic expressions, the natives of the Gulf tend to insert certain neutral Arabic terms into their English variety. What is interesting is that native English and Americans living in the Gulf region have also been influenced by this linguistic feature and started to use these terms in their proper contexts. Let us consider the following sentence extracted from the data:

(34) ... and all those stuff, **ya^cni**, they aren't any good.

Where (**ya^cni**– I mean) is an expression for clarification. It also means (actually) in similar English contexts and is a common expression in Arabic but has been inserted freely in the Gulf English variety. Thus, the identity of the Gulf natives is explicit as well as retained.

The following extract has a different Arabic expression:

(35) You are understanding, **mashi**?

The Arabic expression (**mashi**–literally meaning [he is] going), i.e., (OK?). Pragmatically, it is employed when the speaker seeks the hearer's approval. The expression (**salam(z)** – greeting(s)) below designates a common greeting in Arabic:

(36) **Salam(z)**

The (**z**), however, is freely attached to indicate the plural. This form of salutation seems to receive a positive reaction of approval and replaces greeting expressions, such as (hello) ~ (hi) and even (bye).

It has also been observed in the data that whenever an Arabic expression or a lexical form is inserted, the equivalent corresponding English term is immediately provided. The following are representative examples:

(37) ... a wonderful yellow pigment of turmeric or **kurkum** as is called in Arabic.

(38) I read the other day that **kammun** or cumin has a lot of health properties.

(39) Take a bit of heated **khubz** or bread ...

Thus, to ensure clarity, the English equivalent term either precedes the Arabic expression, as in (34), or follows it, as in both (35) and (36). These terms and the like culture specific terms are interpretations of the cross cultural analysis of identity.

5. CONCLUSION

The present analysis confirms the fact that identity in the Gulf reflects a cultural transformation. The newly emerging discourse used as a means of communication by the Gulf speakers of English is a natural result of modernisation/globalisation. The notion of identity has begun to evolve following the fast and vast development and is being implemented with positive socio-cultural outcome. It has been observed that there is a need among the Gulf speakers of English to accept change in language as a normal process with a positive impact on identity in this region. The data reveals that the Gulf identity is constituted through the dualism of linguistic socio-cultural characteristics. It can, thus, be concluded that the socio-cultural aspects are shared phenomena in the Gulf. Cases of gender identity in the Gulf illustrate in various ways the male dominance society where women and men hold different feelings reflected in their linguistic choices. Gender also makes a difference in the linguistic choices and in the construction of identity. The pluralistic or the potential for pluricentricity perception tends to occur with females. This feature of identity in the Gulf occurs frequently in our data. The view of this distinctive cultural identity has been observed as central for a continual re-evaluation not only in world Englishes but also in the Gulf variety of English. Language and ideology have marked the Gulf variety of English and are also integral components in understanding the changing roles and functions in the global lingua franca. Elements of Gulf religious expressions are drawn on by the natives of the Gulf in order to locate themselves within or against other religious beliefs. These expressions are the direct interpretations of the socio-cultural identity by using the explicit linguistic expressions. Creative linguistic expressions or emblematic (Kachru, 2000, p. 18) grammatical structures, such as the use of the zero copula, have also marked the Gulf English variety. Another aspect of the interpretation of the cross cultural analysis of the Gulf identity is the free insertion of neutral Arabic expressions into the Gulf English variety. What is interesting is that some native English and Americans living in this region also tend to use these expressions in their proper contexts. It can be safely recommended that this type of identity in the Gulf can be labelled as English 'Gulfism' by analogy to 'Lebanonism' and 'Arabism'.

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