

Factors Contributing to the Survival of Standard Arabic in the Arab World: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a number of scholars have raised concerns about the possible negative consequences of globalisation including the threat posed by its spread and the subsequent spread of English to native languages (Eckert et al., 2004; Mufwene, 2005). Within the Arab world this has been an increasing matter of concern since at least the post-2001 era, with the place of English in Arab societies a cause of popular and academic concern (Karmani, 2005; Azuri, 2006). Debate over threats to Standard Arabic however, are also informed by a number of additional factors including the language's diglossic nature and the deteriorating quality of Arabic education in schools. This paper explores the factors that both support and challenge the continued survival of Standard Arabic in the region. In order to examine this in an exploratory manner, 35 teacher and student native speakers of Arabic at Oman's only public university were administered a four-question questionnaire while 50 participants maintained a reflective journal. Results indicate that participants rarely used Standard Arabic in their daily lives although they believed the language would continue to survive in the foreseeable future. Potential challenges to Standard Arabic's survival were identified as including the increasing pace of globalisation and English's importance in both the international context and in Arab societies, while factors supporting its survival were mostly associated with Arabic's strong associations with Islam and Arab heritage. Implications of these findings for the language's survival are discussed.

Keywords: Modern Standard Arabic, dialect, diglossia, globalisation, language replacement, language death

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a number of warnings have been raised against the possible negative consequences of globalisation and the threat posed by English to native languages (Eckert et al., 2004; Mufwene, 2005). These warnings have certainly been heard in the Arab world, although concern over the survival of Standard Arabic has also been aggravated in the region by other factors including Arabic's diglossic nature and the deteriorating quality of Arabic education in schools. Although a number of scholars have argued that the intimate links between Arabic, religion, and cultural identity mean that English only offers a muted threat to the language's continued survival (Mazrui, 2008), this is a supposition that is only now starting to receive direct investigative attention. This is especially true in the Arab nation of Oman.

Like every other member-nation of the Arab league, Oman uses Standard Arabic as the official language. However, there also exists a number of other languages and dialects used by Omanis in different regions of the sultanate (Baker & Jones, 1998; Peterson, 2004a, 2004b). Despite the prevalence of languages such as Baluch, Kiswahili, Persian, the languages of the subcontinent, and English as an unofficial but widely-used lingua franca (Al-Issa, 2007; Altbach, 2010), Standard Arabic is taught in all schools and the language is a significant part of Omani identity (Valeri, 2009). However, Standard Arabic is not used in daily speech in the country, with Omani

dialects instead employed in almost every informal situation in which Arabic is used.

Within this context, the exploratory research sought to examine native Arabic speakers' beliefs about the potential survival of Standard Arabic in the Arab world. In order to achieve this, Arabic-speaking student and teacher participants from Oman's only public university were administered two data collection instruments – a questionnaire featuring four items and a reflective journal activity. These instruments focused on both the factors that support and threaten the continued existence of Standard Arabic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Threats to Standard Arabic

Due to its links to globalisation, English has become the world's dominant language of communication (Sinno, 2008). It is the language of science, commerce, technology, politics, education and communication. In addition, it is the dominant language on the Internet, and is used in a variety of contexts for communication between people whose native language is not English. With the widespread use of English around the globe and its frequent use in communication has come a fear that local cultures and languages may be endangered by this "killer" language (Skutnab-Kangas, 2000). Warschauer, El-Said and Zohry (2006), discussing English's dominance as the global communication tool of the Internet, state that a widely-held fear during the earlier days of Internet expansion was that other languages would be "crowded out" of

global communication exchange. This is a concern commonly associated with almost all forms of communications technologies and one that has led to predictions of increasing rates of language death as the pace of globalisation increases. While English's links with globalisation and the spread of technology are often discussed in outer and expanding circles such as those of the Arab world, within Arab countries, Standard Arabic also faces a number of additional challenges.

Primary among these is Arabic's diglossic nature. Diglossia is the linguistic phenomenon of a sociolinguistic situation where there is normal use of two separate varieties of the same language, usually in different social situations. Across the Arab world, Colloquial Arabic, or the dialect, is used in homes or other informal situations, while Modern Standard Arabic is used in formal situations or formal functions such as politics, government, the media, and at educational institutions (Al-Mamari, 2011). Adding a layer of complexity to this situation, Classical Arabic is used as the language of the Qur'an and of Islamic worship. Therefore, while colloquial Arabic may not be intelligible to speakers of different regions or nationalities, Standard Arabic will be and educated Arabs of any nationality may be assumed to speak both their local dialect and Standard Arabic learnt at school.

The threat that comes from this is related to the fact that Standard Arabic is not often used in everyday communication across the region. Since illiteracy remains

an important societal issue in many parts of the Arab world with, for example, Magin (2010, p. 8) reporting illiteracy rates of between 10% and 60% among adult populations of Arab countries, it follows that illiterate populations are unable to speak the Standard Arabic that is not used in everyday interactions but that is largely confined to the classroom. In addition to this concern, the increasingly centralised role that English plays in education systems, media, private enterprises, hospitals, and even the ministries of many nations of the Arab world (Charise, 2007; Randall & Samimi, 2010), means that Standard Arabic's links to academic, professional, and social success may be weakening. This is a contention supported by Findlow's (2006) description of the linguistic landscape in the UAE, with Arabic in the country associated with tradition and religion, and English with internationalism, enrichment, and material prestige. For these reasons, English has become a dominant language in communication among the educated and the elite in many Arab countries and even acts as an unofficial second language and/or dominant lingua franca in a number of nations across the region (see Charise, 2007; Randall & Samimi, 2010) including Oman (Al-Issa, 2007; Altbach, 2010).

Exacerbating the issues of English's dominance and wide scale adult illiteracy (Magin, 2010), the school systems in many Arab countries do not seem to be doing a good job with teaching Standard Arabic (Guttenplan, 2012; Bani-Khaled, 2014; Hamzaoui, 2014). Standard Arabic is the

language of schoolbooks and the official language of instruction in Arab schools. However, the leap from the colloquial use of Arabic at home and in wider society to Standard Arabic at school results in a situation in which, according to Hamzaoui (2014), “Arab pupils are required to suppress most of their habitual speech while trying to acquire a new set of rules once in contact with school” (p. 13). As a result of the struggles, these students often face with the transition to formal education, Hamzaoui claims that teachers usually adopt one of two conflicting practices – intentionally neglecting all colloquial forms of the language, or using these colloquial forms to ease communication and instruction. This can lead to confusion among learners about the different varieties of Arabic and can result in the lack of demarcation between them and their subsequent misuse.

Moreover, the fact that classical and standard varieties of Arabic are not widely spoken in everyday situations can make them sound like foreign languages that are taught in schools and used for religious observance but are not present in the community or in learners’ surroundings. Such a situation has contributed to the difficulty many pupils face in mastering Standard Arabic in both its spoken and written forms (Maamouri, 1998). For example, writing about the language situation in Egypt, Warschauer et al. (2002) contend that “the country’s low rate of adult literacy - 52.7% according to the United Nations’ Development Program (2000) - stems in part from the difficulty that Egyptian children have in mastering

a written language that is at large variance with its spoken variety” (p. 2).

To illustrate this point, Warschauer et al. (2002) report that Classical Arabic - what has been termed as Standard Arabic in the current paper - was seldom used in Internet communication; this is based on a research survey of 43 Egyptian professionals. In fact, 82.5% of the formal electronic communication performed by respondents was exclusively in English. An interview with four participants revealed that their dominant use of English was a result of the demands at their workplaces. The authors also reported that respondents’ informal e-mails featured code switching between Egyptian Arabic and English while participants reported using Romanised Egyptian Arabic - that is, Egyptian Arabic written in English letters - in those few cases where Arabic was used.

As the above illustrates, there are a number of potential threats to the continued survival of Standard Arabic. However, despite the threats posed by globalisation, English, illiteracy, diglossia, and poor Arabic teaching standards, there are, nonetheless, several factors that are commonly held as supporting the continued existence of Standard Arabic.

Support for Standard Arabic

Arabic is the largest member of the Semitic language family and, according to some estimates, it is spoken by around 280 million people as a mother tongue in the Middle East and North Africa with 250 million speaking it as a second language –

even if these figures have been challenged by authors such as Salameh (2011) on the basis of difficulties with defining what an “Arabic speaker” actually is. The three main variants of Arabic, as discussed above, are Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, and colloquial or dialectal Arabic. Arabic has a rich tradition, and Classical Arabic was the language used during the period spanning from the pre-Islamic era (Jahiliyah) to the times of the Umayyad dynasty rule. Classical Arabic is very rich and expressive and is well known for the beauty of its expressions and sounds. It is the language of poetry and prose of that period, and the Arabs of that time were known for their eloquence, verbosity and vibrant oral culture (Ashour, Berrada, Ghazoul, & Rachid, 2009). Their stories, storytelling and poetic verses spread by word of mouth and were committed to memory and people memorised thousands of verses and related them in their gatherings and in royal courts.

Arabic is the language of the Qur’an and has subsequently acquired a strong association with Muslims and the Islamic religion. All recitations of the Qur’an are done in Classical Arabic irrespective of the worshipper’s nationality. Though not all Muslims speak Arabic, they nonetheless learn to read the script and recite the religious text. The belief that no translation can really do justice to the meaning conveyed in the Qur’an through Classical Arabic has encouraged Muslims around the globe to study the language. The virtue of reciting the Qur’an and knowing it by heart, and the blessings that God promised to bestow

on the person who recites and commits it to memory, has provided a very strong motivation to devout Muslims to keep the language alive.

The Holy Qur’an, no doubt, has a very important impact on the survival of Arabic in both its classical and standard forms. Omran (1988) describes the relationship between Islam and Arabic as “unique” as, when Islam spread through different countries of Arabia and Africa, it helped the spread of Arabic as well. Muslims believe that God has promised to protect the Qur’an from change. This implies the protection of the language in which it is written – Classical Arabic. Since Classical Arabic bears a great deal of similarity to Standard Modern Arabic, it can be argued that the latter also stands a better chance of survival. The study of the Qur’an and the sayings of the Prophet have yielded many religious sciences such as “tafseer” (exegesis or commentaries), “fiqh” (Islamic jurisdiction), and “seerah” (the recording of the Prophet and His companions’ lives). The Muslim library is rich with books on these and many other subjects and this heritage can be argued to help protect the Arabic language from loss and attrition.

In the heyday of the Muslim civilisation and during the Umayyad Caliphate in particular, the ruling caliphs turned their attention to the sciences, philosophy, and the literature of countries that came under Muslim rule. To avail themselves of the knowledge stored in the ancient books of the Greeks, a translation movement began in the 8th century (Al-Khoury, 2009). The Bayt al-Hikmah, or the House of Wisdom,

was established by Caliph Al-Ma'mun in Baghdad for research and translation (Ofek, 2011). This movement lasted for more than two centuries during which science and scholarship were made available in Arabic. People from all over the Islamic world, including non-Muslims, participated in the translation process. Not only did they translate, but they also added new knowledge and corrected errors of the original authors. Scholars around the world studied science, medicine, mathematics, and physics through the Arabic medium.

However, Arabic lost its pre-eminence as the language of science after the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in 1258 (Maziak, 2008). The Mongols destroyed the great libraries of Baghdad and brought about the end of the translation effort that had done so much to store the knowledge of the ancients. In addition, the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula and the European taking of the libraries of Toledo and Cordoba meant that much Arabic knowledge was also entering the West. Over the coming centuries, Arabs were largely to turn their backs on science and European countries and languages gradually again came to the forefront of scientific developments (Lewis, 2002; Ofek, 2011).

Culture, Language and Identity

Heaven and Tubridy (2003) define culture as “the ensemble of practices -linguistic, stylistic, religious, etc. that together form a way of being for a given social community” (p. 153). Ethnic and national cultures colour

the identities of the people belonging to them. According to the authors:

Physical characteristics, styles of dress and behavior, language and communicative accents, and numerous other distinguishing phenomena, act as symbolic triggers in practices of cultural interpretation that attribute collective characteristics to the members of a particular community in a way that locates them within relationships of class, gender, ethnicity and so forth (p. 153).

To illustrate this point, Heaven and Tubridy (2003) state that a specific accent of an individual can identify them as coming from a certain region and as thus having the characteristics associated with others from that region. Although cultures and identities are not prone to quick change, they are not static either. They evolve as a result of interaction with other cultures, identities, and languages. It is because of their dynamic nature that the threat of cultural deracination – or of losing one culture due to the influence of another – is born (Phillipson, 1992). As discussed above, this may especially be a cause for concern in the Arab world, with Arabic described by Findlow (2006) as the “culturally weaker” partner in the English-Arabic dual-language infrastructures that exist across the region.

As this suggests, language is not just a linguistic system of signs, symbols, and a means of communication, it is also an

identity marker for the users. A language is rooted in the social and cultural milieu of its speakers and reflects their identities as individuals and as members of a group (Byram, 2006). As highlighted above, the Arabic language is essential to Arab identity. In addition to connecting Arabs all across the world, it also sets Arabs apart from the non-Arabic-speaking world. Therefore, Standard Arabic is an important contributor to the pan-Arab ideal of “internal cohesion” among Arabs and the external distinction of them as one “nation” apart from others. Arabic dialects, moreover, act as important identity markers among nationals of the same country and also help to establish external distinctions from people belonging to other countries - including other Arab countries.

Thus, Standard Arabic could be argued to cut across national boundaries and serve as both the language of communication and as an important identity marker among Arabs the world over. The connection between Standard Arabic and Arab identity was perhaps most prominent during the struggle for independence that many Arab countries experienced against their European colonisers. Standard Arabic was often associated during this time with President Nasser’s call for pan-Arabism (Danielson, 2007), while pride in Arab national identity was in evidence in the way mosques, social and civil societies and associations operated to taught in Arabic the different branches of religion in the face of often adverse colonial language and educational policies (Saadi, 2009).

The Arabic language therefore, has faced many challenges in its long history and has despite these, remained remarkably resilient. The language’s links to culture and religion, its suitability for storytelling and other verbal arts, and its ability to mark Arabs as one “nation” despite geographic dispersal and frequent civil and international discords, all contribute to the language’s survival. However, it could be argued that many of the challenges facing the language today are of much greater complexity than those encountered in the past. For these reasons, the current research attempted to examine native Arabic speakers’ opinions about the factors that support and challenge Standard Arabic’s continued survival.

THE STUDY: DESCRIPTION AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As the above demonstrates, many Arabs appear to be increasingly concerned about the survival of Standard Arabic. They fear that globalisation, English’s increasingly central role in Arab societies, the detachment of both the elite and the illiterate from Standard Arabic, poor educational standards, and the weakening of Arab nationalist ties, might combine to reduce the language’s chances for survival. Given this level of concern, the current research aimed to explore the opinions of native Arabic speakers about the factors that both support and challenge the continued survival of Standard Arabic. The paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are participants' attitudes to the use of Standard Arabic?
2. What factors do participants believe may influence the potential survival of Standard Arabic?
3. What influence, if any, does English have on the survival of Standard Arabic?

To address these questions, two data collection techniques were employed. The first was a questionnaire featuring two closed and two open-ended questions. The closed questions asked participants whether they used Standard Arabic in their daily lives and whether they believed the language would survive in the foreseeable future. These binary choice questions were complemented by two open-ended questions. The first asked participants about the factors they believed support Standard Arabic's continued survival and the second inquired about the factors that may threaten its survival. The second data collection technique was a reflective journal entry activity asking participants to reflect on how, if at all, English impacts on Standard Arabic.

The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of students and faculty members at Oman's only public university. Although students and teachers represent only one of the groups in Oman society that are likely to use Standard Arabic for professional and/or academic purposes, these participants formed a convenience sample for the researchers that was deemed appropriate for fulfilling the exploratory purpose of the research. Faculty members were

approached through visits to their offices at the research site to request their participation while students were recruited over two consecutive semesters (Fall semester, 2014 and Spring semester, 2015) during regular class time for both research phases. Fifty students and 15 faculty members agreed to take part in the questionnaire phase. After a two-week data collection window for this phase, 35 native speakers of Arabic (20 students and 15 instructors) from nations across the Arab world had completed and returned the questionnaire. Fifty students volunteered to take part in the second research phase with all participants who agreed to keep reflective journals as part of their course work submitting these at the end of the semester. Thematic analysis, with a focus on frequency of responses and the relationship between response themes and those highlighted in the literature, was employed to analyse data.

FINDINGS

The questionnaire's first closed question asked participants whether they used Standard Arabic in their daily lives. 82.9% of respondents indicated that they never used Standard Arabic in their daily lives, while the remaining 17.1% claimed they only used the language in formal situations. Despite this limited use of Standard Arabic in daily interactions, participants nonetheless, remained optimistic about the language's future. That is, around 88.5% indicated in reply to the second closed question that they believed Standard Arabic would continue

to survive in the foreseeable future, while the rest expressed doubt that this would be the case.

The questionnaire's open-ended questions inquired into the factors that might contribute to Standard Arabic's survival and those that may hinder it. Table 1 features factors participants identified as contributing to the language's continued existence (percentages indicate the number of participants identifying each factor). Participants identified 11 factors they believed would support Standard Arabic's survival, with three of these mentioned in more than half of all responses. As may be expected from the intricate links between Arabic and Islam, the two most frequently cited factors were related to religion. That is, participants believed the links between Arabic and the Qur'an (94%) and Standard Arabic being the language of Islam (82%), would support the language's survival. The third factor cited by more than half of respondents was concerned with formal education – Standard Arabic is taught in schools and at the departments of Arabic in almost all Arab universities in Arab countries (71%) – which was perhaps not surprising given both the university-bound nature of the sample and Standard Arabic's official status as a language of education in almost all Arab countries.

The four next most frequently offered factors participants believed would support Standard Arabic's survival were related to its function as an official language both across and within Arab countries and as a marker of identity. Responses included

the use of Standard Arabic in mass media, including in newspapers and magazines (49%), and its position as often the only officially recognised language across Arab nations (31%). Other responses included the status of Standard Arabic as a sign of Arab identity (17%), and its use as a facilitator of communication between Arabs (17%). Other factors that were mentioned only one time (3%) concerned Arab history and creative endeavours. These included Standard Arabic's reflection of the glories of past Arab civilisations, and the language's aesthetic and poetic qualities that have resulted in a rich literary tradition and achievements in creative writing and arts.

Table 2 features participant responses to the open-ended question inquiring about factors that may threaten Standard Arabic's survival. Unlike responses featured in the first table, only one factor here was mentioned by more than half of participants. This was, perhaps not surprisingly given fears of its potentially negative effects in the Arab world, globalisation (85%). Closely-linked with this, though only mentioned by around 46% of participants, was the potential threat of English's dominance both within Arab nations and internationally. The two next most frequently cited factors were mass media's abandonment of Standard Arabic in favour of local dialects and code switching (40%) and the multiculturalism (37%) of many Arab societies as perhaps most readily evident nowadays in the culturally-diverse nature of the Arab Gulf's largest cities.

Fourteen per cent of respondents also identified code switching between Standard Arabic and dialects, or between Arabic and other languages including English, as a potential threat to its continued survival, while the same number also maintained that the younger generation's lack of pride in Arabic was a potential concern. Following closely from this stance, participants claimed that a lack of effort to develop Standard

Arabic may also threaten it (11%), while 6% stated that the lack of strict rules prescribing the use of the language in official Arab organisations could also be a potential threat. Finally, one participant believed that Western stereotypes linking Arabs and, by association, Arabic, to terrorism and violence may be a threat to Standard Arabic's survival.

Table 1
Factors supporting Standard Arabic's survival

No.	Factors	Percentage
1.	The Holy Qur'an	94%
2	Standard Arabic being the language of Islam	82%
3	Standard Arabic is taught in schools and at the departments of Arabic in almost all Arab universities in the Arab countries	71%
4	The use of Standard Arabic in mass media and in the newspapers and magazines	49%
5	Standard Arabic is the official language of all Arab countries	31%
6	Standard Arabic as a sign of Arab identity	17%
7	Standard Arabic is used to facilitate communication among Arabs	17%
8	Standard Arabic is a language that has a glorious history and represents a great civilisation	3%
9	Standard Arabic is an aesthetic and poetic language	3%
10	Standard Arabic has a rich literary tradition	3%
11	Standard Arabic is the language of creative writing and arts	3%

Table 2
Factors threatening Standard Arabic's survival

No.	Factors	Percentage
1	Globalisation	85%
2	The dominance of English	46%
3	When mass media stops using Standard Arabic and instead encourages the use of dialects and code switching	40%
4	Multiculturalism	37%
5	Code switching	14%
6	Lack of pride in their mother language by the new generation	14%
7	Arabs do not work hard to develop their language	11%
8	There are no strict rules of using Standard Arabic in official organisations	6%
9	Western attitudes about Arabs and their association of anything Arabic with terrorism and violence	3%

Reflective journal entries were next analysed to explore what influence, if any, participants in this research phase believed English had on the potential survival of Standard Arabic. Fifty per cent of respondents maintained that English had a negative impact on Standard Arabic. A number of participants identified how English threatened not only the survival of Standard Arabic, but of many languages that it came into contact with. Responses here included, “I think English naturally threatens Arabic and even other languages since it has a predominant hand in different aspects of life in commerce, politics, science and otherwise”, and, “English is a threat for many languages especially the languages in multilingual societies. Arabic is one of the languages that is being threaten by English”.

Reasons for this potential threat captured in the reflective journals largely overlapped with findings from the questionnaire. For example, several participants identified globalisation as contributing to the marked presence of English in Arab societies while the language’s role as a gatekeeper of social success was also featured. These themes are highlighted in the following journal entries: “Globalisation and the new modernised small town are the main reasons why the new Arabian nations shift to speak English”, and:

Nowadays, English is one of the most important languages in the world besides being a sign of education and kind of prestigious and high state. As a result, many start to switch to English for a

purpose or even to show off until it become language mix that people cannot control.

In addition, participants also identified the impact of English on code switching as having potentially negative effects on the survival of Standard Arabic. One respondent even offered the example of Arabizi – or an English-Arab mix in both writing and speaking – as being of especial concern.

Despite this, around 32.6% of participants did not believe that English had a negative influence on Standard Arabic. Responses here were almost universally concerned with the strong links between Arabic, Islam, and Arab heritage. Journal entries that highlight this stance included, “I believe that there is not any power on Earth can take away my language or even my identity, and what I am convince is that sticking to traditions and keep using Arabic are one way to secure my language”, and, “Arabic language is the strongest language in the world because it is the language of Quran. Therefore, no language can destroy it or be a threat to it”. In addition to this focus on religion and culture, one respondent highlighted how they used English for instrumental purposes, thereby limiting the potential for cultural deracination – “English language is a tool not a purpose. We learn it to obtain and get something as a high education, a job etc.” The Muslim use of English for achieving instrumental purposes while limiting the possible effects of exposure to its “normative baggage” is one that has been widely reported in the literature (Dan et al., 1996; Kim, 2003).

The remaining 17.4% of respondents believed that English could potentially have a negative and/or positive effect on Standard Arabic depending on the situation. These respondents focused on English as only a threat in those situations where people chose, either deliberately or without active consideration, to use it rather than Arabic. Responses here included, “When I am not aware of the dangerous of making English my favourite language in speaking, reading or writing and use it most of the time. It will affect me from inside and change my attitude towards Arabic language”, and, “I think English can be a threat to the Arabic language if the person keeps using and replacing his conversation with English for no particular and practical purpose and stops reading or speaking in the mother language”. Finally, a handful of respondents maintained that the degree of value people assign to Arabic will also determine whether English can be a threat to the language’s survival: “Those groups who value the Arabic language will keep the status of this code high, yet those who do not appreciate Arabic language will be easy to them to switch for another language”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current exploratory research examined issues associated with the continued survival of Standard Arabic in the Arab world. The vast majority of participants (82.9%) did not use Standard Arabic in their everyday lives. This finding may not appear surprising as Arabic dialects dominate almost every domain, including the home, interpersonal

relationships, and private enterprises, of the language’s use across the region, and Standard Arabic is often confined to formal educational settings (Magin, 2010). Moreover, even though participants were drawn from a formal educational setting, it should be noted that many of the colleges at this institution offer instruction in English only. For this reason, these participants who have left school – where Standard Arabic may or may not be used by their teachers despite the requirements of national curricula – may mean that exposure to those formal situations where Standard Arabic is used may be very limited. Despite this limited use of Standard Arabic in their everyday lives, it should be reiterated that almost all participants (88.5%) believed the language would continue to survive in the foreseeable future. These findings, therefore, suggest quite mixed attitudes towards Standard Arabic’s survival. That is, on the one hand, participants saw limited utility for the language in their daily lives, while, on the other, they believed it would continue to survive due mostly to its links to Islam and Arab cultural identity.

When asked to describe the factors that influence the potential survival of Standard Arabic, participants focused not only on the intricate ties between the language, religion, and heritage, but also on its official status in Arab countries and their education systems – even if Bani-Khaled (2014) reports that Standard Arabic may have a much looser grip on education in the Arab world than officially prescribed. The two most important factors that threaten the

survival of the language, however, were identified as the spread of globalisation and English's dominance. The spread of globalisation and English's increasingly dominant world role have been assumed by many to go hand-in-hand, while English, despite not enjoying an official status in most Arab countries, acts as either a second language or lingua franca across many parts of the Arab world (Charise, 2007). This concern was expressed in responses in both the questionnaire and the reflective journals, with half of all participants in the latter research phase maintaining that English did, in fact, represent a threat to the survival of Standard Arabic.

Although these findings offer a fascinating glimpse into native Arabic speakers' beliefs about the factors impacting on Standard Arabic's potential survival, it should be noted that this research was exploratory in nature and that the relatively small sample size and somewhat limited nature of the data collection techniques means that more research in the area, and especially research in Oman, remains essential. Moreover, the current research focused exclusively on students and their instructors and did not seek input from other groups who use Standard Arabic in their professional lives, such as certain government officials and those involved in the media.

Adding to these concerns, the fact that participants in the current research were all associated with a single public university means that institutional culture may have had an important influence on findings,

and that students and instructors from other tertiary-level institutions within Oman or across the Arab world would be likely to offer different results. For these reasons, further research could be conducted on larger student and teacher samples from a variety of tertiary institutions and/or on non-university bound populations across the Arab world while also seeking to use more extensive data collection and analysis techniques. By taking such an approach, future researchers could build on the current research by offering findings that policymakers, academics and other concerned stakeholders could use to inform decisions related to the preservation of Standard Arabic across the Arab world.

However, despite these potential limitations, it is perhaps fair to claim that participants in the current study believed Standard Arabic would continue to survive due to its links to religion and cultural heritage, even if they remained unlikely to use the language in their daily lives. This finding, therefore, implies that English and/or other languages will continue to expand their already prominent roles in many Arab nations, thus adding to the already diverse nature of the linguistic landscape in the region.

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