**Title of Project:** The Perspectives of Female Emirati Pre-service Teachers on the Use of English as a Medium of

Instruction: An Ethnographic Investigation

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### **Project Summary**

### **Motivation for the Research**

The use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is currently a hot topic. Described as a phenomenon of global proportions, one focus of English language teaching (ELT) research is coming to terms with "the size and shape of EMI in the world today" (Dearden, 2014, p. 4). Despite its global outreach, EMI remains somewhat loosely defined in part because of its outlay across primary, secondary and higher education sectors and its inter-disciplinary scope. Yet a shared understanding of EMI is the teacher's use of English to teach content courses in contexts where English is not the native language (Dearden, 2014; Graddol, 1997). There are, however, many different ways of conceptualizing the place of English in this wide body of scholarship. Particular interests include policy and national agendas, as well as pragmatic challenges in implementing EMI policies. Recently, new ways of talking about language use in many multilingual contexts in Europe, Asia, and Africa have come to the fore.

An original concern driving my research into conceptions of English was that very little was written about the use of EMI in an Arabic-speaking part of the world to guide my work as a teacher trainer. My contributions to English language education at a start-up teacher training college (TTC) in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) necessitated insights into appropriate orientations for teaching English in this context. More specifically, my professional aim was to support Emirati pre-service teachers to teach in English with respect to a new educational vision: EMI in the state-funded primary schools. While the Arabian Gulf has hosted EMI in higher education for several decades, its research literature offered surprisingly little reporting of how students used English for learning in educational domains in an otherwise Arabic-speaking community. A further concern was that perspectives about the roles of English in a dynamic region, which used Arabic as a lingua franca (Charise, 2007), were poorly integrated in global discussions of ELT and EMI practices (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013;

Tollefson & Tsui, 2004), and EMI practices in the Gulf, were, at best, limited to a cursory review of the region (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2011). One aim of my research was to enrich the regional literature base and make vital connections to the growing literature base in multilingualism in HE (Van der Walt, 2013) so that the particular dynamics in the Arabic-speaking region could inform local and regional policy-makers and educational practitioners.

That said, since initiating the study, ELT research into student attitudes to English in the UAE has begun in earnest. Several papers share a common concern: a shifting balance from Arabic to English in educational domains. The language shift has given rise to a confusing array of labels marking the function of English in education. At the same time, both English and Arabic tend to be described as homogeneous conceptual entities with little attention to form in terms of varieties of English and conditions of Arabic diglossia. A further theme is a polarization of English and Arabic (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Dahan, 2007; Karmani, 2005a, 2005b, 2010; Syed, 2003; Troudi & Jendli, 2011). In this dynamic, presuppositions that English acts as an agent appear where English operates as a threat (Charise, 2007) or a weapon (Hopkyns, 2014), is in battle with Islam (Karmani, 2005a, 2005b), harms Islam's core values and local heritage traditions (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015), and competes with Arabic (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011). Furthermore, Troudi and Jendli (2011) claim that a cause for great consternation is "the constant onslaught of English and its potential disastrous effects on Arabic as a language and as a cultural symbol" (p. 4) when evaluating student experiences of EMI in the Emirates. Rather than a fear of Englishization of HE, a subtractive view of English-Arabic bilingualism emerges where English opposes Arabic.

In essence, my reading of research conducted in the UAE highlighted orientations of English as a problem for the local environment. Yet, my observations at the TTC suggested that Emirati women, in particular, navigate complex social agendas related to the place of English in their Arabic-speaking community. As students and future teachers, they contended with dramatic societal changes and manage changing expectations of institutional bilingualism (Findlow, 2006). Accordingly, my motivation for this qualitative study began with immersion in the setting since 2008 and a particular interest in research conducted in the Arabic-speaking Arabian Gulf. These personal and professional experiences have led to the following research questions.

### **Research Ouestions**

This qualitative study targeted an era in the history of English education in Abu Dhabi by investigating the perspectives of English offered by 16 female Emirati pre-service teachers. As important stakeholders of educational reform, these Emirati women are on the cusp of a linguistic transformation: They are learning in English while preparing to use English as a medium of instruction in classrooms of their own. Within an Arabian context characterized by dynamic change, conceptions of English and how it should be used in relation to Arabic have, undoubtedly, shifted in status and focus. This study explored the complex and diverse ways English is conceptualized by Emirati pre-service teachers during a phase of educational reforms shaped by expectations of bi-literacy in English and Arabic. The study has two main research questions: (1) What are Emirati pre-service teachers' conceptions of English in light of its use as a medium of instruction? (2) What are the social influences mediating their conceptions of English?

### **Research Methodology**

This study, initiated as an unfolding, exploratory one, drew on ethnographic methods across three phases of data collection. However, a preliminary study, which preceded the main study, guided my thinking around emergent themes: (1) linguistic dualism and social practices, (2) emergent classifications of English, (3) apprehension around hybrid forms, and, (4) fuzzy conceptions of EMI (van den Hoven, 2014). The main study included four focus group discussions, a year of participant observations, and ten ethnographic interviews. The main study also relied on theoretical assumptions about the role of language in the construction of knowledge across different phases of learning, as set by Berger and Luckman (1971). The analytical process of coding the data into themes had four recursive and overlapping stages that were informed by Thematic Analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Numerous presentations and publications also contributed to sharpening my analysis of the main issues at stake.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings shed light on the meanings Emirati pre-service teachers have of English in light of its use as a medium of instruction and the social influences mediating these understandings of what English is and means for them. The study offers two main contributions to the field. The findings are concerned with (1) how English is conceptualised within individual linguistic repertoires and (2) what awareness there is of English as one of many languages used in the Abu Dhabi speech environment. These findings extend and challenge established themes of linguistic dualism (Findlow, 2006).

The first major finding described the range of ways that the participants' reported using, modifying, and incorporating English and Arabic in daily life. Careful reading of the collective accounts led to a synthesis of 12 patterns of conversational activity, best described as language modes (Grosjean, 2001). Arranged as a spectrum from Standard Arabic to the Simplified English, I used the participants' accounts of the discrete ways they reported modifying the languages they knew to suit particular pragmatic purposes and interactants encountered. These accounts included a wide variety of people at the college, within the home, and in other select domains in Abu Dhabi, where individuals serve as key social influences. The participants often provided labels for each mode, but when no labels appeared in the transcript, I generated labels based on the salient features appearing in their accounts. In this study, the twelve modes are listed as follows: Standard Arabic, Local Arabic, Local Arabic with English, Local Arabic with Broken Arabic, Local Arabic with Other Varieties of Arabic, Local Arabic with Korean words Arabish, TTC-flavor English, Simple English, Learner English, Academic English, and Simplified English. Several modes include hybridizing English and Arabic in innovative ways. Although not all 16 participants reported using these 12 modes, generally speaking, these modes should be seen as familiar and recognizable practices, comprising the available linguistic resources that are nested within dynamic linguistic repertoires.

The second finding highlights the participants' awareness of a rich linguistic backdrop surrounding and informing their conceptions of EMI. In Abu Dhabi, English and Arabic constitute foregrounded roles in a diverse and multilingual capital city where other languages are experienced and ranked in social importance. The participants readily described Arabic as the language of wider communication throughout their Muslim and Arab communities and conveyed that its use outside these communities was not common. In comparison, they identified English

as a default lingua franca among a wide cross-section of non-Arabic speaking expatriate residents. From this vantage, English and Arabic are both socially valued, but Arabic ranks first in social importance in Abu Dhabi and English as second. The participants also nominated other languages for fulfilling other social roles, even though at times, they lack the rich language necessary to characterize these languages. The participants described six languages in total. In addition to English and Arabic, they presented "Indian," "Persian," "Filipino," and Korean as additional languages relevant for daily communication. According to Charise (2007), the region hosts Urdu, Pasto, Farsi, and several varieties of Arabic and English. The emergence of "Filipino" and Korean in my study suggest at once the benefits that ongoing sociolinguistic research into linguistic diversity in the Arabian Gulf can bring.

### **Implications**

In the doctoral thesis I addressed several theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications of the study for different stakeholders. My stance aligns with Van der Walt (2013) for seeing that knowledge about how a community uses language is a resource for teaching, learning, and researching, pointing out that knowledge gains come from "[a]cknowledging the full repertoire or constellation of languages that are available in HE [higher education]" (p. 18). As such, I will summarize key implications that will foster new understandings of how English language educators should approach the linguistic complexities of the Arabian Gulf. Firstly, conceptions of English - and other languages - as a resource were prevalent. Furthermore, social experiences using English and Arabic are heterogeneous, and these social influences play a profound role in mediating conceptions of English language variation. These findings underscore the inadequacy of contending with societal bilingualism in terms of English versus Arabic. Rather they call into count the hybridized ways Emirati pre-service teachers reported using and experiencing English, Arabic, and other languages in daily life. The participants' detailed accounts of mixing Local Arabic with English and other languages display a sensitivity to the linguistic status of the interactants when making decisions about how to modify the languages they know in particular social contexts. The findings highlight conceptions of English as a resource serving pragmatic purposes. They also problematize stances in the literature that English operates as an external threat in the region as it is recognised as an important feature of Abu Dhabi as a social space. The findings also implicate Arabic as a resource in this Englishmedium environment in Abu Dhabi and suggest that particular social interactions in this domain which give rise to hybrid forms of English and Arabic. In these ways, these findings challenge and extend earlier explanations of linguistic dualism by advocating that policy-makers and educators see the region as socially and historically complex, giving rise to rich experiences of linguistic pluralism.



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## **Revised Budget Summary**

Item	Revised	Revised
	Amoun t (US\$)	
Audio to text	6000	4 dollar/minute of interview
transcription services		• Trail scribe -\$35
of Focus Group data		• Preliminary study = $40 \min - (\$160)$
<ul><li>English typist</li></ul>		• 4 Focus group = 200 minutes (\$800)
		• 10 individual interviews = 1161 minutes = (\$4,644)
Books and articles	2,000	To order and import current literature on my topic to the
		UAE; including TESOL Quarterly articles
		I ordered e-books, e-articles, and research books
library membership	100	HCT community membership for UAE and Education books – access to LIWA library 400 AED
Local and regional	2600	I traveled to references libraries (\$200) and also local and
transportation for		regional conferences in the region
research and		<ul> <li>Qatar University, Doha 2012 (\$1000)</li> </ul>
dissemination of		• TESOL Arabia, Dubai 2014 (\$700)
phases of the study		• GCES, Dubai (\$700)
Paper Supplies	100	Paper, printer ink, photocopying
Computer supplies	2,500	upgraded Endnote, virus software and Microsoft Office
		several times.
		bought transcription software, Express Scribe and a new HP laptop
International	12,500	Travel expenses and registration (including membership
conferences for		fees) to attend and participate in regional and international
dissemination of		conferences related to research I attended several
phases of the study		conferences to present aspect of my research
		• IAWE 2010 (\$2500)
		• Shanghai 2013 (\$2500)
		• AAAL Toronto 2015 (\$2500)
		• AAAL Orlando 2016 (\$2500)
		• LPP Toronto 2017 (\$2500)
Total	25,800	Fees eligible for The Sheikh Nahayan Doctoral Dissertation
		Fellowship Application