

Chapter 17

Challenges of Communication and Identity in the Gulf: Insights from Qatar and the UAE



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Abstract In this chapter, I present the case studies of the State of Qatar and the UAE, two countries in the Arabian Gulf where although Arabic is the *de jure* official language, many foreign languages are widely used for communication because of a large non-Arab, non-national population. In addition to English, which is used as a lingua franca among the educated people, a host of Asian languages are used by blue-collar workers from South and Southeast Asia. While the presence of foreign languages does facilitate communication, it has also heightened a fear of loss of Arabic and Arab identity among the local populations leading to a series of measures by the governments strengthening the position of Arabic officially. I show how the two governments struggle to balance the needs of communication and identity. I argue that since the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are no longer monolingual, there is a need for the development of a language policy that balances the needs of communication and identity not only in Qatar and the UAE but also in Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, and KSA with less, but still significant non-national population.

Keywords Language ecology · Language planning in the Gulf · Language in Qatar and UAE · Migrant languages · Communication and identity

17.1 Introduction

At a conference dealing with multilingualism at the grassroots level organized by the University of Antwerp in Belgium in 2009, Christine Horner and Jean Weber presented their work on immigration and its impact on the diversity of Luxembourg, a small country in western Europe. While discussing its linguistic ecology, they proudly mentioned that about 40% of its population at that time was foreign residents (Horner & Weber, 2008). On the same panel, I presented my research on Kuwait and its linguistic diversity showing that 68% Kuwait's population at that time consisted of foreign nationals (R. Ahmad, 2016). At the end of the panel, Christine

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Horner said, ‘your data on diversity in Kuwait beat ours on Luxemburg’. Kuwait’s demographic composition may be unusual from a European perspective, but it is quite representative of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries consisting of the United Arab Emirates, the State of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar, and the State of Kuwait.

Since the boom in oil and gas prices in the 1970s, the GCC countries have embarked on massive economic and social development projects, which could not have been accomplished with the small and not fully-skilled local Arab population, leading to migration of skilled and non-skilled labor force from within the Arab World and beyond (Shah, 2013). According to the statistics compiled by the Gulf Labor Markets and Migration (GLMM), an independent think tank focusing on migration into the Arabian Gulf, the non-nationals in the GCC outnumbered the nationals in 2016 constituting 51% of the total population (“GLMM,” n.d.).¹ Out of the six GCC countries, in four of them, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE, non-nationals exceeded the number of nationals (Shah, 2013). According to GLMM, the population of foreign nationals in Qatar and the UAE was staggeringly high with Arab nationals constituting only 14% and 11% of the total population, respectively. The proportion of non-nationals in the employed populations was even higher in all GCC countries reaching as high as 95% of the total workforce in Qatar.

Another marked feature of the labor migration into the GCC has been the decline of Arabs in the workforce and its replacement with workers from South and Southeast Asia. According to Kapiszewski (2006, p. 6), the strategy of de-Arabization of the labor force was adopted primarily for two reasons. Firstly, the presence of other Arabs in the GCC was seen as a security threat as they could potentially bring the radical political ideologies from their home countries, especially pan Arabism into the GCC. Secondly, the Asian workers were cheaper and more obedient and thus easier to manage than Arabs. The process of de-Arabization has resulted in the decline of Arabs in the foreign population in the GCC from 72% in 1972 to 32% in 2002/04 (Kapiszewski, 2006). According to Shah, in 2005, the Asians constituted 87.1% of the labor force in the UAE, 92.4% in Oman, and 45.6% in Qatar (2013, p. 45).

The presence of such a high percentage of foreign nationals especially Asians in the UAE and Qatar has led to two major consequences. Firstly, there is a practical need of communication between the large non-Arab Asian population and the government departments, which are mainly conducted in the official language Arabic and English, a *de facto* lingua franca—languages that most blue-collar Asian workers do not control well. To solve this problem, many government agencies in Qatar and the UAE have recently started to use Asian languages in official communications, which contrasts with data from Kuwait, where their use was largely limited to private businesses (R. Ahmad, 2016).

A recent example of the official recognition of Asian language in the UAE is the adoption of Hindi in 2019 in the labor courts in Abu Dhabi whereby non-nationals could use Hindi, besides Arabic and English, to lodge labor complaints (A.

¹ The governments of the GCC countries do not provide disaggregated data based on nationalities, and therefore, different data sources may show slightly different figures.

Ahmad, 2019). Similarly, in Qatar, the Ministry of Interior's mobile app Metrash-2 and the primary healthcare helpline *Hayyak* allow customers to conduct transaction in multiple Asian languages including Malayalam, Urdu, and Tagalog (Chandran, 2019; *Gulf Times*, 2015).

Secondly, the presence of foreign languages has also created a fear of loss of the Arabic language and identity among the local Arab population. Many Arabic and English newspapers have published reports on the purported decline of the use of Arabic among Arabs (Bibbo, 2007; Ḥamadān, 2007). In the last two decades, some academic conferences have also been held in GCC countries in which concerns for the vitality of Arabic have been discussed by academics and policymakers (Arab Council for Childhood and Development, 2007; Jal'ād, 2009). Furthermore, a few research publications from the UAE have further highlighted the issue of the decline of the Arabic language, culture, and identity among the local Emaratis as a result of the dominance of English in the educational domains (Al-Bataineh, 2020; Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; S. L. Hopkyns, 2017). The fear of loss of language and identity can be gauged from the fact that the preservation of the Qatari heritage and Arab identity forms one of the challenges to be tackled in the Qatar National Vision, 2030 ("Qatar National Vision, 2030," n.d.).

This research is situated within the language planning and policy framework, which includes both official, top-down, *de jure* explicit policy statements and actual, bottom-up, *de facto* practices (Schiffman, 2012; Shohamy, 2006). I analyze government policy documents from the UAE and Qatar overtly dealing with regulations about the use of language as well as the actual linguistic practices. I show how the two governments struggle to reconcile the demands for communication which require use of non-national languages and the need for the assertion of Arab identity which mandates the use of Arabic. I argue that given that the GCC has become multilingual as a consequence of labor migration, there is a need for the development of empirical data and the formulation of a language policy based on that, to regulate the use of Arabic, English, and the languages of the migrant population.

17.2 Theoretical Issues and Data Sources

Language planning is a recent subfield within sociolinguistics which emerged in the 1960s with the goal of studying language situations in developing countries that had gained their independence from the colonial rule. The focus of the field was to study the process by which a particular language, out of possible many others, was selected as a national or official language for the purpose of modernization and nation-building. There are many definitions of the concept of language planning, but Cooper's stands out as it is short yet comprehensive; he defines it, 'Language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes' (Quoted in McKay & Hornberger, 1996, p. 110). Language planning involves two broad processes of corpus planning and status planning. While the former refers to the

changes that are brought *within* the structure of the language itself including, but not limited to, coining new words, reforming writing systems, and developing reference material such as grammar books and dictionaries, the latter deals with the political and ideological issue of assigning languages to different functions. Declaring a language as the national language or as the language of education, judiciary, etc., falls within status planning. This chapter is concerned with status planning in the Arabian Gulf.

This paper adopts a post-structuralist framework of language policy and planning research in which language policies are not seen as a neutral tool but a process that shapes people's decision and are simultaneously shaped by it. This framework goes beyond the official policy documents and allows for the inclusion of grassroots practices involving language. Unlike earlier studies, language planning in this framework is viewed as socially constituted, and thus, language groups may contest decisions made by their government. Additionally, there is now a recognition of how language policies at the macro-level of the state are interpreted by individuals and groups at more micro-levels (Schiffman, 2012; Shohamy, 2006). Shohamy alerts us that "the real LP [language policy] of a political and social entity should be observed not merely through declared policy statements but rather through a variety of devices that are used to perpetuate language practices, often in covert and implicit ways" (2006, p. 45). The data for the paper come from recent debates on language in the UAE and Qatar in the public forums such as academic seminars and conferences and Arabic and English language newspapers. Furthermore, recent policy documents from the UAE and Qatar regarding the allocation of languages to various social, educational, and economic domains have also been analyzed. I focus on the UAE Cabinet decision no. 21/2 and the Arabic Language Protection Law, passed by the Qatar parliament in 2019.

17.3 Analysis and Findings

Based on the two major issues emanating from the presence of large non-nationals in the GCC and the dominance of English, this section is divided into two subsections. The first section deals with the measures taken by the governments of Qatar and the UAE to solve the needs of communication with their large non-national Asian population. The second section deals with the fear of erosion of the Arabic language and Arab identity, which is attributed to the presence of Asians with different languages and cultures. Another element of this discourse is the introduction of English in schools and universities, which is believed to have contributed to the erosion of the Arabic language and identity. In this section, I also discuss the scientific measures that are used to study the decline of a language and the data, or lack of it, on which the assumed discourse of the loss of Arabic is based.

17.4 Communicating in a Multilingual Setting

The constitution of the State of Qatar, which was adopted in 2004 following a national referendum in the previous year, declares Arabic as the only official language of the country (Article 1). Similarly, the permanent constitution of the UAE adopted in 1996 declares Arabic as the only official language of the union of seven emirates. Although there is no mention of English in the constitutions or any other government documents, it is widely used in both countries in communication between the government and the non-nationals. Most communication aimed at the non-nationals emanating from the government is available in Arabic and English. Some government agencies have lately begun to use languages of the non-nationals, which is discussed in detail below. In terms of language use, another relevant factor is that both countries have a number of international English-medium schools and branches of Western universities, which are attended by local Arabs as well as non-nationals—Arabs and non-Arabs alike (Findlow, 2006). These schools run parallel to the Arabic-medium government and private schools, which creates two classes of graduates with different linguistic skills.

As mentioned above, the non-nationals in the GCC countries in general and Qatar and the UAE in particular constitute a significant part of the population. Table 17.1 (adapted from Shah, 2013) gives a good perspective on the percentages of non-nationals in the demographic composition and the employment sector of the GCC countries.

Table 17.1 Total population by nationality (2010) and labor force by nationality (2008) in the six GCC countries

Country	Estimated population, 2010			Labor Force, 2008		
	Total population	Non-nationals	% Non-nationals	Total employed (000s)	% citizens	% foreigners
Bahrain (2008)	1,107,000	569,000	51.4	597	23.3	76.7
Kuwait (2010)	3,566,437	2,443,223	68.2	2,093	17.8	83.2
Oman (2008)	2,867,000	900,000	31.4	1,169	25.4	74.6
Qatar (2010)	1,697,000	1,477,000	87.0	1,265	5.8	94.3
Saudi Arabia (2010)	27,136,977	8,429,401	31.0	8,455	49.4	50.6
UAE (2010) ^c	8,264,070	7,316,073	88.5	3,043	15.0	85.0
Total	44,638,484	21,124,697	47.3	16,538	33.1	66.9

As mentioned earlier, Asians form 87.1% and 45.6% of the total workforce in the UAE and Qatar, respectively (Shah, 2013). It is important to note that the term Asian is used as a cover term for the diverse people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Indonesia who speak unrelated and mutually incomprehensible languages. Of Asians, Indians are the largest nationality in Qatar and the UAE. In Qatar, they constitute 21.8% of the total population (Snoj, 2019), whereas they form more than 30% in the UAE (“Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.,” n.d.).

It is worth noting that Indians are not homogenous linguistically either, as they come from different parts of India speaking Malayalam, Tamil, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, and Telugu. It is clear from this that the linguistic diversity in the GCC is quite complex. What further adds to the complexity is that bulk of the Asian migrants are uneducated, low-skilled workers who do not know English, which is otherwise used as a lingua franca. While doing research on the use of migrant languages in Qatar during COVID-19 campaigns, a government official in an interview told me that the most important thing he learned from the campaign was that English is not really an international language in Qatar (R. Ahmad & Hillman, 2021). Piller (2017) in her sociolinguistic description of Dubai, which applies equally well to Qatar, highlights the complexity of the use of the term lingua franca by noting, “the statement ‘Arabic is the official language of the UAE’ hides more than it reveals” and “the statement ‘English is the lingua franca of Dubai’ equally conceals as much as it reveals” (p. 15).

The governments in both Qatar and the UAE understand that relying on English for effective communication with the Asian population is fraught with danger especially in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Both UAE and Qatar used Asian languages, though in different degrees, to reach the migrant population in their own languages. Although the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization (MOHRE) in the UAE government used Hindi, Urdu, Tagalog, and Chinese to assure the labor market of stability during the COVID-19 crisis (“Corona Virus- Covid19 Procedures,” n.d.), Hopkyns and van den Hoven (2021) show that its communication with non-national population during COVID-19 crisis in 2020 was largely in Arabic and English. The Government of Qatar, by contrast, used the migrant languages Malayalam, Tamil, Nepalese, Tagalog, Sinhalese, Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali extensively in both the print and audio–video modes during COVID-19 awareness campaigns (R. Ahmad & Hillman, 2021).

The use of migrant languages is not confined to what is known as directive signs, which are signs used by the authority to inform the public about a public order (Angermeyer, 2017; Mautner, 2012). In 2019, the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department in the UAE made a landmark decision to allow the use of Hindi, which is an official language of India, in the labor courts, whereby workers could file complaints related to wages, compensations of arbitrary layoffs, and other employment benefits in Hindi, in addition to the existing Arabic and English. The Undersecretary of the Judicial Department said that the inclusion will enhance access to justice for migrant workers (A. Ahmad, 2019). Although spoken Hindi has emerged as a lingua franca among South Asians (R. Ahmad, 2019), it is not clear if Malayalis, Bengalis, and others can

use it in its written form. The decision, even if not fully effective, holds a symbolic value as it is an official recognition of a foreign language in an Arab country.

Similarly in 2015, the Road and Transportation Authority of the UAE included seven more languages namely Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, Bengali, Chinese, Russian, and Persian to the existing Arabic, English, and Urdu in the driving tests for licenses (Shahbandari, 2015). This allowed non-national residents to take the computer-based knowledge test in these languages; for those who couldn't read the test was also available in voice-over mode in these languages. In addition to the tests for driving license, these languages were also available for traffic lessons. The telecom service provider Etisalat and Du, which are partially owned by the government, allow mobile phone customers to select Urdu as the default language of the mobile SIM.

In Qatar, the migrant languages are utilized much more frequently and widely to communicate with the non-nationals. In recent years, the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs have taken a lead in the use of migrant languages in print and on social media. Similar to the UAE, in 2018, the General Directorate of Traffic, within the Ministry of Interior, added eight new ones to the existing ten languages in which knowledge test is available for those applying for a license (Mohammad, 2018). Ministry of Interior's popular mobile application Metrash-2, which allows citizens and residents to conduct transactions related to residency, exit permit, traffic violation, etc., from their smart phones, is available in six languages including Urdu and Malayalam (Fig. 17.1). Similarly, the round-the-clock emergency helpline number 999 is also available in multiple languages (Fig. 17.1). Hayyak, the helpline of the Primary Health Care Corporation, the government agency responsible for primary care of citizens and residents, is available in Tagalog, Urdu, and Malayalam in addition to Arabic and English (Gulf Times, 2015). Similarly, the Ministry of Labor allows residents to file labor complaints in nine languages including in Urdu, Hindi, and Malayalam (Fig. 17.2).

In addition to the examples mentioned above in which the residents can use multiple languages to communicate with government agencies, ministries themselves engage in creating materials in multiple languages, in addition to Arabic and English, in communicating with resident non-nationals. On June 10, 2021, the Ministry of Interior on its Facebook page posted awareness material about electronic



Fig. 17.1 Government services in non-official languages



Fig. 17.2 Sample fliers in Sinhalese, Urdu, Malayalam, and Nepali

crimes including identity theft which happens as a result of people sharing with others their one-time password (OTP) needed for online transactions. The awareness material was posted in nine languages, namely Malayalam, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Sinhalese, Pashto, Nepalese, Tamil, and Bahsha Indonesia. I give below in Fig. 17.2 sample fliers in Sinhalese, Urdu, and Malayalam. To disseminate the safety measures, the Facebook page requests users to share the awareness posters with their family and friends’ circle. Similar contents related to other common issues affecting Asian workers are posted on the FB page in multiple languages. The Ministry on August 28, 2014, posted a flier titled ‘pedestrian safety’ which raises awareness about road safety among Asian workers. People coming from Asian countries, where driving is on the left, often look in the wrong direction before crossing a street in Qatar, where driving is on the right. The flier also contains other safety measures including not using the mobile phone while crossing streets.

On the non-official level, different languages-speaking communities, especially those with large numbers, have established linguistic and literary societies that hold activities in their respective languages. In Qatar, the *Bazm-e-Urdu*, *Anjuman Farogh-e-Urdu Adab*, *Karwan-e-Urdu*, and *Anjuman Muhibban-e Urdu* are some active organizations that hold literary events frequently including the popular *mushaira*, poetry recitation events in which poets from the India and Pakistan are invited. In the UAE, three Urdu weeklies, namely the *Janib-e-Manzil*, *the Urdu Akhbar*, and *the Urdu Weekly* are now printed in the UAE for Urdu speakers from India and Pakistan; in the past, Urdu and other language newspapers used to be imported from the subcontinent. Malayalis who are one of the culturally strongest communities in Qatar and the UAE publish local editions of the Malayali newspaper *the Malayalam Manorama*, *the Mathrubhumi*, and *the Madhyamam* from the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and KSA. The local editions are modified versions of the mother editions published from Kerala, India. Sometimes the front page is modified to include important news items relevant to the specific country of printing. The GCC editions add pages to cover local news and events from the expat Malayali communities in the GCC.²

Having faced the challenges of communication in an extremely complex multilingual environments, the discussion above shows that the governments of the UAE and Qatar have realized that the use of Arabic, the *de jure* official language, and

² I would like to thank Shajahan Madampat, a writer and cultural commentator based in Abu Dhabi, UAE, for clarifying the Malayalam language publications in the GCC.

English, the purportedly lingua franca, is not enough to ensure smooth communication with the Asian non-nationals. Consequently, they have taken recourse to the use of their languages. The presence and use of these languages and cultures have not been without some implications for the perception of Arabic among Arab nationals. This has crystallized in the form of a discourse of fear of loss of Arabic in the GCC countries to which we return in the section below.

17.5 Perceptions of Fear of Loss of Arabic in GCC

Before I examine the discourse on the fear of loss of Arabic or its decline in the GCC, a word of caution and clarification is in order. The first question is: what are the measures or indicators used to assess the vitality of a language based on which the decline of a language can be determined? The best answer to this question comes from studies on the status of French in Montreal in Canada, which, in response to the discourse of its ‘decline’, has passed a series of language laws in the past several decades, to support French and protect it from being overtaken by English—the language spoken by most people in Canada. According to Arsenault Morin and Geloso (2020), two frequently used measures are the proportion of people who, in the government census, claim French as their mother tongue and those who report speaking French *at home* as their main language (p. 420). People who claim that French is experiencing decline in Montreal use statistics from the census that show falling numbers on these two measures. Interestingly, the census data also show that the percentage of people speaking French *at work* has, in fact, increased in the last few decades. Based on this, Arsenault Morin and Geloso argue that the existing parameters are problematic since people are becoming bilinguals in French and English because of, among other things, interlinguistic marriages. They argue that the criteria should be amended to include use of French *either at home or at work* (not both) as a measure of whether the use of French is declining or not. Their point is that the rise in bilingualism should be taken into account in the studies of the assumed decline of French.

Returning to Arabic, there are two major issues with the discourse of its decline in the GCC. Firstly, the claim is not based on any tangible data but anecdotal and impressionistic accounts from individuals some of which are outright incorrect. The government census in GCC countries does not collect data based on language spoken at home and/or work. Even articles written by the academics do not provide evidence of the decline based on other sources, for instance, ethnographic research in the community. Al-Farajānī, a professor in the University of Cairo, in an article entitled “the Harmful Effects of the Influx of Asian Work Force in the Gulf Countries” published on the Al-Jazeera website, argues that the presence of Asians has had negative cultural consequences the most important of which is *ifsād al-lughah al-‘Arabīyyah*, ‘corruption of the Arabic language’ (Al-Farajānī, 2008). He claims that due to the presence of large Asian work force “...words from Asian languages gain

currency so much so that their Arabic equivalent words disappear (*tatawārā*)". Al-Farajānī, however, doesn't give even one example to support his claim. It is not even clear what he means by Asian languages, because the term Asian subsumes more than a dozen languages as different as Malayalam, Tagalog, and Urdu. Al-Farajānī does not stop at that but goes on to claim that the situation will not only distort the [Arabic] language but will eventually create a *huwīyyah hajīn*, 'hybrid culture'. Although he does not elucidate what he means by hybrid culture, it possibly means the influence of other cultures on his assumed 'pure' Arabian Gulf culture. This claim is even more problematic than the one about disappearing Arabic words as close contact with Iranians over the past centuries have led to the borrowing of many words of Persian origins into standard Arabic as well as the dialects spoken in the Gulf. Standard Arabic words, e.g., *tāzīj*, 'fresh', *kanz*, 'treasure', and *jāh*, 'high rank', are borrowings from Middle Persian (Gazsi, 2011). Similarly, words in the Gulf Arabic dialect such as *drīsha*, 'window', *bisht*, 'a formal male attire', and *darwāza*, 'door' are of Persian origin.

Let us now return to the discourse of the decline of Arabic in the GCC, which was the theme of a panel of an international conference entitled "Coordination Meeting of Universities and Institutions Concerned with the Arabic Language in the GCC Countries" organized by King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Center for Language Planning and Policies, based in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. On the panel, Dr. Lateefah Al-Najjar, professor of Arabic in the UAE University, presented a paper on the effects of Asian workforce on the Arabic language in the GCC in which she argued that the amount of standard Arabic a Khaliji child is exposed to is quite little as bulk of the input is the Arabic dialect spoken at home and the pidgin language (*lughat hajīn*) used with the Asian maids and drivers. Without giving any evidence, she concludes that the pidgin language will undoubtedly affect the acquisition of Arabic language (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Center for Language Planning and Policies, 2013, p. 11). She recommends that the Asian workforce be replaced with Arabs and that the learning of Arabic be a condition of employment. Similar anecdotal arguments can be seen in a recent interview with his excellency Dr. Muḥammad A. Al-Kāfūd, former Minister of Education of Qatar, published in the Arabic newspaper *the Al-Rayah*. Among other factors, he also holds presence of non-nationals (*wujūd al-wafidīn*), mixing of cultures (*ikhtilāṭ al-thaqāfāt*), and foreign nannies (*murabbīyah ajnabīyah*), responsible for the decline of Arabic in the GCC countries. In a detailed academic study of foreign labor and its impact on the Gulf, Al-Najjār titles section five of his paper "fear of cultural melting" (*makhāwif al-dhawbān al-thaqāfī*) (Al-Najjār, 2013, p. 17). He argues that the increase in the size of the "foreign society" (*mujtama' al-ajānīb*) will lead to the submerging of the local identity by non-national identities (p. 17). Although he gives rich statistics on the proportion of foreign labor in different GCC countries, in this section, like other writers discussed above, he does not provide any data.

In contrast to the impact of large labor force on the decline of Arabic language and culture, some studies have examined the impact of English as a medium of instruction on Arabic in the GCC in general and the UAE in particular (Al-Bataineh, 2020; Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; S. L. Hopkyns, 2017). The common premise of these studies

is that Arabic faces a threat *not* so much from the dominance of Asian languages and cultures but from the powerful global English, which has become not only the lingua franca among the educated Arabs and non-Arabs but also the medium of instruction in international schools and institutions of higher education in the UAE. As the title of Al-Issa and Dahan's work "Global English and Endangered Arabic in the United Arab Emirates" suggests, they argue that Arabic is already endangered in the UAE because of English, "...Arabic in the UAE is facing the very real possibility of becoming very limited in use within the next two or three generations" (p. 4). Although there is a rich discussion of how the UAE has introduced English in the private educational institutions and in higher education, the researchers do not present any primary data in support of their claim of the "endangered Arabic". One of the arguments mentioned is, '...the language itself is notoriously difficult to learn and has quite a complex grammar' (p8), which is not a fact of language, but a piece of ideology informed by certain interests, and therefore, cannot be used as evidence of the decline of Arabic. If this was really a fact of language, how would one explain mastery of Arabic by Arabs now and in the previous centuries.

While it is true that the use of English has changed the sociolinguistic landscape of the UAE and the GCC countries at large by reassigning certain domains of languages use, for instance higher education, to English, it does not follow from it that English as the medium of instruction will endanger or lead to the loss of Arabic. The study does not take into consideration the possibility of the development of bilingualism in which Arabic and English may get allocated to different social functions. English could become the language of education and workplace, whereas Arabic will function in other domains including home, religion, socialization among Arab friends, etc., as is the case in many countries including Montreal in Canada. Al-Bataineh's work (2020), based on primary data gathered in a public university, is more nuanced in that she does not make alarming and sweeping statements about the loss of Arabic, like the ones discussed above. Based on her data, she claims that the educational language policy in the UAE values English more than Arabic which is likely to strengthen the position of English further in education and marginalize Arabic. This is a reasonable conclusion as the introduction of English is definitely reconfiguring the language of education in schools and universities. Before I am misunderstood, I do not claim that this reallocation is insignificant, what I instead stress is that this is not tantamount to loss or endangerment of Arabic.

Secondly, in the discourse on the decline of Arabic, it is the standard Arabic that is believed to be facing a decline. This is often attributed to the English being used in private schools as a medium of instruction. Although sometimes in debates the line between the standard and the dialects may not be very clearly drawn, in one instance it was clear that the decline under debate was indeed the standard Arabic. On January 11, 2009, the TV host Nashwa Al-Ruwaini hosted a show entitled *Ghiyāb al-Lughah al- 'Arabīyyah*, 'Absence of the Arabic Language' on Dubai TV, which was widely reported in newspapers as well (Hajr al-Dād wa haymanat al-Injilīzīyyah ma'a Nashwah, 2009). In one section of this episode called *al-Arab al-ladhīna lā yataḥaddathūna al- 'Arabīyyah*, 'The Arabs who do not speak Arabic' she interviewed two young women and one man who went to English medium schools

and college in the UAE. The Egyptian young man was able to speak Egyptian dialect fluently, so it was clearly his ability in standard Arabic that was believed to be not good enough. The Emarati young woman interviewed on the show was fluent in Emarati Arabic, but she often switched between the Emarati Arabic and English. Clearly, there is an assumption that people should be speaking standard Arabic and that too without mixing English words.

The phenomenon of mixing words from another language or switching to it has been found to be a feature of bilingual speakers in other speech communities. Sociolinguistic studies have long shown that mixing and switching are linked to social factors such as the addressee, the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor, the choice of the topic, the setting of the conversation, and the identity the speaker wants to construct for themselves (Clyne, 1998). Mixing and switching cannot be taken as evidence of the decline of Arabic. Similarly, the claim that the assumed decline is because of the Asian maids and drivers is also suspect because children may learn some foreign words from their nannies, but as they grow past their teenage and become conscious of their social identity, they stop using them. The phenomenon, referred to as age-grading in sociolinguistics, has been discussed in a study in which Canadian children watching American kids' shows pronounced the last letter of the English alphabet as 'zee', the American pronunciation instead of the Canadian 'zed', but they switched to 'zed' when they became older (Chambers, 2001).

The fact that there is no evidence of the decline of Arabic doesn't mean that it does not have consequences. In sociolinguistics, the discourse of decline is seen as a piece of language ideology, which are perceptions speakers have about structure and use of language, which are used to construct and justify social and political measure. Woolard and Schieffelin emphasize the relationship between ideologies and use by noting that, "ideologies of language are significant for social as well as linguistic analyses because they are not only about language. Rather, *such ideologies envision and enact links of language to group and personal identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology*" (1994, pp. 55–56). Despite the fact that there is no tangible evidence of the decline, the ideologies have resulted into the governments of Qatar and the UAE taking measure to counter the alleged decline. We return to this in the following section.

17.6 Measures to Arrest the Perceived Decline of Arabic

Although Arabic is the only official language in the UAE constitution, on March 9, 2008, the UAE Cabinet passed Resolution Number 21/2 whereby all ministries, federal entities, and local government departments were required to use Arabic in all their transactions and correspondences (Cabinet's Resolutions, 2008). According to Dr. Ebtisam Al Kitbi, a professor of political science at the UAE University, this was done to stop the "invasion of foreign languages in government institutions". Hailing this as a landmark decision, Al Kitbi further remarked that the decision will

strengthen the national identity and augment the Arabic-speaking people in labor force and “restore the national identity” (Al-Baik, 2008). For Al Kitbi and those behind the resolution, notwithstanding constitutional status of Arabic in the UAE, the resolution was needed to ensure that Arabic language is also the *de facto* official language and not merely *de jure*.

A forceful execution of the Arabic language outside of the government domains could be seen in the violation tickets the Department of Economic Development of Dubai issued to twenty-nine restaurants, in 2015 for not having their menus in Arabic in addition to not specifying the prices. Ahmed Al Awadhi, the Director of Field Control, asked business owners to cooperate with the department in “establishing the values of the [Arabic] language” (Al Deberky, 2015). Here also, we see how the government agencies are enforcing Arabic in the domain of private businesses. Furthermore, Al Awadhi linked the violation with the rights of the Arab consumers to have the menu in their mother tongue. This may remind the reader of Montreal-style violation tickets issued to businesses for not having French on their signs in violation of the Charter of the French Language. In 2020, Deli 365 based in Montreal, Canada, was slapped a hefty fine of \$1500 by the Quebec Office of the French Language for having their signs and advertisements only in English (Eliot, 2020).

In Qatar also, measures have been taken to reinforce the status of Arabic in different domains. In 2012, the government passed a law regulating the public signs whereby no signs could be placed without securing an approval from the municipality. Article 5 of the law, however, dealt specifically with the language of the signs stipulating that Arabic must be the primary language of signs, but other languages can be added based on subject to municipality’s rules and regulation (Regulation and Control of the Placement of Advertising, 2012). In the same year, an Amiri decree changed the medium of instruction in schools and Qatar University from English into Arabic (Mustafawi & Shaaban, 2019). This was followed by a more comprehensive law in 2019 called Arabic Language Protection Law (ALPL), which may be considered the first language policy document in the Arab World that regulates the use of language in government and private institutions in Qatar.

Unlike the law in the UAE, discussed above, that mandates the use of Arabic in government institutions, the very first article of the ALPL, consisting of fifteen articles, stipulates that all government and private institutions are obligated to protect and support the Arabic language in all their events and activities (Qānūn Ḥimāyat Al-Lughah Al-’Arabīyah, 2019). According to Article 2, the government institutions are under obligation to use the Arabic language in their meetings and discussions and all communications emanating from them in the audio, visual, or written forms. Translations in other languages can be made available in public interest. Article 3 further emphasizes that Arabic shall be the language of talks and negotiations with other governments and institutions with translation in their approved languages.

ALPL also reinstates Arabic as the medium of instruction in government schools and Qatar University, which is a public-funded university, allowing use of other languages if it is necessitated by a particular course or an academic program (Article 5 & 6). Private schools are required to include Arabic as an independent subject in their curriculum. In addition to the above government domains, the ALPL lays

down rules for commercial and other private entities. According to Article 8, private business, educational, and entertainment companies must carry Arabic names except international trademarks and brand names, which can retain non-Arabic names, but they must be written in Arabic as well. Similar to the Charter of the French Language in Montreal, Article 11 stipulates that entities violating Articles 2, 5, 8, 9, 10 will be fined a sum of QR 50,000.³ Dr. Hamad Al-Kuwari, the Qatari Minister of State, in December 2021 launched a Twitter campaign with the hashtag *ma ‘an li da ‘m al-lughah al- ‘arabīyyah*, “Together In Support of the Arabic Language” in which he stressed that the GCC needs to do more than other countries to support the Arabic language because the challenges it faces are greater (Ibrāhīm, 2021). He further mentioned the implementation of the law faces some formidable challenges.

Despite the concerns raised by the Minister, there are sign of its implementation in Qatar. On July 29, 2021, the Arabic language newspaper Al-Sharq reported that the courts in Doha refused to hear those civil, family, and criminal cases in which the required papers were not submitted in Arabic. These included a civil case filed by a lady seeking divorce, but the court didn’t look into her claim because the documents she submitted were not in Arabic which didn’t only violate the ALPL but also Article 16 of the Judicial Authority Act passed in 2003 whereby Arabic is the language of the judicial transactions (Al-Zā’id, 2021). In the report, Ali Al-Kaabi, Director of the Public Relations at Doha Institute of Graduate Studies, who was among the people interviewed, highlighted the importance of enforcing the ALPL and ensuring that the violations are properly dealt with.

17.7 Conclusions

Based on the case studies of the multilingual societies of Qatar and the UAE, where non-nationals constitute an overwhelming majority reducing the local Arab nationals to a minority within their own countries, I have shown that the presence of large foreign population has created two major challenges to the governments: (i) communication between monolingual Arab nationals and non-nationals, especially the uneducated blue-collar workers, and (ii) the fear of loss of the Arabic language and Arab identity among the population. I have shown how the governments of Qatar and the UAE are increasingly adopting migrant languages, in different degrees, for communication with them. In the UAE, the inclusion of Hindi in the judicial court of Abu Dhabi clearly reflects the government’s understanding that successful communication with the Asian population cannot be achieved without using their languages. The more free use of Asian languages by the government of Qatar shows not only their openness to the acceptance of migrant languages as effective ways to communicate with the non-national population but also that their use is inevitable in a multilingual society.

³ This is equal to \$13,700 US dollars.

I have further discussed that although no concrete statistics on the use of Arabic and English among the local population in different social, educational, and workplace domains, like the ones in Montreal, Canada, is available, a discourse of fear of loss of Arabic has grown in the GCC countries. Lack of statistics notwithstanding, I have shown that the ideology of fear of loss of Arabic has led to some consequences, which include the strengthening of the position of Arabic in Qatar and the UAE. In the UAE, despite the fact Arabic is constitutionally the only official language, a Cabinet decision in 2008 made the use of Arabic mandatory in government departments and agencies because its use was gradually declining and that the local population feared that their language will fall out of use. In Qatar, the perceived fear led to the inclusion of preservation of Arab identity as one of the challenges to be dealt with in the Qatar National Vision 2030. The discourse of fear, in the past decade, has further led to the reinstatement of Arabic in government schools and Qatar University, the only public university in Qatar. The most striking development in response to the discourse of fear was the passing of the Arabic Language Protection Law in 2019, which makes the protection and support of Arabic mandatory for both government and private entities. It is clear that in contrast to the UAE, where the cabinet decision made the use of Arabic mandatory only in government departments, the ALPL applies to both the public and private entities. Furthermore, this law is the first of its kind in the Arab World that imposes a hefty fine of QR 50,000 on violating entities.

While the needs of communication are critical in multilingual societies like those of the Qatar and the UAE with a large number of blue-collar workers, the fear of the loss of Arabic among the local Arab nationals cannot be ignored as this might lead to further strengthening of Arabic, which will go against the needs of communication. Communication and identity stand in inverse relation with each other. The needs of communication require languages other than Arabic, which may further heighten the fear of loss of Arabic among the local populations. In the talk Dr. Lateefa Al-Najjar gave at the GCC Meet on language, discussed above, she proposed different levels of proficiency in Arabic language, depending on the type of job, a condition for employment. Although this is not feasible, it shows the impact the discourse of fear can have on communication. The issue of communication and identity, therefore, must be addressed for a sustainable language ecology. Any such policy must be based on good data on use of languages in different domains among both nationals and non-nationals. This requires inclusion of language-based questions in the national surveys and expertise of linguists for their analysis and feedback.

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