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The construction of the universality of English within Saudi Arabian education contexts

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ABSTRACT

Discourses of the universality of English and its role in individual mobility and social development abound in the literature; these discourses have contributed to the global spread of English and to the development of English Language Teaching as a profession. Despite the ubiquity of the discourses of the value and universality of English, there has been limited research on how these discourses unfold in local contexts, how these discourses are reproduced or appropriated, and how these are translated into teaching and learning artefacts (e.g. policies and textbooks) and practices by teachers and students. This paper explores the construction of the discourse of the universality and value of English within education policies, curricular documents, and textbooks used in Saudi Arabian schools, and how these discourses then play out within teacher/student interactions in a rural Bedouin-dominated classroom. Our aim is to contribute to the understanding of global English and its discourses taking a local, situated perspective.

KEYWORDS

English language teaching; Saudi Arabia; English as universal; poststructuralism; English as a foreign language; English in Saudi Arabia

Introduction

Discourses of the universality of English and its role in individual mobility and social development abound in the literature, ranging from the mythical representation of English as 'Aladdin's lamp' (Kachru, 1990) to the mercenary view of it as 'hard currency' (Nino-Murcia, 2003). Motha and Lin (2013) contend that 'the acquisition of English is inevitably saturated by the particular meanings that the language carries globally in today's world' (p. 3). Consider how English as linguistic capital is constructed in this argument for the teaching of English in Saudi Arabia (SA):

Currently, those who can communicate in English face a much brighter future in terms of securing a wide range of employment opportunities, seeking knowledge, enriching their understanding of other cultures, pursuing studies abroad, especially higher ones, and widening their horizon and having a better understanding of the world, or even leisurely pursuits, such as travelling internationally for pleasure. (Al-Seghayer, 2011, p. 14)

Critical scholars including Pennycook (2007) and Phillipson (2011) have argued that the discourses that construct English as valuable and universal, beginning within the era of

British colonialism, have contributed to the global spread of English and to the development of English Language Teaching (ELT) as a profession. This discursive view of the global dominance of English, which takes into account the agency of those who spread English for their own interests (theory of linguistic imperialism; Phillipson, 1992) and of those who learn the language (theory of macroacquisition; Brutt-Griffler, 2002), needs to be complemented by a situated understanding of the dynamics of English and its discourses in specific social sites (Canagarajah, 1999, 2005).

The ubiquity of the discourses of the value and universality of English can be problematized through examination of how these discourses unfold in local contexts (see Canagarajah, 2005; Hamid, 2015), how these discourses are reproduced or appropriated, and how these are translated into teaching and learning artefacts (e.g. policies and textbooks) and practices by teachers and students (Blommaert, 2010; De Costa, 2012; Pennycook, 2010), in particular local settings.

This 'contextual sociology of English' (Pennycook, 2000) from a discursive perspective is imperative particularly in the Middle Eastern polities where, while English has been traditionally viewed as anti-Islamic, it has nevertheless made significant inroads into society in the wake of the petroleum boom and the attempts at the secularization and de-Islamization of education following 9/11 (Karmani, 2005).

Against this background, this paper explores the construction of the discourse of the universality and value of English within education policies, curricular documents, and textbooks used in Saudi Arabian schools, and how these discourses then play out within teacher/student interactions in a rural Bedouin-dominated classroom. Our aim is to contribute to the understanding of global English and its discourses taking a local, situated perspective, as suggested by Canagarajah (1999), May (2014), Pennycook (2000), and Ricento (2014), among others.

English in SA

Unlike other Gulf countries, SA 'has never been under the control of a European power and ... [English has] never been endured as a residual of colonization or a heritage of missionaries' (Al-Seghayer, 2011, p. 7). It is generally agreed that English was introduced into the Saudi curriculum in 1928, a few years after the establishment of the Directorate of Education (Al-Seghayer, 2011; Assah, 1989). Even in those early years the government recognized that English was a tool by which Saudis could communicate with the outside world (Al-Seghayer, 2011). The exponential growth of and investment in the oil industry required a foreign language that was suitable for people working in government and for the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) (Alam, 1986). English was the language used by most of the foreign experts coming into the country and it was vital for locals to be able to interact with these experts. Furthermore, throughout the year, millions of Muslims from various parts of the world visit SA to perform a religious rite called *Umra* and the annual *Hajj* pilgrimage in Makkah. Hence, it was perceived as necessary for Saudis to learn English to communicate and socialize with the vast number of people visiting their country (Al-Seghayer, 2011).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in SA has long been a major part of the curriculum of private and public education (Al-Yousef, 2007). In a typical 15-week semester, approximately 60 hours are devoted to ELT instruction in public schools in SA across the three

stages of schooling: elementary, intermediate, and secondary. However, despite the long history of teaching English in SA, EFL proficiency levels of the majority of students have been disproportionately low (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Teaching English in SA, as in some other polities in the world (Kaplan, Baldauf, & Kamwanga Malu, 2011), has faced a number of problems (Al-Nasser, 1999) which fall into two main categories: problems related to the question of 'why' learn and teach EFL, and problems related to the question of 'how' to learn and teach EFL. Central to the investigation of these two inextricably linked 'why' and 'how' notions of EFL and ELT is the way in which they are discursively constructed. In this paper, the contradictions and complex interrelationships between the discursive constructions of the value of English and the classroom contexts in SA are explored.

This quite straightforward account of the teaching of English in SA may negate the actual complexities that are evident when investigating any context. The value of EFL is discursively constructed by multiple discourses operating in contextual and sociocultural milieus (Blommaert, 2010). The interplay of these multiple discourses is complex and mediated by a variety of factors: ethnicity; geographical location; gender; religion; and geopolitical relations. The construction of the discourses about the 'value' of English in the particular context of rural Bedouin schools in SA is necessarily affected by other discursive systems operating, both globally and locally. For example, the long cultural, social, and economic history of the Bedouins in SA (Ménoret, 2005); the changing geopolitical context in which SA as a nation-state operates (Zuhur, 2011); and the economic and social impacts of global movements and patterns including the impact of these on Islamic teaching in SA (Zia, 2006), impact on the operation of English Language teaching, and learning, and curriculum and policy development and how these discourses operate within rural Bedouin schools.

Theoretical framework

The study that this paper draws on investigated EFL teaching and learning practices in SA by employing a Foucauldian poststructuralist framework. This poststructuralist discursive perspective made it possible to view EFL teaching and learning as complex social practices, interacting with the discourses of English and ELT practices available in the global as well as the local context(s). The adoption of a discursive lens for this study helped 'to challenge the inertia of "linguistic orthodoxies"' (Billig, 2000, p. 292) within the field of English language learning and teaching in SA, while enabling the possibility of examining the 'historical conditions, assumptions and power relations that allow certain statements, and by extension, certain discourses to appear' (St Pierre, 2000, p. 493). It is possible to shift the focus away from an examination of EFL teaching and learning effectiveness, away from a view of the EFL learner/teacher as a stable 'subject' and focus instead on how EFL teaching and learning practices are discursively constructed to enable particular positions to be enacted. The employment of a discursive lens provides tools and alternative languages for examining, analysing, and elucidating EFL teaching and learning practices.

The first author of this paper, and the researcher who conducted the study, is a conservative Muslim Saudi male who was born and brought up in SA, a conservative Muslim country, and this positioning calls into question the employment of poststructural

methods of inquiry, given the perception of this theoretical position as being somewhat evil and anti-Islamic (see Ahmed, 1992; Shah, 2000). However, we concur with the views of a number of Muslim academics, such as Ahmed (1992) and Shah (2000), who believe that there are more commonalities between the two schools of thought than there are contradictions. Shah (2000), citing Weiner (1994), suggests that resolving these contradictions is possible

... if we move ... to the 'acquired' and 'constructed' knowledge, recognising [the] epistemological difference ... , and understand post-structuralism as *problematizing* (not rejecting ...) universals and truths. (Weiner, 1994, p. 99; cited in Shah, 2000, p. 108)

In the educational sector in SA, poststructuralism has just started to penetrate into a number of arenas which will most likely multiply possibilities for different truths by unravelling taken-for-granted regimes of truth to reveal the nuanced and complex, discursively organized meanings for teachers and students.

Methods employed

The study explored the question: How does the interplay between discourses of English, the social context, and language education policy impact on Saudi EFL teachers and students and the learning environment in a Saudi EFL classroom? To answer this question, qualitative methodologies were employed with specific assumptions about the nature of the world, where everything is seen as complex and multifaceted. Three research instruments (document study, interviews, and classroom observations) were employed over four interconnected phases so that theory and interpretative methods were considered and reconsidered across the whole study.

In the first phase of the study, policy documents produced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the textbook used by EFL teachers and students were collected. This collection occurred prior to approaching the research sites in two Saudi intermediate schools in two different rural areas. Two EFL teachers, Faleh and Kamel (pseudonyms), were interviewed and observations were conducted in their Grade 1 intermediate classes. There were 29 Saudi students in total (15 in Faleh's class and 14 in Kamel's class). The age of the participating students was around 13–14 years. All the participating students were male Saudi Bedouin Muslims and all spoke Arabic as their mother tongue.

After analysis of the collected documents, the second phase was based on interviews with the two participating teachers. In the third phase, classroom observations took place in the two schools. Each teacher and his students were observed for two lessons per week over a period of 10 weeks. Upon the completion of classroom observation, using extensive field notes, a set of observed events was prepared. In phase four, post-observation interviews were conducted with the participating teachers, and six students from each class were invited to participate in a focus group discussion based on the discourses observed in the set of collected events.

A bricolage of different discourse analysis tools were used to undertake poststructuralist discourse analysis (PDA) (Baxter, 2008) of all data collected. Søndergaard (2002, p. 187) commented on the flexibility and adaptability of the discursive tools available including: 'inclusive and exclusive discursive processes' (p. 189); 'alienation/verfremdung' (p. 196); and 'paradoxes and alternative narratives' (p. 198). For further discussion of PDA and



the empirical studies that have employed it, see Baxter (2002a, 2002b, 2008), Castañeda-Peña (2007, 2008), Creese (2005), Davies (1995), Davies and Harré (1990), Søndergaard (2002), and Weedon (1997).

The educational and language policy documents, participants' interviews, and field notes were analysed to explore the underlying discourses of the value of English. Blommaert (1999) observed that the discourses of a language are socioculturally and politically constructed. These discourses are produced and reproduced by means of a variety of institutional and everyday language practices that occur in schools, the media, and other sites (see Canagarajah, 2001; Elyas, 2011; Hornberger, 2003; Ramanathan, 2005). Discourses of the value of English are not conceptualized as pre-existing sets of truths that can be taken for granted or be uncontested but, rather, as a set of assumptions that are not fixed and can be problematized. This discourse formation includes normalizing a set of assumptions about a language. In the context of this study, drawing on Foucault (1995), this normalizing process is pervasive in different institutional settings, including the MOE, the school, and the classroom, and is achieved through practices of inclusion and exclusion. In these institutions, inclusionary and exclusionary techniques are used to legitimize and delegitimize the foreign language to be offered to students in schools, the purposes of learning such a language, the materials to be included in the textbook, and the delivery of the language. Also, this normalization can be seen in the 'ways in which the learners [of that taught language] are positioned with regard to the language and its speakers' (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 329). The normalizing process that discursively shapes and reshapes particular language ideologies is an example of the exercise of power in different educational institutions. From this perspective, the process of educating is conceptualized as an exercise of power where this power 'incites', 'induces', 'seduces' and education is made 'easier or more difficult' (Foucault, 1983, p. 222).

Discourses of the value and universality of English in SA

The universality of English has been one of the most reported reasons for learning English as a second or a foreign language in SA. It is suggested that '[t]his discourse is reflected in policy statements in various contexts and countries, where it often becomes a determining factor in proposals for the structuring of (second/foreign) language education' (Sargeant & Swann, 2011, p. 250). In what follows, the presence of this discourse is explored within the data collected, including in policy documents, the teachers' and students' talk, and classroom observations.

Policy documents

One of the general goals of teaching English in SA states that students should be able to 'develop their awareness of the importance of English as a means of international communication' (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2002, p. 122). In this policy document, English is constructed as the most important language on the globe today: 'the tool that bridges the linguistic gap between the different parts of the world' (Al-Issa, 2002, p. 214). The message is that EFL education in Saudi should be structured and planned to achieve this means of international communication. What is obvious in these policy statements is the frequent use of modality such as students 'should be able to develop'

and ‘should be able to appreciate’ English (MOE, 2002, p. 224). The use of this modality ascribes a particular value of English and entails an obligation on the part of EFL teachers.

The universality of English is also constituted in the textbook where the value of English is described in the preface using language that reflects the MOE position:

English is the mother tongue for approximately 400 million people. It is also estimated that it is the second or the third language for more than 660 million people in different parts of the world. ... English is the language of international communication, diplomacy, science, business trade, aviation and navigation. Mastering English will enable one to read English newspapers and give his/her access to channels broadcasting in English. (Sroj et al., 2010, p. B)

Here English is positioned as a universal language in terms of the number of its speakers, both native and non-native, and its use in key domains. However, while this powerful representation of English is expected to influence pedagogical considerations in different components of the EFL curriculum including the textbook, the representation of the value of English as a language of international communication is limited, ultimately, to this excerpt. In other words, the content of the textbook does not reflect this position; in fact, there is an obvious lack of any representation that would signal that such a discourse is operating. In the 28 lessons included in the textbook, not a single reference is made to the claimed international status of English presented in the preface. Throughout the textbook, the authors limit the representation of English users to the Saudi population. Al-Qahtani (2003) observed that ‘[l]iterally the entire content of the EFL textbooks ... present the Saudi culture’ (p. 159). Central to this presentation is the construction of English as a means of communication between Saudis. This is reflected in the title of the series *Say It in English*, indicating that Saudis can say everything in English. Constructing English as a language of the locals is manifested in almost all of the conversations included in the textbook (see pages 3, 4, 7, 13, 15, 22, 25, 26, 41, 44, 50, 52, 54, 61, 63, and 65), as well as in many of the images accompanying these conversations (Figure 1).

It could be argued that the practice of localizing EFL materials is a ‘malformation’ ‘[d]etaching English from the real world’ (McVeigh, 2002, p. 148) that has resulted in a representational gap with regard to the multiplicity of English native speakers. There is no reference to countries where English is spoken as a mother tongue, such as the United States, Britain, or Australia or representations of speakers from those countries. There are also no representations of speakers of English who use it as a second or foreign language, who are estimated to be more than a billion (Crystal, 2003). The process of ‘Saudization’ and ‘localization’ which also employs the technique of ‘invisibilization’ (Herrera Torres, 2012, p. 48) are discursive techniques used to exclude non-locally based EFL knowledge. What is presented here is an imagined English-speaking Saudi community that is actually unimaginable for many of the users of the textbook, both teachers and students.

Although English is visible and operating in many parts of SA, it is a language that operates externally outside the daily lives of many. It is a language that is viewed and consumed through marketing, through western style products and goods, through television, the Internet, and other electronic and digital forms of communication. It is rarely spoken, and even more rarely written. It is not spoken as an everyday language, even in formal settings such as schools; it is not a language of instruction in public schools except in English classes (Al-Seghayer, 2014). The representations of Saudis having everyday conversations with each other in English is not one students using this

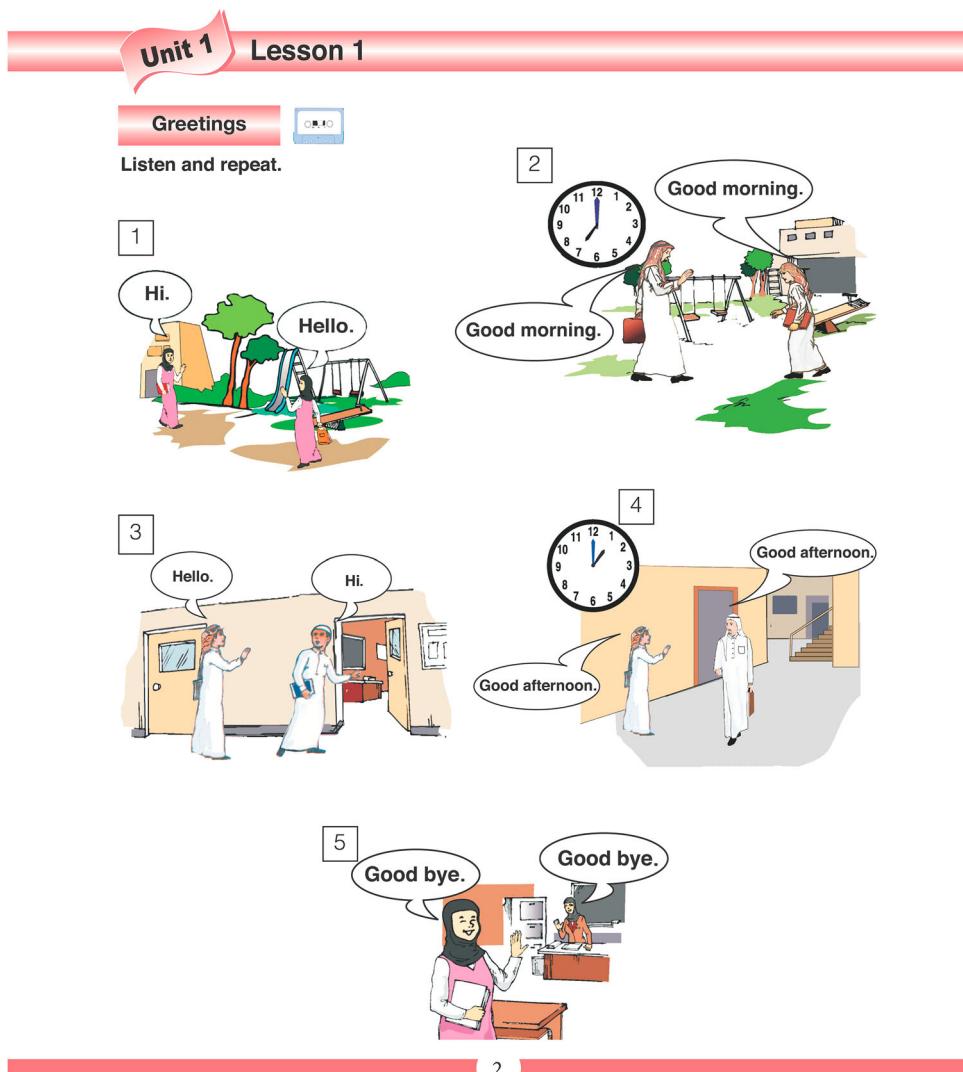


Figure 1. Example from textbook.

textbook would imagine to have any place in the reality of their daily lives; the scripted conversations together with the visual representations in the textbook would simply never occur.

This localization of the content of the textbook in SA contributes to competing positions over the place of the target culture/non-local cultures in EFL teaching and learning (Holliday, 1999; Kramsch, 1993). While the SA government policy, reflected in the textbook preface, constructs a powerful view of the importance of English as a universal language, it is contradicted through the construct of another powerful discourse within the Saudi context, produced by religiously motivated voices opposed to teaching English using an international template. These opposing voices 'fear that introducing different religious beliefs or values to their students at this early age may affect them or their behaviours

in an unfavourable way' (Al-Qahtani, 2003, p. 163). So, other cultures are not included or represented 'in order to avoid sedition, as they are worried about the impact of Western culture on Muslim youths' (Al-Thowaini, 2010, p. 14).

Teachers

Not surprisingly given its place in policy texts, the teachers in the study also took up the discourse of the universality of English. For example, in response to one question, Faleh stated:

Now, English is the mother tongue of the world and one is considered illiterate if he or she does not speak English and know how to use computer. They are the true illiterate in the twenty-first century. English will be spoken by everyone and hence it should be learned. Students lack the ability and wisdom to think of what might be useful to them in the future.

Kamel, the other teacher, viewed the learning of English as a necessity despite student and parental resistance:

- Interviewer: If this is how these students and parents perceive English, why do you still believe that they should learn it?
- Kamel: First, English is made compulsory by the MOE. Second, nowadays there is no question about the importance of English. English is the language of communication internationally. If you speak English and visit any country around the world, even in non-native English speaking countries, you will be able to find people who speak English.

These two excerpts indicate the adoption of a powerful discourse about the value of English as a universal language and its significance for international communication which is prevalent within the larger social context including educational institutions. Thus, their adoption of the discourse can be seen as a result of these two teachers entering an established discursive field that is infused with institutionally and discursively constructed meanings and relationships. Weedon (1997) suggests that by entering a discursive field that is already established, individuals 'learn their modes of operation and the values which they seek to maintain are true, natural, or good' (p. 3). It could be expected then that this powerful discourse would be made visible in their teaching practices; however, this was not the case.

Classroom practices

EFL classrooms are sites where students are engaged in a social space where discourses of the target language and 'desirous [L2] subjectivities' (Motha & Lin, 2013, p. 16) are discursively constructed. In these social spaces, particular discourses of English are facilitated and negotiated while others are excluded. In other words, 'the classroom is an extremely important institutional setting ... where the meaning of English is constructed' (Park, 2009, p. 12). As they engage in these discursive spaces, students become part of a particular set of discourses that govern teaching and learning practices in the EFL class.

In this case, one of the ways that teachers limited the representation of the universality of English was through their emphasis on its use to communicate only with certain groups of people in local contexts. For example:



- Faleh: When you go to McDonalds and the Bangladeshi working there does not speak Arabic, how would you greet him?
- Faleh: We can use these greetings when we meet a Filipino in a hospital.
- Kamel: Where can we use this sentence?
- Student: When I speak to the Indian working at the petrol station.

The construction of English as the language to be used in these contexts by both teachers does not reflect their articulated position of English as a universal language, but instead limited its use to communicating only with local blue-collar non-native English-speaking employees. In none of the 40 classes observed did the teachers refer to the use of English outside the borders of their own country.

The contradictions between the teachers' claims that English is a language that is/will be spoken by everyone, and the limitations expressed during their classroom teaching are also visible when they spoke about English teaching in these particular classrooms, both located in rural remote areas. As Faleh stated:

See. I am talking about this area in particular. This area is very different and less attractive than the city. In the city, students are exposed to English when they go to supermarkets, for example. English exists. English can be used. On the other hand, here in this remote area, there is one traffic sign and it is in Arabic (slow down, speed bumps ahead). English is not visible. Nothing is written in English where a student might have the chance to read when he travels with his dad. They always stay in this area. I always ask them whether they go to other places over the weekend. The answer I always get is 'no'.

The teachers were not able to visualize other possible communities in which their students could use and engage with English, and in some ways then constituted their students as 'different' or 'disadvantaged'. As part of universality-oriented English lessons, teachers are expected to give students the skills to perform the various everyday tasks of globalized world, such as texting, playing games, surfing the web, and at the same time, learn how to make the best use of English (Sarwal, 2007). The exclusion of these new realms where English is used as a universal language and the limitation of using English with foreign employees have possibly denied students, to some extent, 'access to a world community' (Wesche, 2004, p. 284), possibly then impacting on their investment in learning the target language.

Students

Surprisingly, despite the relative invisibility in the textbook materials and classroom activities of the discourses situating English as universal and global, the students took up this discourse in their discussions of its importance. This supports Park's (2009) argument that '[w]hile the classroom is an extremely important institutional setting that contributes to global modernity, it is obviously not the only site where the meaning of English is constructed' (p. 12).

During the focus group discussions, the students were asked to discuss why they had to learn English. The students' answers exhibited a number of discourses that they had adopted about the target language. It appeared that these answers are not related to immediate language practices or needs. English is not the language that the students use in everyday interaction, neither is it the language of instruction at schools, nor are

students likely to meet any native English speakers or encounter a situation where there is a dire need to use English. Nonetheless, all students from the two schools who participated in the focus group discussions testified to the power of the discourse, as seen in the following student comments. For example, Dhafer stated, 'English has become the official language of the world. Even if you travel to China or Japan, or anywhere you have to speak English.' Awad also linked English to non-native and native English-speaking countries: 'If one travels to Japan or the United States, he has to speak English. This is how it is.' Also reflecting on the spread of English, Ayed stressed that 'it is very important. English is the most spreading language in the world. Most of the people around the world speak English'. Dhafer affirmed Ayed's comment: 'English has been spreading in the world. Everyone speaks it.' The idea of the universality of English in the local context is explicit in Saif's statement: 'All people who come from overseas to work in Saudi speak English.' Influenced by the place of English in the cyber world, Mohammed stressed that 'English is the language of the Internet. Learning it makes one able to communicate with all people around the world.' Another student, Saber, stated that 'English is the language of communication between all the countries.'

The above extracts illustrate how Saudi Bedouin students in a remote area perceive English as universal, widely studied, spreading, and the most widely used for international communication. This could be a possible product of contextual reinforcement, as seen in the media, of the significance of English, which rests on its myriad uses globally, as well as the vast number of its speakers.

By and large in the Saudi context, the general public accept this ideological representation of English and believe that English is the key to access every part of the globe, both geographically as English speakers can travel anywhere with ease, and socially, as it is a language that is used worldwide. In this context, the discourse of the universality of the English language has been adopted and gained legitimacy. As Al-Abedalhaq and Smadi (1996) affirmed, Saudi young people have access to and are exposed to English through different means: TV, satellite TV, electronic games, radio, and music. Contradicting their teachers' claims that 'English is not visible', even these Saudi students living in remote areas who participated in the study are constantly exposed to English. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

- Dhfer: My brother showed me a movie in English. I understood a little. He told me that I will come first in English in my class.
- Ayed: I sometimes watch translated English movies to have a grasp of some words.
- Marzooq: I sometimes watch TV and movies in English.
- Saber: When I watch soccer matches, I read the names of the players in English; also I listen to English on satellite TV channels like MBC and Dubai.
- Fahad: If a doctor gives you a prescription, it is written in English.
- Saber: If you go to the hospital, the doctor and nurses use English. Also, it is the language used to learn about computers and through which one can have access to English websites.

Similar extent of the presence of English in everyday Saudi life was earlier documented by Elyas (2011) who observed that:

It is usual for English to be used alongside Arabic on road signs and on names of the shops. Printed materials in places such as banks, airports, travel agencies and post offices are usually in both English and Arabic. In fact, in the main shopping strip in the upmarket shopping



districts in Jeddah, names such as Toys R US, Body Shop, Diesel, Starbucks, Next, and Mother Care, are only written in English using the Roman alphabet without any kind of translation. (p. 94)

Although, in their remote areas such language practices are not visible, the Bedouin students encounter them when they travel the short distance to urban areas where they go shopping, visit a doctor in a hospital, eat in fast-food restaurants, or run other errands. Despite their remote location and only occasional interactions with English in urban areas, the students appear to have fully adopted the powerful discourse that English is universal and spoken everywhere. Dhafer, Awad, and Mohammed said English was ‘the official language of the world’ and that one might ‘have to speak English’ in countries such as China or Japan, the United States, or ‘anywhere’. Further, they noted that ‘English is the language of the Internet’, facilitating communication ‘with all people around the world’.

However, it is worth noting that, in making these remarks about the place of English in the world, the students did not use personal pronouns; they all used either ‘if you’ or ‘if one’ which suggests that they did not view themselves as part of this world of EFL learners and competent English speakers who will one day travel the globe, access the Internet, and use English to communicate with people worldwide. In some ways, then, they themselves agree with their teachers’ view of themselves as ‘different’ or ‘disadvantaged’.

Although our focus in the paper is not on differential access to English, this potentially raises the question of how English proficiency development is mediated by factors such as ethnicity, geographic locations, and socioeconomic status in SA, as elsewhere (e.g. Hamid, 2015). This ‘local’ reality of the English may challenge the global discourses of English and its cosmopolitan appeal (see May, 2014; Ricento, 2014).

Conclusion

The current popularity of EFL in SA and the belief in the universality of English in Saudi schools are undisputable. Given this, it was expected that the adoption of such a powerful discourse would be apparent in the teaching and learning practices in the observed EFL classroom. The gap between the dominant social views of English and the translation of these views into pedagogical practices points to specific relationships between English teaching and learning community in the peripheral contexts and the normative discourses of English as a universal language of opportunity.

In the literature (Allen, 2006; Cohen, 2012; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Li & Simpson, 2013; Norton, 2001; Ryan, 2006), the power of imagination and imagined communities in shaping L2 language learners’ investment is well recognized. Allen (2006) suggests that ‘[i]magination is crucial in beginning L2 learning’ (p. 47). It appears that these students and teachers simply serve as the conveyer of dominant discourses without the necessity, or capacity or imagination to personally relate to these stories of English. The teachers and students talked about English without an investment of their agency or making any personal connections to an ‘imagined L2 community’.

The L2 discourse made available to students in the classrooms did not ‘prompt them to [think of] cross[ing] boundaries and assimilat[ing] to ... new communities or ... become [ing] members of multiple communities’ (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 285). It was clear that students did not envision a future with English. Their teachers and the textbook failed to establish

the absence of English as a lack to be fulfilled (Motha & Lin, 2013). Students did not take up the discourse that learning English would give them an opportunity to interact with and participate in other global L2 communities to use English as the language of international communication. The lack of student investment in the target language leads to questions about the value of creating more preferable L2 imagined communities in the different discursive systems (such as the textbook or the classroom) that could lead to an increased understanding of the possibilities for their future as EFL learners which could, in turn, fuel their investment in learning English. If students had access to possible global L2 imagined communities, they may have adopted other discourses of the target language and that would have been reflected in their investment in the L2 learning. In other words, the construction of imagined communities which 'provide learners with a form of peripheral engagement through the power of the imagination' (Murray, 2011, p. 82) would have discursively constructed a relationship between the adopted universality discourse and the possible spheres where English could be used which might in turn be translated in paying more effort to acquire the target language. Murray suggests that some EFL learners would like to be members of other communities and teachers should identify their students' imagined communities to tailor their teaching practices to enhance their investment in learning the language.

To facilitate the discussion of possible L2 imagined communities in EFL classes, it might be useful to include a wider range of international English speakers in EFL textbooks and in the classroom interactions with students. The inclusion of these representations might help students to adopt the 'interculturality' discourse in order to add another meaning to learning English (Ho, 2009).

In making these suggestions we are not trying to construct new truths or to construct a linear relationship between the inclusion of wider representations of English users and students' investment in learning the language. We are presenting these ideas as possibilities that may impact on developing more productive English teaching opportunities and moments in classrooms such as those observed in SA.

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