

Teaching English in the Arab World: A Future in Turmoil

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Abstract This paper attempts to wave a flag that the teaching of English as a Second or a Foreign language may witness a tremendous decline in Arab countries where Fundamental regimes may take control as a consequence of what has been termed as Arab Spring “chaos”. In attempting to get closer to the hearts and minds of the masses, new fundamental leaders, it is hypothesized, will take the stand point of anti-English as an easy path. Obsessive Muslim leaders who may sneak their way to the ruling offices in the troubled Arab states will, most likely, try their best to suppress English; for many of them English is coined with disloyalty, Westernization and colonization. This paper brings evidence from related literature that supports its main hypothesis. Research results incorporated in this paper show that foreign languages are perceived as symbols of cultural or political dominance in countries where narrow-mindedness and intolerance prevail. Henceforth, the researcher, as a TESOL specialist and as a father of children for whom English has played a major role in building their education and career, feels that TESOL is facing a real dilemma in the Arab World.

Keywords Language and Social change, Islam and Language, Fundamentalism, Arab-Spring, Language and Identity, Patriotism

1. Introduction

Since 1299 up to 1923, the Arab world was ruled, under the name of Islam, by the Ottoman Caliphs. For some that kind of governance was an extension of the ancient Islamic ruling regime which represented legitimacy. Therefore, the Western support to overthrow the Caliphate during the First World War was believed by some as a conspiracy and a crime. In such instances and within such an understanding, speaking English or learning English by Arab Muslims in the Arab world had been, at times, viewed with dismay. In the early days of the Arab Modern history –the years of independence 1923-1970, speaking of English as a subject matter in schools was a big challenge¹. The fact that English language has remained in most Arab countries as a Foreign not a second language is a good enough example to prove such alienation. Politically, The English language had been associated with the ENGLISH (British) and/or the Americans and neither had enjoyed a high acceptance amongst the Arab Muslim societies.

However, in the years that followed the Arab independence and the downfall of the Caliphate, many Arab countries have allied with the West, particularly Britain and

the US for political, military, economic support or for investment and development partnership. In many such countries (the Gulf States, Jordan, Iraq etc.), As a consequence, English language has enjoyed an important status within the societies. It became the language of teaching and instruction in many local universities – especially in medicine, Engineering, Business and Science, the language of commerce and trade, as well. It also became the language of the educated and elites. In some countries, English has become a number one requirement for securing a job. Furthermore, in some public educational systems (ex. Jordan) where English language was a subject taught in schools starting with grade five for the fear of negatively affecting the child’s identity and patriotism (see Lenneberg (1967), Lambert (1977) and most recently Shohamy 2006), it has recently become a major topic in schools starting with grade one.

The teaching of English as a Foreign/ Second language (TEFL and TESOL) has blossomed over the past four to five decades in several Arab States. TESOL Arabia is just an emblem of the status that English language has achieved in the social, business and educational arenas in the Arab World. The so many AMIDEAST offices and ESL Centers open in Arab countries are also another evidence of the important status of English in these countries².

Throughout this history of prosperity, English Language teaching in the Arab World has passed through ups and downs due to the inflectional attitudes people have shared vis-à-vis foreign language education. Such attitudes have been generally affected by theories of international

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Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/edu>

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1 Ibrahim, M. Hassan: Communicating in Arabic: problems and prospects; in Florian Coulmas (ed.) Language Adaptation. Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pp. 39-60.

2 <http://forms.amideast.org/flash/60th/60th.htm>

acceptance that had some little fact and a lot of fallacy. The power of language to reflect culture and to influence thinking was first proposed by Sapir and Whorf. Their hypothesis stated that the way we think and view the world is determined by our language. Therefore, language and cultural heritage have been hot issue discussed at large by many researchers over years (see for example Claire Kramsch (1998) and Michael Byram, Carol Morgan and Colleagues (1994). Hence, the fear of the negative cultural influence on the Arab learners' identity and personality was an issue to consider when planning ESL education in the Arab World. There were times when educators have considered some sort of scientific English or limited-access English to avoid language influence and cultural dominance. There were times also when some educators in the Arab World have thought of ESP and home-made English curricula.

This being said, the writer believes that the time for arguing for or against foreign language teaching has long passed. Foreign language teaching has become the norm the world over. The advantages in human richness and openness that bilingualism/multilingualism has brought to people around the globe are too many to be touched at in such a short paper. It has been proved that authenticity is a major criterion for language acquisition, teaching and learning. As such, it is pointless to argue that a language can be taught stripped of its cultural heritage. There is no such a teaching method that can be referred to as "skimmed language" teaching method. Consequently, accepting the fact that languages come with their cultures into our ESL/EFL classrooms is a common place notion. Subsequently, the idea of teaching authentic English in ESL classes may constitute a problem for many radical Muslim educators and decision makers. Authentic material and authentic language use might mean for them more negative cultural influence or Westernization.

This fear of cultural influence and Westernization is probably finding a very suitable flora in the new Arabic politics that has come as a byproduct of the so-called Arab-Spring. The past few decades of tolerance towards English Language, the obvious understanding of the importance of English as the Lingua franca, the interest in learning English for Specific purposes, the interest in learning a language for life, this is probably going to change soon.

If some narrow-minded, fundamental figures may make their way to the ruling chairs in some Arab Countries as a result of the current political chaos, ESL and the general attitude towards foreign language teaching will definitely witness a great decline. Hence, the writer projects that the status of English in the Arab World is endangered.

This paper shall attempt to bring evidence to support the above mentioned assertion in trying to post a warning for TESOL, ESL, and TEFL specialists and language planners in the Arab World that their future plans and activities are at a critical stance of change.

It is a warning that if English is to survive in the Post-Arab

Spring World, not as a lingua franca but simply a window for intercultural understanding or even as simple as a foreign language for personal learning interest, it probably has to grow a beard!

2. Discussion

It shall be argued below that the Post Arab-Spring Ruling forces, mostly Islamic Fundamentalists of MB (Muslim Brotherhood) ideology, may interfere with the English language Teaching policies and plans in their countries in different ways. They may ban the teaching of English or any other foreign language in schools altogether on the assumption that our Arabic Islamic language is good enough for everything. As well, and since most of the new rulers of the Arab Spring are from the less fortunate masses, they, in an attempt to please the masses who for bad economic and social barriers were deprived of good English language education, may opt for such a decision. English language mastery has always been associated with social-economic status in the Arab world. The better off a person status and finance, the better his opportunity would be to join some private and advanced schools where English language is emphasized. This has also been directly related to the parents' education level, the income, the neighborhood and the communicative social needs.

On the other hand, English language might be viewed with the same stance as Arabic is in the West. In other words, the new dogmatic rulers might take a decision to coin English with Christianity and Western invasion and Western cultural dominance as Arabic is coined with Islam and terror. If this attitude may prevail, the English language education could probably be abandoned.

As well, one should not underestimate the zeal for power. It is a well-known fact that the ones who get to the ruling office are not very much willing to step down, at least in the Arab part of the world. Therefore, it has been noticed that throughout history, the leader who wanted to have more dominating power over his people, was the one who would speak with the masses tongue; i.e. the local dialect of the general masses. Such was the approach of Nasser, Ghadaffi and many others. The language of the Masses is important for the ruler's status because it gives him two valuable assets: he will appear in the people eye as more belonging, more patriotic – more one of them, and he will also be more at ease in using religious terms and Quranic Verses to deploy more emotional impact on his people. Some Arab leaders used to speak in Arabic in all domains and circumstances although they had a good command of English just for getting the emotional support of the uneducated Masses. If this becomes a common practice, would English then still find a paved road to the public schools? Moreover, and in some extreme case, such fanatic leaders may consider a "fatwa" against using or speaking any language rather than Arabic. The Islamic dogmatic background of the new rulers and their political belonging may oblige them to follow one of the assumptions presented above as a means of staying tuned

with their ideological commitment. One should take into account that the ruling post Arab-Spring powers are mainly BMs (Brother Muslims)³. In a less pessimistic perspective, one can assume that English language classes in schools might be reduced in number or a decision may be taken to delay the teaching of English until grade five so that the importance of English goes back to the way it used to be more than fifty years ago: simply a foreign language taught as a subject matter.

Some writers have already looked into these different possibilities although at a limited-research-scale only. Their findings are supportive of the current paper's assertion. For example, Lewko⁴ (2012) in his master thesis entitled: *Linguistic Projection and the Ownership of English: Solidarity and Power with the English Language in Egypt*, tries to find possible answers for a question posed in his study about the future use of English in Egypt after the 2011 revolution. Although his data is dependent on a limited number of interviews, yet one can safely conclude that there are some pessimistic views about the future of English. He says:

"Amal noted that a politician advocated banning English from Egyptians schools, although the reactions she saw on social networks to this were very negative. Nada, Nagwa, and Ahmed saw a reduction of the use of English on the Internet. Nagwa, Heba, and Ahmed noted how Arabic is "connecting" Egyptians with each other in a post-revolution Egypt. Ahmed said, "So you're trying to reach a wider audience, so you're going to more, um, kind of use terms and concepts, and even topics that we're not used to talking about in Arabic, to talking about them in Arabic"(p.98).

In his thesis, Lewko brings about very interesting topics related to language identity and language ownership. He concludes: "The overall view presented here is that English will continue to be an important linguistic tool, but Arabic will take a greater role in public discourse." (p.98).

Lewko ends up his discussion of language and power in post-revolution Egypt by saying:

"It is possible that the renewed use of Arabic after the Egyptian revolution, particularly online, may influence English in this way. English may find renewed competition in Arabic as Arabic is used to include as many Egyptians as possible to new political dialogue and social movements. While it is unlikely that this will cause English to be unimportant, it may cause Egyptians to question why English is important, and what role should English play in a post-revolution

Egypt. This could lead to a revision in English's perceived relationship with social class. Of course, politics in Egypt may have very surprising consequences to come for both languages" (p.118).

In his revolutionary article entitled: "TESOL in a Time of Terror: towards an Islamic perspective on Linguistics" Karmani⁵ (from the University of Sharjah, UAE) poses some very important questions concerning the role of ESL and ESL teachers in a War Against Terror. He says in his brief introduction: "(is) TESOL another strategic component in the struggle for hearts, minds, and tongues in the so-called war against terror?" or "is the teaching of English, as Edge (2003) has suggested, now a crucial ingredient of the pacifying process once the tanks, troops, and B-52 bombers have retreated?".

Karmani further questions our role as TSOL teachers: "Does perhaps our role as teachers of the "language of the conqueror" (Templer, 2003) implicate us as unwitting de-Islamizing agents in a U.S.-led campaign to "rid the world of evil" (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2002, p. 5)?

Many such questions and presuppositions are evoked in this article by Karmani –the founder of TESOL islamia (www.tesolislamia.org). And although not many answers are provided, the writer ends up confessing that English and Islam are such two Big components to be covered in an article. He quotes Harris (1992) that "the names English and Islam, whatever else they may be, are names of two very big battalions when it comes to the current international power struggle for control of the Middle East" (p. 90). In such a citation, Karmani probably wanted to indicate that the real focus of today's TESOL should shift to the teaching of English as way of life not just as a language or a tool. He is latter cited saying clearly that "we as language teachers might begin to explore the effects of political interference in Arab-Muslim curricula," and he goes on, "Teachers and students in the region should adopt critical educational practices that connect language acquisition to the purposes, contexts, and effects of communicating in English."

Be it political dominance or economy, it remains true that English is engulfed in a huge cloud of ambiguity in the Arab World and ESL teachers, being just a minority as they are, may never have the power to defend the language that the teach in a place where doubts and uncertainties are increasing daily. Hence, I believe that with more focus on Islam from the New Arab Rulers-as the scenario is expected-less focus shall probably be on English. New Arab Rulers will definitely try their utmost to connect and stretch in order to build their dream of a United Islamic caliphate⁶ (see the

3 SHARIAH the threat to America. Available at : http://media.washtimes.com/media/misc/2010/Sep/15/Shariah_The_Threat_to_America_Team_B_Report_09142010.pdf

4 Alexander M. Lewko, Alexander M. (2012): *Linguistic Projection and the Ownership of English: Solidarity and Power with the English Language in Egypt*. A thesis presented in fulfillment for the MA of Arts at the American University of Cairo.

5 Karman, S. (December 2005): "TESOL in a Time of Terror: towards an Islamic perspective on Linguistics", TESOL Quarterly: Volume 39, Issue 4, pages 738–744.

6 <http://www.theoakinitiative.org/src/pdfs/teamb/7-Shariah-The-Threat-to-America-Team-B-Report-Web-119-147.pdf>

Muslim Brothers Doctrine at their official site <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/>). English will enjoy the least of their interest, if any at all.

Rahman (2005)⁷ poses so many interesting views of the relationship that governs Muslims and English in Asia. Although Rahman talks mainly about the India-Pakistan example- which of course is a good representation of English through many south Asian countries (the Philippines, Singapore, Afghanistan etc.), there are so many similarities with English and Arab Muslims. In some explanation of one instance which he called "assimilation" as a mode of acceptance to English language in India and other countries, the writer shows how the Imperial British Politicians were so actively involved in creating a social class of British (English)-educated people who would make the ruling of the country much more easier for the British. He is citing Macaulay (1835) as saying: "We must at present do our best to form a (social) class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect." (p.5).

This is a clear example of a situation that has led to assimilation of English within some social classes in the Arab World also. The class of opportunists who have made important gains either by working in higher offices and closer to the ruling agents or by travelling and having a distinguished education in Britain as early as the thirties and forties of the 20th. Century. One must admit, however, that although this particular class of people did gain a lot of advantages from the occupying power, many have served their countries before and after independence in the best possible manner. Hence, the writer admits no direct association or link between bilingualism and lack of patriotism or loyalty.

Rahman, on a different stand, presents examples of an opposing reaction to English in India and in Pakistan. He talks of a majority who, even without the need of fatwa, felt a rejection to the language of the British Conqueror. He says that the "ordinary Muslims ... instinctively felt that English ... threaten their worldview." And he claims that "This resistance and rejection still characterizes the Islamic conservatives." (p. 6). This seems to be so true of many Muslim undereducated or non-educated Arabs who for no conceivable reason believe that English (and any different language or culture) is a threat to their faith and way of life.

Rahman's article also makes reference to an historical source that sheds light on a very important point which could actually clarify some of the points mentioned earlier in this paper: namely the Ottomans' documents. He cites Bernard Lewis (1982) in looking at Turkish History as saying, "During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ottoman chronicles devote ... not a great deal to Europe. The various

European nations are still referred to invariably as 'the English infidels,' 'the French infidels etc.,' (p.5). This evidence can shed more light on the fear and hostility that the West sometimes associates with Islam in general regardless of the so many changes in attitude and behavior among Muslims towards the West.

Mallah⁸ (2000) in her article on "English in an Arabic Environment: Current Attitudes to English among Kuwait University Students," uses as a major assumption the claim that Kuwaiti undergraduate students have a positive attitude towards English and English native speakers. In her concluding statement, she says:

"it was found that the more one is exposed to the English language, through being in an English medium college, visiting and staying in an English-speaking country or watching English programs on TV, and the more one needs the English language either for present studies or for future career, the more one appreciates English and reveals positiveness towards the language." (p.41).

Such is the case of English for academic and work purposes in most Arab countries. It has been shown in several similar research efforts that English is highly valued amongst the educated people for several reasons starting with the language aesthetic values and culture and going up to cover a much wider perspective of advantages. In short, the more utility exists in learning the language, the more motivated students are in learning and the softer or milder their attitude is, in general, to the language culture and native speakers (see. Al-Rabai (1999), Gardner, R. and Lambert, W. (1972), Vogt, C. and Oliver, D. (1999)).

In a remarkable linguistic and humanistic exchange of emails between Karmani and Pennycook⁹, a breath-taking debate is presented on the relationship between English and Islam. The posed questions and the answers don't only reflect the fact that both writers enjoy a very sophisticated level of understanding of the fallacies and facts in as much as the struggle between English and Islam is concerned, but both writes do seem to unintentionally symbolize the two major superpowers in today's war against terror: namely the power of accusation and that of denial. In some ironic stances, two contradicting views are placed on the table and making a choice was almost as confessing an underlying hatred. For instance, in attempting an answer to the question: was English one of the major causes of the success of the 9/11 attacks? In other words, had the hijackers not known English very well, would the attacks have been possible? The direct answer is of course NO. It is true that Fluency in

8 Malallah, S. (2000): English in an Arabic Environment: Current Attitudes to English among Kuwait University Students, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 3:1, 19-43. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13670050008667698>

9 Karmani, S. (2005): Islam, English, and 9/11, *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 4:2, 157-172. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0402_6

7 Rahman, T. (2005) : The Muslim Response to English in South Asia: With Special Reference to Inequality, Intolerance, and Militancy in Pakistan, *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 4:2, 119-135 available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0402_4

English provided the attackers a level of ease in committing their crime. Now, in response, are we with more English in Muslim schools or Less English? Similarly, are we with more Islamic teaching (Madrassa) in Pakistan and More Religion and Arabic classes in the Arab schools or with less religious or native language concentration? These are not ideas for discussion anymore? With some radical Muslim leaders as heads of states, some of these assumptions may soon become decisions that will affect the educational scene in some Arab countries.

This exchange of ideas between the two imminent specialists could have been more harmonized had they attempted to subdue the tension over English versus Islam and focused more on the implications of 9/11 on the future of English teaching in the Arab/Muslim world. One expected retaliation of the 9/11 accusations could probably take the form of taking more serious action against the teaching of English in the Arab World. This latter view is usually associated with regimes that find more security in returning to Arabic rhetoric and Islamic fundamental doctrines to defend themselves against terror-Islam related accusations; the case that may pop to the surface in the post Arab Spring governments.

Derin & Ece (2009)¹⁰ shed some light on the effect of English language teaching on students' identity in Turkey. They carried out a research to investigate the ESL learners' as well as teachers' views of the impact of English on the Turkish, Muslim identity of the learners. Although their study has depended on probably a limited sample, it reviled a very interesting point mentioned in the last chapter of the study. The writers, in summarizing their findings, say, "the participants seemed to be well aware of the presence of their multiple identities, but they all privileged their Turkish and Muslim identities over the Western way of existence presented during English-Language courses." (30).

The writer believes that the question of the relationship between language and identity should possibly be totally neglected, especially when touching on the teaching of a foreign language or a second language within the first language premises, as is the case of English in Turkey. It is well-established that language may have a slight component in shaping the child identity if acquired during early childhood. However, at later stages, such an impact starts diminishing as other factors in building the child identity came into the play field such as religion, home-bringing, social impact, friends etc. It is probably safe to assume that language shows or reveals the persons' identity rather than attributes to the building up of that identity (see this wiki answer which is available at:

http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_connection_between_language_and_identity, and also Norton, B. 1997, Kashru, B.B. 1992 and Pennycook, A. 1994). Therefore, it is

more fathomable to suggest that English as a foreign language in the Muslim world is not an actual threat to the child identity as much as it is a tool to expand his vision and image of the world. Once a learner is equipped with more tools, his/her ability to see the word from different perspectives becomes stronger and more developed. If identity is belonging and loyalty, then it is much harder to speculate where and when our second/foreign languages can change our identities. However, if it is a matter of adding traits to a well-established identity, as in the Turkish example in the current study, the writer believes that ESL plays a very important role in shaping the way a learner sees, feels and understands things. This, from the writer's own experience as a foreign language learner, is an asset not a hindrance and henceforth doesn't constitute a reason for taking a stance against English. The Turkish example is not the only one in the Middle East where English is widely used and respected as a foreign language. Jordan, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are just a few examples of countries that have long survived this whole dilemma of ESL and identity. In many such countries, the Education Policy makers have decided to start English from Kindergarten as opposed to old practices where English was taught starting with fifth and sixth grades. The real issue facing Arab Muslim students is not the continuation of the state of affairs in as much as English teaching is concerned; it is the fear that some negative consequences might occur if a decision is to be taken with respect to the teaching of English to young Muslim Kids in the Arab countries. Would the new decision makers construct their views about English based on fallacies or on facts? Are they going to give a good listening ear to research results and theories that have long proved the importance of multilingualism and bilingualism to the child/human development and success? Or they will remain adamant to change and totally convinced with stereotypes and inferiority complexities? Will they always hold the belief that English is evil? That English is associated with the Missionaries and crusaders? Similarly, and within the same logic, Are English language teachers going to be looked at as missionaries or preachers of Christian beliefs? To what extent an English Language teacher (Christian or Muslim) can be neutral in teaching English?

Baurain (2007)¹¹ tried to respond to some of these worries. In defining the ESL teacher's role, he emphasized that English language Christian teachers should be wary of the negative impact that may result when involving the personal teacher's beliefs, especially that of bearing witness, and the role of teaching the foreign language to non-Christian students. Baurain cites very good examples from Edge (1996, 2003), Pennycook & Coutand Marin 2003, Pennycook & Makoni (2005) to consolidate his point of view; all citations tend to prove the that people, henceforth teachers, who believe that the have the Truth are probably more radical and

10 Atay, D. & Ayse Ece (2009): Multiple Identities as Reflected in English-Language Education: The Turkish Perspective, *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 8:1, 21-34 Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15348450802619961>

11 Baurain, B. (2007): Christian Witness and Respect for Persons, *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 6:3, 201-219, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15348450701454221>

less professional to teach. He uses a very strong citation from Edge (2004), “those equipped with complete certainty are frequently handicapped,” and he further uses an aphorism by Voltaire cited in Edge (2004), “Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd.” (p.204).

Baurain is responding to a major critique that has been launched against English, English Christian Teachers and Schools and ESL teachers in general. The argument presented in Baurain’s paper is very profound in that it presents many instances where ESL teachers, schools and agencies have been looked at with dismay by locals from a lower class or a conservative socio-cultural background. However, one have to admit that in certain cases, such feelings of suspicion and skepticism toward English schools and English teachers was probably acceptable as when missionaries who are particularly interested in converting people or influencing peoples’ beliefs have actually used the English Language teaching mask to perform their missions in the Arab World,

“in order to work as a missionary in Muslim countries it is often necessary to hide one’s identity. Evangelists should always have a handy, nonreligious explanation for their presence in Muslim countries,” and “I could look someone in the eye and say, ‘I am an English teacher, I have a degree, and I’m here to teach.’” (Rick Love cited in Yeoman, 2003)¹²

Furthermore, the writer of this article, as an English language teacher and an ESL specialist in a Muslim world, has personally experienced some sort of alienation by the more conservative teachers, particularly teachers of Arabic language and Islamic education in several institutions that he worked for. In many such instances, he was viewed as the “westernized guy” just because he speaks English or wears a pair of jeans. In other more severe cases, some would find it too bizarre to see him pray in the break between classes; an ESL teacher, even a Muslim, can be viewed as an infidel to use the Turkish Ottoman style. Ignorance may, in various situations, mask itself with a veil; in many such cases, the veil was disguised as religion and that is where the danger lies.

3. Conclusions

The Fear of the Unknown is the greatest fear of all. And yet we claim that we live in a global village. It is much more accurate to say that our huge world is becoming so enormously vast that the more we believe we know one another, we discover that miles and miles are separating us. Yes. Bilingualism, Biculturalism, multilingualism and multiculturalism are great achievements and challenging attempts to bring peoples together. However, ignorance is such a malicious enemy. Ignorance that is disguising itself behind the mask of Religion, Faith, Identity, Nationalism

and Patriotism is what causes all pains to language teachers, language learners and the nations world-wide. It is such a narrow-minded view to think that only strict Muslims are against foreigners and foreign languages in general. Americans are holding the same view. Many Americans believe that the fact that there are minorities in the US who don’t speak English, is constituting a threat to the American identity and self-image¹³. Similarly, Germans look at the Turkish minority with estrangement¹⁴. Therefore, whether it is the language, the religion or just the looks, it is easy to identify somebody as a stranger. Homogeneous societies can easily depict newcomers or strangers. This narrow-mindedness is what causes a threat to the researcher and to many who might share the same attitude to life and people. Do we need a lingua franca to get us united? Can English bring us together? Will we feel more secure when we know each other better? All these questions can be answered with a big yes. English is an international language spoken by most people around the world with varying degrees of perfection; English does, to some extent, bring us together over the internet and on social networks; and we can proudly claim that we know much about each other compared to what was the case fifty years ago- at the times of Laurence of Arabia. We have successfully passed the time that was described by Said (1997) “in the crudest, most extreme, and reductive of terms: as being locked, for instance, in the middle ages, at the mercy of fanatical mullahs, as being driven by an insatiable desire to conquer the world, and as such desperately in need of Western-style modernization.”

However, when we could easily travel within the touch of a button and meet each other and know each other, when there are means and ways to bring us as humans closer to one another, new types of fears are created to keep us apart; Many such fears are hiding their true identity behind a mask of religion, nation, culture or other form ignorance-fostering adrenalin pump.

This being said, the question remains: why is English a threat to fundamental Muslims, to conservative Arabs or to the uneducated people in the Arab, Muslim world? Consequently, why teaching English in post Arab-Spring countries may witness a retreat? The answer for those two questions will help close the loop for the allegations presented in this paper. In an attempt to answer the first question, one should first try to understand the emotional and social background of the new leaders in the Post Arab-Spring countries. Many of those new leaders came from a social class that was generally poor or deprived of some rights to very good education at the time of the deposed governments. This fact is directly related to the quality of education these leaders have received in their early childhood. In general, and it is a fact known to all- education in general public

12 Yeoman, B. (2002). The stealth crusade. Mother Jones. Retrieved from: <http://www.motherjones.com/magazine/MJ02/stealth.html>

13 Newman, B. et al (2012): Foreign Language Exposure, Cultural Threat, and Opposition to Immigration. Political Psychology, Vol. xx, No. xx,

14 Schumann, S. (2011): Hybrid identity formation of migrants: A case study of ethnic Turks in Germany- term paper available as an e-book at www.grin.com

schools in most Arab countries is much below an acceptable level. English in particular is one of the most ill-treated subjects in public schools due to the lack of resources, the poor quality of teachers and textbooks. When the English language ability of the new leaders is at stake, some little evidence may bewilder the reader. Take the embarrassing example of “Gas and Alcohol don’t mix” which was made by Mursi in Germany, or take his English language deficiency while teaching at CSUN in the US, “My grandfather said that his professor (Mursi) seemed to have good teaching skills, however his English destroyed many students,” said Wallace, referring to complaints, made by his grandfather, that many students had to retake Mursi’s class due to his alleged inability to adequately communicate the lecture.” (in O’Neill 2013)

The evident low level of English education in public schools, has, in turn, given supremacy to private schools, especially in the teaching of foreign languages (Rosary Sisters Schools, American Schools, British Schools, Berlitz, etc. are just examples of private schools well-known in the Arab World). Joining such schools was always for the social elites and the financially better off kids. This fact has created a feeling of bitterness amongst the poor everywhere in the Arab World. This feeling doesn’t go to the rich only as was clearly shown in the Arab Spring events (stealing stores, damaging fancy cars, stealing Villas etc.) but it also logically goes to all what those elites (rich) has owned; one such special property of the elites is good education and one major distinguishing criterion of their education is the mastery of English Language. Subsequently, one might safely assume that English might come under attack as stores, cars and homes of the rich were stolen, damaged or burnt by the revolting powers.

The second reason, as was hinted at earlier in this article, is the ideology the new rulers follow. If they are, as clearly known in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and future Syria, all MBs, then the language of the Quran should be the only language used. English language may be reduced to some sort of ESP or EAP. For why would they invest in teaching the language of the infidels? However, one may argue that Islam is not against learning and in particular it does not forbid learning the languages of others. That is true. Islam was the power that had led millions of Arabs and Muslims to learn Latin, Roman, Hebrew, Turkish and Farsi in ancient times. Islam was the teaching force that made Muslim scientists, artists, philosophers, critics, physicians etc. excel and share their knowledge with the whole world. It is also Islam that made people in many present Arab countries learn English, French, Japanese, German etc. and pursue their higher education in many universities all over the globe. However, it is Islam not political ideologies behind an Islamic veil that stood behind all that achievement. It is the true Islam that makes millions of Muslims around the world share with their fellow brothers and sisters in humanity their grief and joy, failure and triumph and their sadness and happiness. What is clearly different is the fact that political ideologies under an Islamic veil have almost never represented the true essence of Islam

except for some limited instances throughout Islamic history. May these instances rise up again?

Witnessing the so called Arab Spring events, I have been so much worried about the sudden collapse of civilization in my part of the world; the so many big losses in development which were achieved with a lot of pain and sweat over the years. I was seriously saddened to see homes demolished or burnt down, shops stolen and devastated, ambulances and police cars destroyed, hospitals, museums, schools bombarded and the worse of all was to see humans killed. Of a minor importance to many is probably the anticipated loss of the English Language.

The harm that may affect English Language is to the researcher as distressing as that which had already affected schools, hospitals, mosques, churches, shops, universities etc. The Loss of The English Language or its prospective underestimation is an attempt to suffocate the future generations’ hopes and aspirations. Poor English language is breathing with one lung; poor English language or NO English language for future generations is closing a door to freedom and democracy.

I have personally seen the gains and I am witnessing the pains. I dare say that English is at a crossroad in the Arab countries: Authentic Cultural components will disappear because they may be accused of cultural insensitivity; language private schools may have to close because they may be considered missionary; using live internet resources in the English language classrooms may be banned because it can corrupt the students’ minds; textbooks will most probably be produced locally so that no pictures or drawings may be used which could negatively affect the students’ Islamic identity. Teachers of English as well as English teaching resources may witness an era of decline in preparation and development; they might be driven back to the least important pages of the educational agenda in the Post Arab Spring Education Priority Plan.

If English language should stay in Post-Arab-Spring countries, it has to grow a beard. In other words, the English language education in the Post- Arab -Spring World has to hide behind an Islamic Mask: Grammar-Translation teaching approach, reading of religious texts translations and old English literary works, teacher-centered classroom techniques, segregation of language skills, classrooms with clean walls and straight lines of chairs and desks etc. All of these traditional old-fashioned features must be presented through dry material that has no sign whatsoever of the English Language Authentic life or culture. Similarly, this sort of bearded English must be presented by serious teachers who may prevent any use of role play, drama, singing and games as that might be considered nonreligious or indulging. Such type of English will most probably give no priority at all to verbal communication and social networking.

This paper is just a first-degree warning to educators, TESOL specialists, young people and families as well as to those writers, publishers, course designers, investors, AMIDEAST and British Council English policy planners

that your long-lived ENGLISH glory in the Arab World is probably facing a decline.

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