Attitudes towards Standard Arabic: A Case Study of Jordanian Undergraduate Students of English

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the attitudes of Jordanian learners of English towards Standard Arabic (henceforth SA) as a mother tongue. It sought to categorize the attitudes held among these students in terms of ranked themes. The sample participants of this study were selected from two major state universities in Jordan. All students were taking English major courses during the first semester of 2013-2014. The total number was (366) students from all year levels. The students were both female (n=275, %=75.1) and male (n=91, %=24.8) students and between (19-22) years old. Data was collected over a period of four weeks. The students' responses came through short-essay composition tasks, i.e. answering the question: How do you personally feel about Standard Arabic? The results showed that it was possible to identify at least ten themes under which students' attitudes could be categorized in ranking order. These categories were: (1) status and future of SA; (2) the lexical gap; (3) affective feelings; (4) intra-linguistic aspects of SA; (5) inter-cultural impact; (6) the religious dimension; (7) perceived imperialism; (8) identity 'crisis'; (9) losing faith in SA; and (10) literacy and education. These themes are discussed with particular reference to the context of Arab / Jordanian EFL learning.

Keywords: Standard Arabic, Attitudes, Jordan, English, Students, Dialects, Bilingualism

1. Introduction

Language plays a vital role in the society. Society also impinges on language. Language is also a means of showing identity and solidarity among individuals and groups in the same society. In addition, developing a communicative competence in a foreign language may be linked to awareness of and proficiency in the mother tongue. In the Jordanian society, the young age group is demographically dominant and their language use may influence the overall society. Jordan may be becoming a truly bilingual community at least in the capital Amman and primarily among the young generation who are mostly students. Perhaps this comes as a result of modernization and world-wide globalization and impact of rapidly-spreading communication technology. Consequently, attitudes and perceptions of language in Jordan may have changed. Arabic has been associated with the Islamic religion for centuries as the language of the Holy Quran. However, many see SA as a difficult language, or even the most difficult language.

In the state-run secondary education examination, 'Tawjihi', many students take private tuition classes in standard Arabic because it is 'difficult'. It is a truism that the Arabic language is a composite of many varieties: old classic, modern standard and numerous local colloquial varieties as dialects. Most songs are in local dialects. Standard Arabic is not actually used for spoken communication. Radio news is in standard Arabic. Friday and religious sermons are in Standard Arabic talk whereas chat shows on radio are all in spoken dialects.

This study was inspired by the following quotation brought by one of my students of sociolinguistics:

[Ahmad received a message in Arabic from his friend Moayad explaining why he could not make it to the party]

Ahmad: Are you serious by sending me a message in Arabic language? i felt for a moment that my grandfather had sended me that message…You are too young to use Arabic while writing, u'll seem old in age and old fashion, thank god you didn't post it on my facebook page that would be so embarrassing"

This quotation triggered a lot of discussion among my students as to the current state of Standard Arabic. As a result, we wondered if the Jordanian society is becoming truly bilingual or indeed bicultural. Bicultural is "a person who knows the social habits, beliefs, customs, etc. of two different groups." (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:51). Bidialectal is a "person who knows and can use two different dialects. The two dialects are often a prestige dialect, which may be used at school or at work and is often the standards variety, and a non-prestige dialect, which may be used on at home or with friends". (Ibid: 51). However, upon discussions with my students, I have come to realize that in our society it is quite the opposite. People seem to find 'prestige' in avoiding standard and feel proud of using the local variety; this is very ironic. We wondered if Standard Arabic was literally dying. According to Ibid: 288), language death is "the disappearance of a 'living" language as its speakers switch to using other languages and children cease to learn it." This led to taking the issue further

and investigating the actual attitudes of university students of English towards their "dying" mother tongue. In particular, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do undergraduate students of English perceive Standard Arabic as their mother tongue?

2. How can undergraduate students' of English perceptions of Standard Arabic as their mother tongue be classified?

3. How can undergraduate students' of English perceptions of Standard Arabic as their mother tongue be ranked?

2. Literature Review

Abdulmoneim (2000) examined language transfer within the domain of learning of English as a foreign language by Arabic-speaking students who are often misled by the partial similarities between the two languages. The problem is further complicated by the fact that there are two main varieties of Arabic in each Arab country: modern standard Arabic (MSA) and non-standard Arabic (NSA). The author asked the question: which variety is it that students transfer from? To answer this question, (50) third-year secondary-school students were asked to translate into English two versions of a short Arabic text; one MSA and the other NSA including (14) relative clauses. No significant difference was found between the means of the number of clauses produced in both cases. This finding is supported by an analysis of (35) inter-lingual errors found in free compositions written by (24) students. The results indicated that it is important to take both MSA and NSA into account when making use of Arabic in teaching English as a foreign language.

Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) investigated writing skills in the two languages involved, English and Arabic, and to see whether there is an association between poor writing across languages. Data were collected from (150) students (chosen randomly) who wrote about the same topic in English and Arabic. Scripts were assessed respectively by ELT as well as Arabic specialists. The study confirms that poor writing in English correlates with similar deficiencies in the mother tongue. Thus the common assumption in ELT, that all learners are fully competent in their first language skills is unfounded. Moreover, Sehlaoui (2008) developed a rationale for the acquisition and teaching of Arabic as a heritage language of the USA. Three general themes emerge: (1) the unique demands made by heritage languages on parents, (2) the central role of culture and literacy in the maintenance of heritage languages, and (3) the need to think of heritage language learning as a variety of language learning that must constitute a 'dialogue' in a deeper-than-usual sense if it is to be successful. Ayari (1996), on the other hand, identified the negative impact of the linguistic situation in the Arab world, characterized as it is by the phenomenon of diglossia, on Arab children's ability to acquire reading and writing skills in Arabic; and hence on their academic attainment in general. Specific obstacles posed by contemporary Arabic diglossia to the acquisition of literacy are discussed, including the attitudes of parents and teachers to the colloquial and standard forms of Arabic. Some remedies are suggested. These include modification of the Arabic script, and improving the status of Arabic as a language of instruction in the schools, where it is often

replaced by English or French. The author emphasized the necessity to expose young children to literary Arabic, by means such as story reading to preschoolers, so that it is not, in effect, another language that they have to learn as soon as they enter school.

Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) explored the perspectives that (14) Arab and Jewish EFL student teachers adopted towards the use of L1 (mother tongue) and L2 (target language). The study was conducted within the context of student teachers' reflections on their classroom discourse during practice teaching. Student teachers were asked to record, transcribe and reflect on one classroom lesson implemented in their practice teaching through a series of guiding questions. The analysis revealed that both Jewish and Arab student teachers exhibited new insights regarding the different purposes for which L1 can be used in a communicative lesson. Novices reported to have gained a more situated and realistic perspective of the various uses of mother tongue in communicative teaching as a result of analyzing their own classroom discourse. The findings shed light on the striking similarities between Arab and Jewish student teachers in regard to the new understandings gained about the use of L1/L2 in communicative lessons.

Al-Mamari (2011) addressed the research question: what are the impacts of Arabic Diglossia, if any, on the experience of learners of Arabic as a foreign language? The study attempted to answer this question through examining the perceptions of a sample group of (23) learners studying Arabic as a foreign language in World Learning Oman Center. The participants were first surveyed online. This was followed by three separate focus groups that involved all the participants partaking in the survey. Further investigation was done through three individual interviews with alumni of World Learning programs currently living in It was concluded that Arabic diglossia is indeed an impactful factor in learning Arabic as a foreign language. It is especially impactful while learning Arabic in a native country. The data proved that students of Arabic in Oman were aware of Arabic diglossia and its impact on their learning. The higher level students coped better with this reality while lower level students tended to be confused about it. Similarly, the level of interaction with the speech community increases as the learner became more confident in handling the diglossic reality. Most participants agreed on the value of learning both MSA and spoken dialect for the learner.

Alshammari (2011) investigated the use of native Arabic in English classes at two Saudi technical colleges. The main objectives were to examine the purpose of L1 use and the attitudes of Saudi teachers and students towards the role of Arabic in the EFL classroom. Data were collected through two different types of questionnaires. Results indicated that the use of Arabic (L1) was for clarification purposes and that a balanced and judicious use of L1 in the EFL classroom by both teachers and students can be useful in the language learning process and may even be essential to increase learners' comprehension.

Hayes-Harb, (2006) conducted two experiments to compare the reading processes of native Arabic speakers to the reading processes of native English speakers and non-Arabic ESL learners and provided evidence that native Arabic speakers are less aware of vowel sounds in English texts than either control group. This differential awareness of vowel sounds

may contribute to native Arabic speakers' ESL reading comprehension difficulties. Also, Dweik and Abu Al Hommos (2007) investigated the relationship between first language (Arabic) proficiency and second language (English) performance in the writing skills of Jordanian bilingual second secondary school students. Despite the linguistic distance between English and Arabic, it was postulated that Arabic writing skills can be transferred positively to the target language (English). The researchers used composition prompt tests instrument for this purpose; one test was in Arabic and the other was in English. The data was collected in the second semester of the academic year 2005-2006. The population was from two leading public secondary schools in the First Directorate of Amman in Jordan. The participants were (20) male students who were chosen on the basis of the students' achievements in the previous years. A significant relationship was found between the two languages. Those students who got high marks and were proficient in Arabic writing performed well in the counter skill (English). The present study supports the notion of L1 transfer.

Husseinali (2006) reported on the initial motivation of learners of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL). One hundred and twenty students enrolled in first-year and second-year AFL classes participated in this study. The participants were classified into two major groups of learners according to their heritage background: The first group consisted of learners of Arab and Muslim heritage, and the second consisted of all other heritage backgrounds. Data were collected using a survey. The results indicated that AFL learners had a variety of orientations prompting them to study Arabic: travel and world culture orientations, political orientations, instrumental orientations, and cultural identity orientations. These were then broadly grouped into three major types of orientations, namely instrumental orientations, identification orientations, and travel and culture orientations. Significant differences were found between heritage and non-heritage learners on instrumental and identification orientations.

Cote (2009) explored factors affecting the feasibility of selecting a particular dialect of Arabic to serve the educational needs of the entire Arabic-speaking world, including the widespread use of colloquial Arabic and present-day national education policies. In addition, to learn how native-Arabic speakers perceive this diglossic state of affairs, the researcher interviewed (84) participants ranging in age from (17) to (48) living in Tucson, Arizona, or Madrid, Spain, to determine their views on the various vernacular dialects of Arabic and to obtain their opinion on the prospects of replacing MSA with one of these dialects. The author concluded that having so many distinct dialects makes choosing and implementing a common Arabic-language both daunting and unlikely, for not only would the governments of more than (20) nations have to choose a particular dialect to implement, but they would also have to convince their populations to adopt the chosen language.

Bader (1995) examined switching to English in daily conversations in Jordan in search for factors and attitudes. The results of a questionnaire given to (145) students at Yarmouk University (Jordan) showed that most students disapproved of code-switching and considered it harmful to the purity of Arabic speech, national pride, and social identity. On the other hand, Hamdan and Diab (1997) analyzed the role of Arabic as the native language in

assessing reading comprehension in English as a foreign language. They reported the findings of an experimental study on (60) secondary school students in Jordan. The results showed that the participants who were tested in Arabic outperformed their counterparts who took the English test version.

Having reported some relevant literature, it is now possible to observe that very little research was done on SA perceived as a mother tongue by students of English. Previous research seems to have focused on L1 transfer and the role of mother tongue in L2 classes. The question of how learners of English perceive SA as a mother tongue was left untouched.

3. Sample and Method

This qualitative study examines how a sample of Jordanian undergraduate students of English perceives SA as a mother tongue. The sample participants of this study were selected from two major state universities in Jordan. All students were taking English major courses during the first semester of 2013-2014. The total number is (366) students from all year levels. Almost all of the students are of similar socio-economic backgrounds coming from (capital) Amman and urban Irbid district in northern Jordan. All participants are Jordanian citizens residing in Jordan at the time of the study. The students were both female (n=275, %=75.1) and male (n=91, %=24.8) students and between (19-22) years old. Data was collected over a period of four weeks. The students' responses came through short –essay composition tasks, i.e. answering the question: How do you personally feel about Standard Arabic? The essays were written during class time. All data were skimmed through and scanned by the researcher manually. A second reading was conducted in search of insights and themes emerging in the texts submitted with special reference to language attitudes to SA in Jordan.

No attempt was made to make any comparisons between the participants according to any variables such as gender, topic, socio-economic, geographical backgrounds, or year level. This could be the subject of a follow-up study. Statements/phrases were listed throughout the whole data. Color-coding was used to isolate and categorize possible themes covering the attitudes. The researcher attached a theme to each statement or phrase mentioned by a respondent. Content and discourse functional/pragmatic qualitative analysis of the compositions was observed throughout the analysis. Class group-discussions were also conducted after the compositions were written to discuss the issue. Notes were taken as a follow-up support for the analysis. Validation involved consulting with some colleagues and students to check and double check the categorization of statements into the fields. First, all statements were listed as they happened. Then, the researcher conducted initial skimming and scanning of each statement. Second screening to check how each statement was fitting in the hypothesized category of factors. An initial taxonomy was drawn. Then each statement was matched with a possible appropriate category. Some categories were merged after it was discovered that there was little difference between them. The researcher looked into the available international literature to see if there was a model framework to classify the attitudes and factors to issues such as dialects and standard languages. It must be admitted here that the analysis of the accumulating data proved quite challenging as there was a lot of overlapping between the items in the initial framework of categories.

4. Results

Students in the sample were generous in providing quite interesting data on their perceived attitudes towards SA. It was possible to identify at least ten themes under which students' attitudes could be categorized. These categories are presented in the Table (1) below. Although this study is qualitative in nature, some indicators were possible in numerical manner. For each theme the number of students who mentioned and/or commented on this theme was counted and a percentage representing the number out of the total sample was calculated. In addition, the themes were ranked in order to show their degree of significance as indicated by the percentages found. It should be remembered here that individual students were providing data on more than one theme. Percentages represent the number of students who mentioned a particular theme in their essays.

Table 1. Ranked themes of attitudes to SA

Rank	Theme	N	%
1	Status and future of SA	287	78.4
2	The lexical gap	250	68.3
3	Affective feelings	230	62.8
4	Intra-linguistic aspects of SA	215	58.7
5	Inter-cultural impact	185	50.5
6	The religious dimension	167	45.6
7	Perceived imperialism	150	40.9
8	Identity 'crisis'	135	36.8
9	Losing faith in SA	119	32.5
10	Literacy & education	107	29.2
	out of 366		

4.1 Theme One: Status and Future of SA: (n=287; %= 78.4)

The theme that received most of the students' comments was the status and future of SA. The vast majority (n=287; %= 78.4) of the sample members commented on the status of SA and its future. Looking at the discourse used by these students, we observe a major agreement

among the students that SA is in trouble. It is clear that the students feel that SA is dying and may soon become an obsolete language. Interesting vocabulary was actually used by students in the sample. Lexical items like: 'death', 'dying', 'die', 'fade' do indicate that notion of language death or loss. Words such as 'suffering', 'very old', 'ages', 'past', and 'history' are indicative of the idea that if not dying, SA is certainly phasing out. In short, it is evident from the students' responses that they feel that SA is not in good shape due to lack of use. SA is not in current use and maybe the word 'museum' sums up where many students think should go. The following are but a small sample of the students' responses in relation to the first theme.

- *"Arabic will stop spreading finally will fade away."*

- *"Standard Arabic is dying dramatically…"*

- *"It is very old"*

- *" Some Arabic words may feel heavy or old-fashioned to the user*

- *"they consider Arabic old language…"*

- *"Arabic language is suffering"*

- *"The use of Arabic began to fade"*

- *" I do believe that standard Arabic will die in the upcoming future."*

- *"use of Arabic is decreasing"*

- *"They consider it as old language"*

- *"there is no native speaker of the standard Arabic."*

- *"Only educated and literate people are able to communicate with this standard dialect."*

- *"…because there is no official use of our great formal language."*

- *" Therefore, we should preserve languages and dialects from being death…"*

- *"This is a language for museums.."*

- *"Ages have passed.."*

- *"the accent is changed after the ages"*

- *"language of the past history and literature…"*

- *" unusable in these days."*

- *"Rarely we find people speaking the formal Arabic"*

- *"No native speakers of formal Arabic"*

- *"Arabic is not universal."*

- *"we are not using Arabic in studying sciences and academic subjects …So it affects our daily speech"*

- *"Even in writing now people are using hybrid writing using English letters to symbolize Arabic letters"*

- *" we use standard for studying only."*

4.2 Theme Two: The Lexical Gap: (n=250; %=68.3)

It seems that the problem of SA lies in the lexical level, at least in the eyes of students of English at the university level. It seems also that one motive to drift away from SA is the feeling that SA vocabulary is not accessible any more, at least to the young generations in Jordan. Ranking second on the scale of themes came the lexical gap syndrome. This received a big majority of students responses (n=250; %=68.3). SA lexis is accused of being less expressive, heavy, old fashioned or unavailable especially when it comes to scientific vocabulary. This is certainly a big problem for a generation that is bombarded with technology driven terms on a daily basis. The following statements are quoted from the corpus of students' essays. They give an indication of students' attitudes as to the lexicology problem.

- *"to express intellectually for scientific terms she does not know them in Arabic"*

- *"Lack of specific terms in Arabic…"*

- *"Arabic terms s are less expressive."*

- *"Arabic phrases can't give the exact meaning."*

- *"They borrow some terms that are easier from the ones in Arabic."*

- *"Some terms might not exist in Arabic."*

- *"Most of the technology is named in English terms"*

- *"In business they don't have equivalent terms in Arabic"*

- *"Lack of specific terms in their mother tongue"*

- *"Some people think Arabic terms are less expressive."*

- *"many words we don't find an easy Arabic for them"*

- *"Some Arabic words may feel heavy or old-fashioned to the user, so…"*

- *"They feel proud when they use terms from other languages"*

- *"People don't understand some of the vocabulary"*

4.3 Theme Three: Psycholinguistic (Affective) Feelings: (n=230; %=62.8)

The third theme in ranking came what could be termed the Psycholinguistic (Affective) Feelings domain. Almost two thirds of the sample members (62%) expressed psycholinguistic feelings concerning the use of SA. Various emotions were attached to the situation or to the individual who opts to use SA as a means of communication. Vocabulary items such as 'shame' were frequently used in describing how many Arabs feel when or if

they ever use SA. It seems odd as uses of SA are apprehensive of making mistakes or not being understood. It is clear from the discourse of these students that many people, especially the young, have become rather detached from their mother tongue in the form of SA. It is no longer in use in daily communication, and a negative attitude is attached to its use. For many Arabs, their SA seems to have become a foreign odd language that brings feelings of shame and awkwardness. The following are exemplary quotations to further clarify how the students viewed SA as a mother tongue.

- *"We feel shame and embarrassed when speaking formal Arabic."*

- *"Arabs are feeling shame of their language."*

- *"They feel shame of their Arabic language."*

- *"Formal Arabic.... where people feel shy to use or get afraid to make mistakes or make fun of himself in front of others."*

- *"They don't use classic they feel shame because they are accustomed to a certain language"*

- *"They feel shy of their own tongue"*

- *"feel   ashamed of being a third world country."*

- *"Arabs are strongly ashamed of their own language…"*

- *" does not like standard Arabic"*

- *" In fact, people feel ashamed of their standard*

- *"...and Arabic   it feels artificial when used in daily and casual conversations."*

- *"Speaking in standard Arabic makes people look like old fashioned people.*

- *" maybe they feel ashamed of their language."*

- *" In fact, people feel ashamed of their standard"*

- *"They consider anyone who using standard Arabic uncivilized and silly"*

- *"To pretend that they forgot the meaning of a word in Arabic"*

- *"They feel proud when they use terms from other languages"*

- *"I think spoken Arabic gives you opportunity to be normal inside your society and useful."*

- *"Laziness of using basic Arabic"*

4.4 Theme Four: Intra-Linguistic Aspects of SA: (n=215; %=58.7)

More than half (n=215; %=58.7) the sample brought the issue of difficulty as an inherent feature of SA. This theme was ranked in the fourth place judged by the percentage of students who talked about this aspect of SA. Students talked about SA as necessarily hard and difficult

to use as a language of daily communication in Jordanian modern life. It is interesting that they see a foreign language such as English an easier tool of communication. In addition to its 'hard' vocabulary, its grammar is also viewed as complicated. It is described as 'rigid', and similar terms. It can be clearly seen here that SA has lost its 'intelligibility' feature. The attitudes appear to be clearly negative regardless of whether they are founded by any scientific objectivity. To illustrate such views expressed by the sample, the following statements show this theme more clearly.

- *"Arabic is hard."*

- *"Arabic is very vast"*

- *"It's a heavy language."*

- *"Speaking in English is easier than speaking Arabic."*

- *"Arabic is considered to be as one of the most difficult language in the world even for Arabs themselves."*

- *"Standard is hard to be used and to be pronounced also…"*

- *"It is hard to speak our mother tongue."*

- *"Standard Arabic is difficult not everybody could use it correctly."*

- *"Too rigid to use to use it in their conversations"*

- *"People don't understand some of the vocabulary"*

- *"It is difficult to use the classical language to the public that speak slang"*

- *"people…do not have the ability to use standard Arabic"*

- *"Standard Arabic difficult…"*

- *"Arabic very hard and complicated"*

- *"classical Arabic has a lot of grammar that would be hard to use"*

- *"They find the standard Arabic difficult"*

- *"Uneducated people who do not have the ability to use standard Arabic"*

- *"You'd be crazy if you learn standard Arabic.'*

- *They find standard dialect difficult to express their thoughts*

- *"... unusable in these days."*

4.5 Theme Five: Inter-Cultural Impacts: (n=185; %=50.5)

In the fifth place came the theme of inter-cultural influence. The students seemed aware of how SA has been driven away by what is viewed as foreign cultures. Half of the students (n=185; %=50.5) touched on this theme as they wrote their essays on SA. There is a clear

awareness of language and cultural contact as possible influences on SA. The majority see SA as a variety that does not suit the 'modern' life they are leading. The lifestyles of many young Jordanians are viewed as progressive and trendy. SA is seen as a language that has submitted or surrendered to external forces represented by foreign languages and cultures. Interesting words such as 'invasion', 'imitate' and ' import' have been used in assessing the situation. Actually the concept of 'cultural invasion' is frequently used in the discourse of the conservative sectors of the Jordanian community when discussing modern Arab affairs. Interestingly, Britain and America have been specifically mentioned as the sources of the cultural impact.   What follows are examples of actual statements used by the sample students in relation to this theme:

- *"Arabian culture not appropriate in the present"*

- *"Strange cultures to our country"*

- *"Other culture eliminated the classical language"*

- *"English culture interferes in our life"*

- *"amazed of   foreign their culture lifestyle and progressive"*

- *"the culture fell in love with foreign language and culture*

- *"we want to fit in"*

- *"Arabs always imitate the west in their attitudes"*

- *"Arabs are trying to be updated to the new world by replacing some of our origin language into English."*

- *"This is a kind of cultural invasion in everything comes to our life..."*

- *Our culture is affected by their language"*

- *Arab people try to be understood and loved by the other side."*

- *"Imitation blindly"*

- *"Arabs loves to imitate everything from outside the Arab world"*

- *" they feel that the Arabic language does not fit the western world."*

- *"Many arabs are used to live in America"*

- *"They love to travel to Britain"*

- *"Arab countries think that Britain and American are the ones that always win looking at our situation from a political aspect we are failures and usually a failure tries to imitate the successful one."*

- *"The foreign language has spread in the Arab countries"*

- *"Our country always imports."*

4.6 Theme Six: Religious Dimension: (n=167; %= 45.6)

Perhaps, this is the only positive attitude that was apparent in the corpus. Almost half of the sample (n=167; %= 45.6) showed concern for SA from an ideological perspective. The correlation between SA and its status as a symbol was asserted here. Acknowledging the fact SA is the language of the holy Qur'an and the old poetic or literary heritage of the Arab nation. SA seems to be respected not as a tool of daily communication but rather as a language in which one can identify with a religious Islamic heritage. The following are some illustrative examples of how the students expressed their attitudes to SA in relation to this theme:

- *"The language of the Koran"*

- *"If we want to keep the language of Quran, it is hard because we cannot govern generations..."*

- *"Arabic is our language and we should be proud of it."*

- *"...our language which is our Islam language"*

- *"There is no problem with language… the problems are in the people who use it."*

- *"Standard Arabic became used   to Quran and holy books.."*

- *"Arabic standard is based on quran and pre-Islamic poetry"*

4.7 Theme Seven: Perceived Imperialism: (n=50; %= 40.9)

In this theme, students were rather reflecting on possible reasons or factors behind the demise of SA as a tool of communication. This theme was ranked seventh as less than a half (n=50; %= 40.9) of the sample mentioned it as a topic. SA has been portrayed as a victim of imperial effects. A case of language imperialism can be observed here. Students were candidly blaming 'colonization' and 'occupation' as sources of harm targeting SA. It is interesting to note that the term 'brain wash' was used by some students. This clearly shows that the students are aware of historical and political conflicts as factors influencing language use in the Arab World. The following are statements literally quoted showing perceptions of students in the sample:

- *"Their   (colonialism)   tools aim is to obliterate the Arabic standard language"*

- *"Arab countries think that Britain and American are the ones that always win looking at our situation from a political aspect we are failures and usually a failure tries to imitate the successful one."*

- *"Occupation forced its language in education"*

- *"This is effecting our identity and it is all because of the mass media that is washing our brain."*

- *"Arabs are colonized by British and France"*

- *"Colonization made us confuse the accent is changed after the ages"*

- *"colonizing is the mean reason …"*

- *"Colonizing from foreign countries."*

- *"because of the occupation the Arab world faced"*

- *"Historical reasons influence of colonization"*

- *"Jordan was occupied"*

- *"Occupation forced its language in education"*

- *"They think they have alternative which is English"*

- *"Arabs were effected by colonization"*

- *"some people see every American thing and not Arabic it's nice and good."*

- *"Being occupied by others"*

4.8 Theme Eight: Identity 'Crisis':   (n=135; %=36.8)

More than a third (n=135; %=36.8) of the sample students were concerned about the notion of identity. As a young generation, students seem to be caught in an identity crisis. They admit that they do not consider the decline of SA as a result of a total breakdown of their collective self-esteem as a nation. However, they provide rationalizations for neglecting their original mother tongue, but they at the same time do not see themselves as responsible. The decline of SA is, for them, a natural outcome of a perceived lost identity. They portray themselves as a generation who were left with no options other than submitting to local dialects or broken use of a foreign language. The following are some illustrative examples of this aspect of students' perceptions:

- *"People in arab countries have lost their identity when they really lost their own language"*

- *"It will make us lose our heritage"*

- *"A generation that does not respect its own identify"*

- *"A generation ignoring   its identify"*

- *"and we are lost between formal Arabic and spoken local dialog and English words"*

- *"We are a nation that is not proud of its language"*

- *"Arabs lack confidence"*

- *"They think it is reactionary."*

- *"By the use of it they will be backwarders and reactionary."*

- *"Arabs are forgetting their standard..."*

- *"we forgot our original language…"*

- *"Using Arabic all the time gives negative perception."*

4.9 Theme Nine: Losing Faith in SA: (n=119; %= 32.5)

Still, a substantial number of students, approximately a third; (n=119; %= 32.5) showed a theme that can be labeled as 'indifference' or lack of respect to what is supposed to be a mother tongue. Giving up on SA and lack of concern is represented in the statements grouped under this theme. After all it does not seem to matter as they have easy and straightforward options such as local dialects or foreign languages such as English. SA has lost its attraction and cannot be considered a variety associated with prestige or education. It seems to be a thing of the very ancient past that modern Jordanians care less about. The following statements were used by the students who talked about this dimension:

- *"It is a mistrust in our language"*

- *"we don't respect Arabic"*

- *" we actually don't care in losing it"*

- *"arabs people lose their trust of our language*

- *"Arabs lack confidence"*

- *"arabs people lose their respect of our language"*

- *"Standard Arabic no one is concerned about it anymore"*

4.10 Theme Ten: Literacy & Education: (n=107; %=29.2)

The theme that came on the bottom of the scale was indicating the relationship between attitudes to SA and literacy and education. Less than a third of the sample students (n=107; %=29.2) talked about how the educational system let SA down. SA was viewed as influenced by the neglect it received from teachers and educators. SA is not being used in the schools even by the teachers of Arabic. Low literacy levels seen in the neglect of reading and writing among school students was seen as an impact factor on SA. The varieties of Arabic that are used in schools or universities are mainly local spoken dialects. Naturally students graduate with language varieties they actually used in schools rather than the standard language they learned about in a formal way. The following quotations are extracts from what the students wrote:

- *"I-pads tablets androids are spoiling our language.."*

- *"lack of using standard started from school"*

- *"Because they don't read books in classical language"*

- *"People prefer to use the language they are used to."*

- *"Some people feel that they could express and explain their sayings by using words from the language they have learned, because they got used in using it more than their*

original language..."

- *"Arabs are illiterate in standard"*

- *"Teachers don't use standard Arabic in schools"*

5. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Looking at the results of this study, it is possible to note that the students of English showed a clear awareness of the role of SA as their mother tongue and symbol of identity. The students also showed awareness of the effects of globalization and modernization on language use. The students' attitudes towards SA appeared to be apathetic in general. As they see SA rather dying out as a language of daily communication, they seem to be accepting the change to become bilingual and maybe multi-dialectal in their communication. As more communication technology becomes accessible, most of the modern generations find easier alternatives using spoken varieties in vogue, with varying degrees of code switching to English and a new language that is forming these days, i.e. 'Arabizi' (using Roman letters and numbers and emoticons for writing messages and chatting communication. This issue is worth further research. It is clear in the students' discourse that SA is a case of 'language death' in the sense that is discussed in Richards and Schmidt 2002: 288).

In the literature of EFL within the Arab context, it is strange that little research was done on how students feel about their own mother tongue. The available studies usually address how EFL students view the target language, i.e. L2 (English in this case). Attitudes, according to (Johnson & Johnson: 1999:14), "may be formed from haphazard experience. Or they may be the result of deliberate thought. They may conform to cultural or peer-group norms or not. They may exert considerable control over a learner's behavior in numerous ways, and therefore may be related directly or indirectly to levels of achievement." It is not clear, however, how students of English in Jordan do form their attitudes and if such attitudes come as a result 'haphazard experience' or as an effect of other factors coming from school or society. It is not also clear how a diglossic language such as SA may affect the linguistic behaviors of students of English. It is clear that the majority of young Arab learners are diverting away from SA as a mother tongue and replacing it with local vernaculars.

Future research may investigate how illiteracy in SA can affect EFL performance in L2 language using tasks such as translation, reading comprehension, or academic writing. We also need to know how EFL classes are influenced by the use of L1 dialects and /or code-switching between the two languages. In the absence of a unified mother tongue, (cf. Suleiman, (2003:143) and also Suleiman, (1994) and with the continuing steady state of linguistic fragmentation, it is unclear how Arab students of foreign languages would cope with a multitude of mother tongues or L1s. We should also remember Abdulmoneim (2000), who brought to our attention the problem of having more than one clear mother tongue in learning English as a foreign language. Which variety is it that students transfer from? Also, Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) argued that the common assumption in ELT that all learners are fully competent in their first language skills is unfounded. This certainly complicates the problem much further. The issue of L1 interference and the issue of L1 transfer would be

very difficult to deal with as long as the actual mother tongue of EFL learners is not easy to capture.

The results of the current study indicated that the sample students were aware of inherent problems of SA. They could not see SA as a viable mother tongue due to the lexical gap factor. They also associated psycholinguistic variables such as feeling of shame and pride to their attitudes towards SA.   If this is true, then the diglossic dilemma would be very hard to be resolved because language use is deeply rooted in the subconscious domain of modern Arabs. Feelings of inferiority and submission to foreign cultures were used to explain or justify why the modern generations are boycotting their original language. Also, the cultural dimension was very apparent in the discourse of students of this study. A negative attitude seems to be attached to the effect of rather imperialistic cultures and their languages. Future research should take this point further to see how the L2 learning process may be affected by such attitudes. The role of the educational system in shaping students' experiences and attitudes about SA should be the subject of more research. The disappearance of SA as a tool for communication is probably rooted deeply in the educational system. Perhaps school reform efforts should deal with the issue of mother tongue as a medium of learning and teaching in addition to its possible role as a medium of communication.

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