

*Exploring the Linguistic Identity of Lebanese Undergraduates:
Experiences and Perceptions of Lingua Franca Speakers*

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Abstract

Globalization has turned English into the world's dominating lingua franca. Its rapidly-growing spread of English has brought changes to its static rules, replacing by that its national culture with a global one (Dornyei' et al. 2006 as cited in Jenkins, 2007) and leading to a linguistic diversity in the way English is used (Norton & De Costa, 2018). In fact, this change has affected English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) speakers' identity and linguistic practices in the Arab region including Lebanon, a country with diverse and complex affiliations, ideological polarization, and language identities. Thus, from a poststructuralist perspective, the Lebanese ELF speakers are ideal social agents for exploring the relationship between the evolvement of identity and ELF learning. Accordingly, the researchers aim to investigate how the use of ELF has affected the identity and social-linguistic practices of the Lebanese youth. A mixed-methods design is used whereby quantitative and qualitative data are collected through an online self-completion questionnaire and focus group interviews. The participants, purposively selected, consist of 100 Lebanese undergraduates who speak English as a second or third language besides their Arabic mother tongue. The findings reveal that the Lebanese participants are attached to their Arab identity and languages but, at the same time, embrace the linguistic power of English for seeking a successful future. Also, both languages have an impact on the construction of their social identity and linguistic practices. This entails the need for new educational practices that protect the Arabic language without resisting the English language.

Keywords: Arabic Language, Cross-Cultural Identities, Lebanon, English as a Lingua Franca, Undergraduates, Sociolinguistics

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Introduction

Globalization is one main reason behind the complexity and range of identities for speakers (Jenkins, 2007). One face of globalization is the English language, which has become the world's main lingua franca (ELF) as a result of its rapidly increasing global use. The English widespread use has evolved the identity of the language in a sense that its previously imposed linguistic norms and standards have become loose and changeable, resulting in the appearance of new identities for other English speakers who are economically powerful and population wise larger (Asians, Arabs, Europeans, Latin Americans among others) (Jenkins, 2007). Another noticeable factor is that the new global community of Non-Native English speakers (NNS) are not motivated as before to sound like English Native Speakers (NS) nor wish to integrate as the previous generation into the NS English culture. In fact, they have succeeded in building a new identity with the English language in terms of its acquisition and its use with the internal ELF communities (Norton & De Costa, 2018). Such communities project their affiliation to each other linguistically through their ELF (Dornyei et al., 2006 as cited in Jenkins, 2007). Hence, the construction of the new identity of the English language and the emergence of new norms and use within different social contexts explain the new interrelationship between language and attitude, ideology, and power in the postmodern societies as described by Jenkins (2007). On the other hand, it is important to note that despite the linguistic behavior and the linguistic hybridity which ELF speakers negotiate and reconstruct depending on the groups they wish to identify or not to identify with, their ethnic affiliation is not affected at all (Jenkins, 2007).

Poststructuralist research has considered the previously ignored relationship between the effect of social interaction –power relations on the linguistic identity negotiation and reconstruction of speakers and the new values and identity options that are brought about. Thus, according to post-structuralist, the linguistic identity is not fixed, and it is reconstructed or constrained depending on the context of its use and the social relationships of interlocutors (Jenkins, 2007; Norton & De Costa, 2018). Accordingly, Norton and De Costa (2018) explain that understanding globalization and the impact of the new forces of neoliberalism across the different domains of life helps in the development of research on language and identity. The rise of English and other major languages such as Chinese, Arabic, and Spanish which are “bolstered by globalization and technology... makes an investigation on lingua franca timely” (Norton & De Costa, 2018, p. 101). Accordingly, this is one of the rationales behind conducting the current study, which investigates the negotiation of identities and the change of the socio-linguistic practices of the Lebanese ELF undergraduates, a generation which is highly impacted by globalization and neoliberalism in the Arab region. The findings are also significant since they fill a gap in the literature due to the shortage of such studies in Lebanon. They are going to pave the way for more needed studies that enhance our understanding of how linguistic identities in Lebanon have evolved, got reconstructed over time, and impacted the learners' linguistic practices.

Lebanon is a middle eastern country with a diverse and complex nature of ethnic, religious, and political affiliations, ideological polarization, and language identities, mainly Arabic (Standard Arabic and Lebanese Arabic), French, English, and Armenian. Moreover, Lebanon's geographical location makes it open to the global world on different levels locally, regionally, and internationally. Although Arabic is the official language of the country, foreign language learning, especially English (which is more of a lingua franca now), is considered essential for citizens to acquire and a pre-requisite in top-universities and high- ranking jobs. English and French, part of the school curriculum and delivered either as a first or second foreign language

depending on the learner's choice (Saba 'Ayon & Harb, 2022a; Saba 'Ayon & Harb, 2022b), are also essential for the Lebanese' continuous immigration plans due to the financial, economic, and political crises the country has been suffering from. Lebanon's linguistic landscape is bilingual; street signs, billboards, shop signs, street/district names are in English and Standard Arabic among few French-Arabic ones. Moreover, the spread of Arabizi¹ is considered as a normal way of communication on social media platforms.

Thus, from a poststructuralist perspective of identity, the Lebanese ELF speakers are ideal social agents for exploring the relationship between the evolvement of identity and ELF acquisition and use.

Literature Review

Research on language and identity has been increasing in the Arab region, particularly in the Gulf due to the cosmopolitan nature of these countries and the influx of expatriates from Anglophone and English-speaking countries among others. Researchers have been interested in studying the cross-cultural identities experienced by the ELF Gulf youths as a result of the sociocultural role English has had in their daily communication not only because of globalization but also due to the technological development, the economic growth, and the industrial and urban change witnessed.

Hayat and AlBader (2022) explored the linguistic identity negotiation of the ELF Kuwaiti youth and the rapidly spread phenomenon of code-switching among them. More specifically, they aimed to explain the change of attitude of Kuwaiti's youth towards their Kuwaiti Arabic (KA) and the English language. In their study, the two researchers focused on "McChickens" cohort or code-switching youths, who are bilinguals yet use English even when it is not required. The results showed that the majority of the participants prefer to teach their children both languages in the future. Moreover, some participants felt ashamed of not being proficient enough in expressing themselves, reading and writing in Standard Arabic (SA). They are immersed in Western culture and media and thus tend to relate better with such views than those held by their parents. Furthermore, most participants expressed their comfort with English in contrast to that of Arabic and its complex grammar and vocabulary. The findings on the discomfort with the challenges of the SA also align with Al-Issa's (2017) results which showed that 57% of the Emirati participants did not feel comfortable with writing in Arabic because their education was mainly in English. However, 97% of them wanted to be Arabic literate because it is their cultural heritage, showing by that an ethnic affiliation as per Jenkin's (2007) description.

Other Kuwaiti participants in Hayat and AlBader's (2022) study described their linguistic identity change when social-authority relationship changes with the speakers. For example, they use KA when talking with their grandparents and English when talking with their friends, cousins, or colleagues. During Ramadan month, they are more exposed to SA since it's the language of the holy Quran.

The Kuwaiti's attitude towards the Arabic language contradicts with that of the Qatari participants (Ellili-Cherif and Alkateeb, 2015 as cited by Mustafawi et al., 2021), who consider Arabic as more effective for learning and achieving success at university. Within the same context, Mustafawi et al. (2021) investigated the perceptions and attitudes of Qatari University

¹ The use of Roman numbers and letters to represent Arabic letters

students towards English and Arabic. The researchers found that Arabic was rated higher for media language preference, value and symbolism of Arabic, Arabic in education and society, medium of instruction, Qatar culture identity, and manifestations of sociocultural identity. On the other hand, English was perceived as more useful than Arabic in scientific and professional communication. Mustafawi et al. (2021) concluded that although the Qataris are aware of the value and importance of English across different essential domains, they have no concern about the impact of English on their national and social identity as well as their cultural heritage.

Moving to the Emirati context, Hopkyns (2016) investigated the impact of English on Emirati university students' attitude, culture and identity. The findings show that for the participants, English was mainly connected with the wider international business and modern world, education, communication, and entertainment. Arabic was more associated with religion, culture, family, history, traditional authenticity, and emotions. As for the participants' attitude towards English, the majority had a positive attitude since it was useful and necessary for learning. However, few participants showed concern about its negative impact on the Arabic language. As for the impact of English on participants' lives, identity, and culture, 80% confirmed changes or slight changes on their lives, and 57% believed the Emirati culture was affected. As for the change in identity, the participants were divided between 50% who confirmed it and 50% who negated it. The changes were both positive (more open-mindedness, knowledge, confidence, opportunities) and negative (outfit style, behavior like foreigners/Americans, less use of Arabic, fear of loss of Arabic). As for those who did not express a change in their identity, they did not perceive English as a threat but rather a useful tool for them. Finally, 77% of the participants were interested in learning about the Western culture as part of their English courses.

In a more recent study, Hopkyns et al. (2020) investigated Emirati millennials' attitude towards mixing their languages, the domains they mix languages in, and the extent to which they do that. The findings show that the majority use Arabic at home and with friends. English and Arabic were equally used with helpers and drivers. At the university, the majority used both languages: writing, presentations, reading/finding sources, and taking notes under pressure. However, in public spaces English was used more. In entertainment and online contexts, the English use dominated too. On the other hand, both languages were equally used on social media of friendship groups. The two highly rated reasons behind translanguaging were: 1) it's comfortable and has become a second nature and 2) some words are not easy to translate. As to the participants' attitudes to translanguaging use, 33% disapproved of it and considered it as confusing and distorting. Few participants voiced their concern over the loss of Arabic as a result of translanguaging. As for Arabizi, 55% declared using it and more than 52% felt bad about its use because of its negative implication on the Arabic language in terms of purity, correctness, and existence. Other participants felt comfortable with Arabizi, considering it an emerging fact of life which has become ordinary and normal. Hence, Hopkyns et al. (2020) conclude that although linguistic hybridity was viewed as normal and part of their daily lives, Emirati millennials had mixed attitude towards it. Some viewed it from a pragmatic perspective, while others showed a firm monolingual ideology about it.

Dahan (2017) states that language for so many people does not solely determine a person's identity. It is not a major identity marker but rather a tool that helps in constructing their social identities. When it comes to SA, there are many factors that stand in its way as an identity marker for Arabs because it is almost not used in their daily conversations. This is in addition to the fact that the conversational local Arabic has many dialects and diglossic nature which vary from one country to another. Driven by this situation, Dahan (2017) examined how

students, coming from different Arab nationalities, in one of the UAE universities, perceived their Arabic identity and the extent to which they consider their Arabic language as an identity marker. The majority of participants agreed that their identity was an Arab one, and 49% declared that their identity was based on Arabic language. The majority believed that other factors, namely culture (78%) and ethnicity (77%) contributed to their Arab identity. Qualitative findings revealed other markers related mostly to family, besides history, traditions, experiences, origins, mentality and behavior. The researcher concludes that a new perspective towards the Arab identity has risen among the Arab youth which is beyond the use of Arabic language, especially that many were not proficient in using it. For these people, being an Arab is what defines their Arab identity. Finally, the participants viewed English positively for its effectiveness in education, research, and communication and did not see it as a detractor from their heritage and identity.

Research Questions

Based on the above literature, it is interesting to find out about the perceptions of the Lebanese youth, another Arab population that tends to negotiate its identity and change its sociolinguistic practices. Hence, the following main and sub-research questions guided this research study:

How has English as a lingua franca (ELF) affected the Lebanese youth identity?

1. To what extent do the participants view Arabic and English from a different perspective and attitude?
2. To what extent has ELF affected the participants' Arab identity?
3. To what extent has ELF affected the linguistic identity and practices of participants?

Methodology and Methods

Because the problem addressed in this study is complex, the researchers employed the mixed-methods design, which includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. By doing so, the researchers aimed to provide "an expanded understanding" of the research problem (Creswell, 2009, p. 203).

Data-Collection Methods

For the quantitative data, the researchers used an online self-completion questionnaire that consisted of four parts adapted from different sources presented in the literature review section. The first part, consisting of 6 multiple-choice questions, solicits information about the participants' demographics. The second part, 23 rating-scale questions, is about the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards English and Arabic. As to the third part, it consists of 8 multiple-choice questions and 5 rating-scale about language use and identity reconstruction. Finally, the fourth part, 38 multiple-choice questions, is about the language participants use with different interlocutors and in different situations.

To get deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions and attitudes, the researchers complemented the quantitative data with 3 focus-groups interviews, each of which consisted of 7 participants who expressed their willingness to take part in these interviews. The transcriptions were emailed to these participants for validation.

Participants

The researchers purposively selected 200 undergraduates, residing in the country for at least 3 years, from private Lebanese universities located in different parts of the country to ensure diversity in the sample. Unfortunately, despite the reminders sent to encourage participation, only 100 students returned their completed questionnaires but were not as diverse as the researchers had expected in terms of religious affiliation, age group and gender as seen in the following table.

	Gender			Age			Religion ²					
	M	F	O	17-20	21-23	24-27	S	SH	D	M	O	N
Frequency	63	35	2	71	23	5	70	10	13	2	1	3

Table 1: Description of Participants

The 100 participants, who are almost all native speakers of Arabic, are fluent at least in one foreign language (English or French), mostly English. They have learned the standard Arabic and two foreign languages (1st & 2nd foreign language) in school, and they have received instruction in subject matters in the foreign language as early as primary classes (See table 2 below).

	Native Language			1 st Foreign Language			2 nd Foreign Language ³				
	A	F	E	A	F	E	A	F	E	O	NA
Frequency	98	1	1	1	25	74	1	25	22	14	38

Table 2: Languages Spoken by the Participants

Data Analysis

Using SPSS (version 23), the quantitatively- collected data were analyzed mainly descriptively for overall trends and patterns. As to the qualitative data, the participants' responses are being transcribed and thematically coded (in progress). Then the conclusions derived from both analyses will be triangulated. The similarities found between these conclusions would contribute to the validity of the findings.

Findings

In this paper, only quantitative data are presented. These findings are presented in four sub-sections, namely participants' perceptions of Standard Arabic (SA), English and Arab culture; participants' perceptions of their identity; participants' English language use and identity reconstruction; and participants' linguistic practices with different participants as well as in different situations.

Participants' Perceptions of SA, English and Arab Culture

Participants' Perceptions of SA. The participants seem not to be aware of the status of SA in public offices, in the Lebanese society and internationally. For example, less than half (49%) believe that SA is more important than English in Lebanese public offices, where SA is only

² S: Sunni; SH: Shiite; D: Druze; M: Maronite; O: Others; N: Choose not to answer

³ A: Arabic; F: French; E: English; O: Others; NA: Not applicable

the medium of written communication. In addition, only 42% and 45% agree that SA is respected nationally and internationally respectively when SA is one of the six languages used in the United Nations. The majority of the participants (67%) don't believe that using Arabic as the medium of instruction in math and science could facilitate their learning of these subjects. Though the participants were almost equally divided about the difficulty of SA (44% vs. 46%), the majority (90%) consider SA a true symbol of Arab identity and culture, and more than half believe that a native Lebanese must master the Arabic language (see Table 3).

Items	CA/ A	NS	D/ CD ⁴
1. SA is more useful than English in public offices	49%	19%	32%
2. SA is useful than English in most private offices & companies	76%	15%	9%
3. Students would better learn sciences & math if instructed in Arabic	8%	25%	67%
4. SA is too difficult	44%	10%	46%
5. The Lebanese society highly respects the SA	42%	34%	25%
6. SA is highly respected internationally	45%	28%	28%
7. SA is the true symbol of Arab identity & culture	90%	3%	7%
8. A native Lebanese must master the Arabic Language	59%	27%	14%

Table3 : Participants perceptions of SA⁵

Participants Perceptions of English. The participants seemed to think highly of English. To them, it helps them communicate with diverse people (72%) and contributes more to their professional life than SA (82%). The majority relate fluency in English to feeling superior to others who don't speak the language as fluently (69%), and they even believe that a person cannot take a high position in the workplace without being proficient in English (62%). Most of them (71%) believe that English will be the only language used in business/technology in the future. More information is presented in Table 4.

Items	CA/ A	NS	D/ CD
1.English is more important to me than SA as it helps me communicate with more people in terms of number and variety	72%	13%	15%
2. Being fluent in English makes a person feel superior to others who aren't as fluent in this language	69%	6%	25%
3. It's not possible for a person to be at a high level in the fields of sciences, business or engineering without being proficient in English	62%	16%	22%
4. English will be the only appropriate language to be used in business/technology in the near future	71%	13%	15%
5. English is more important than SA for my professional life	82%	7%	11%
6. I prefer learning English to learning SA	55%	25%	20%

Table 4 : Participants' perceptions of English

Participants' Perceptions of Lebanese/Arab Culture. As shown in Table 5, the majority of the participants (81%) believe that the influence of English/American culture is evident in some cultural aspects in Lebanon, and half of the participants (50%) consider that the use of English in different sectors both threatens the Arab culture in Lebanon and is a sign of a weakened Arab culture.

⁴ CA/A: Completely agree/ agree; NS: Not sure; D/CD: Disagree/completely disagree

⁵ Numbers are rounded in tables

Items	CA/ A	NS	D/ CD
1.Using English in different sectors threatens the Arabic culture in Lebanon	50%	22%	28%
2. Our continuous use of English is a sign of a weakened Arab culture	50%	18%	32%
3. The English/American culture is clearly evident in some cultural aspects in Lebanon	81%	13%	6%

Table 5 : Participants' perceptions of Lebanese /Arab Culture

Participants' Perceptions of Their Identity

As to the participants' identity, the majority (93%) consider themselves to be mainly Arabs, and 95 % of them are proud of their Arab identity. Most of them (68%) believe that this Arab identity is evident in the Lebanese culture. However, half of them (50%) consider teaching all subjects in English weakens the cultural identity of students (see Table 6 below). This could explain why those participants feel that using English is threatening to the Arabic culture (as presented in the previous section).

Items	CA/ A	NS	D/ CD
1.I am proud to be an Arab	95%	3%	2%
2. The Arab identity is clearly evident through some aspects of the Lebanese culture	68%	30%	3%
3. Teaching all subjects in English weakens the cultural identity of students	50%	22%	28%

Table 6: Participants' perceptions of their identity

In addition, the majority of the participants (88%) consider the Arabic language as a defining feature of their identity, which aligns with their perceptions about SA as a true symbol of Arab identity and culture (presented earlier). However, they also believe that there are other contributing factors to their Arab identity, namely historical role of Arabs (76%), interconnectedness of Arabs (55%), economic achievements (21%), and political achievements (19%).

Participants' Language Use and Identity Reconstruction

Though a lot of the participants believe that speaking English has affected neither the way they relate to their families (58%) nor their attitudes towards Arab culture (62%), the majority believe that it helped them understand world events (99%) and affected their attitudes towards the Western culture (58%). However, about one third of them (33%) are concerned about their Arab identity as a result of speaking more English than Arabic (see Table 7).

Items	CA/A	NS	D/CD
1.Speaking English has helped me understand world events	99%	0%	1%
2.Speaking English has affected the way I relate to my family	15%	27%	58%
3.Speaking English has affected my attitude towards Arab culture	20%	18%	62%
4.Speaking English has affected my attitude towards Western Culture	58%	18%	23%
5. Speaking English more than Arabic makes me feel concerned about my Arab identity	33%	22%	45%

Table 7: Impact of English language use on identity and culture

When the participants were asked about what language/languages help them think better; express their feelings; or really express who they are, their answers reflect evolution of identity among some of the participants as they selected both languages (English and Arabic) as seen in the table below. However, the language that most represent who they are is Arabic.

Items	Arabic	English	Both	Depends	Others
1. I find that I think better when I use	27%	14%	32%	25%	1%
2. When it comes to expressing my feelings, I prefer to use	44%	24%	31%	0%	1%
3. The language that really expresses who I am best is	57%	19%	22%	0%	2%

Table 8: Participants' language use and identity reconstruction

Despite their comfort to use English, the majority still consider themselves to be mainly Arabs as shown in Table 9.

Item	Arab	Arab & Western	More Western	Neither
When it comes to my culture I consider myself	76%	16%	7%	1%

Table 9 : Participants' Main Culture

At the same time half of the participants (50%) consider themselves as belonging to both Arab and Western cultures (see Table 10).

Item	Yes	No
I consider myself belonging to both Arab and Western cultures	50%	50%

Table 10: Participants' belonging to Arab & Western cultures

Participants' Linguistic Practices

The findings in this sub-section relates to the participants' language choices with different interlocutors and in different situations.

According to Table 11, the participants use mainly the Lebanese Arabic (LA) with members of the family, friends, partners, table attendant, doctor and helper. However, they use more English (ENG) with their teachers and superiors. It's worthy to note that another language variety, namely Arabizi (AZ), is becoming common among the Lebanese youth: siblings, friends and partners.

Interlocutors	SA	LA	ENG	FR/O	AZ
1. Mother	8%	63%	8%	4%	17.2%
2. Father	11%	68%	7%	1%	13%
3. Siblings	4%	47%	23%	5%	21%
4. Grandpa	12%	81%	3%	0%	5%
5. Grandma	10%	78%	6%	1%	5%
6. Friends	5%	40%	27%	6%	22%
7. Partner	5%	43%	28%	3%	22%
8. Teacher	11%	26%	54%	4%	6%
9. Superior	7%	33%	53%	6%	2%
10. Table attendant	6%	45%	42%	4%	3%
11. Doctor	3%	47%	38%	6%	6%
12. Helper	6%	50%	33%	4%	7%

Table 11: Languages used with different interlocutors

As to the language/languages used in different situations, the Lebanese Arabic was mostly used when talking about religion, telling jokes, insulting, greeting, expressing anger, and ordering food in a restaurant. However, English was mainly used when talking about scientific topics, completing a job/university application, taking notes, writing personal letters/emails, posting on social media, watching news/reading books/articles, reading for pleasure, discussing academic materials, surfing the internet, and watching movies. In some situations, English and Lebanese Arabic were almost equally used such as talking about intimate topics, flirting/complimenting, checking in a hotel/hospital, speaking to a coworker/classmate, and discussing taboos. Nonetheless, in certain other situations, namely chatting, writing text messages, posting comments on social media, and telling jokes, the newly developed language variety, Arabizi, was named besides English and was even used more than the Lebanese Arabic (see Table 12 for further information).

Situations	SA	LA	ENG	FR/O	AZ
1. To talk about religion	24%	55%	13%	2%	6%
2. To talk about intimate topics	8%	42%	40%	2%	8%
3. To talk about a scientific topic	8%	20%	65%	5%	2%
4. To tell jokes	9%	59%	16%	2%	15%
5. To insult someone	5%	58%	26%	2%	9%
6. To greet someone	8%	50%	31%	3%	8%
7. To flirt/compliment	7%	43%	40%	3%	8%
8. To express anger	5%	61%	23%	2%	9%
9. To order food in a restaurant in Lebanon	4%	52%	34%	4%	7%
10. To check in a hotel/hospital in Lebanon	7%	50%	40%	2%	2%
11. To complete a job application	12%	7%	74%	5%	2%
12. To complete a university application/petition	8%	4%	82%	4%	1%
13. To take note while reading	8%	16%	57%	1%	18%
14. To write a personal letter/email	11%	5%	77%	2%	5%
15. To post comments on social media	7%	16%	48%	2%	28%
16. To chat	6%	26%	32%	3%	33%
17. To write text messages	7%	22%	37%	2%	32%
18. to read a newspaper/watch news programs	24%	21%	48%	3%	4%
19. To read a book/article	23%	8%	61%	5%	4%
20. To speak to a coworker/classmate	2%	46%	39%	4%	10%
21. To discuss academic material	6%	32%	53%	3%	5%
22. To read for pleasure	22%	19%	54%	2%	4%
23. To discuss taboos	11%	40%	43%	1%	7%
24. To surf topics on the internet	19%	7%	65%	6%	4%
25. To watch movies	11%	18%	64%	6%	2%
26. To listen to songs	15%	30%	45%	8%	2%

Table 12: Languages used in different situations

Discussion

The Lebanese participants showed a sentimental feeling towards their national language. The majority believed that SA is a true symbol of their Arab identity and culture. Their ethnic affiliation was revealed in their belief that every native Lebanese should master the Arabic language. However, less than half believe that SA is respected nationally and internationally. Moreover, the majority did not show preference to Arabic as a language of instruction and learning probably due to its difficulty to learn as acknowledged by half of them. This attitude is also shared with other regional participants who preferred English in acquiring their education such as those in the studies of Hopkyns (2016), Al Issa (2017), Dahan (2017), Mustafawi et al. (2021), and Hayat and AlBader (2022). Also, in alignment with the studies cited, the majority of the Lebanese participants not only confirmed the gatekeeper role the English language plays in the professional life and in the business, technology and communication sectors, but they also related English fluency to distinction and superiority to others, hence, reflecting by that the prestige the Lebanese correlate with foreign language acquisition. Moreover, the majority confirmed the positive impact of English on their social identity as they became more interested in the Western culture and more comprehensive about world events. This social change in identity aligns with Hopkyns (2016), Dahan (2017), and Hayat and AlBader (2022) studies.

The findings also showed that almost all the participants identified themselves as Arabs and reflected pride about that. More specifically, they saw themselves as Arabs mainly because of their families, nationalities, and religion. Moreover, the majority viewed Arabic as a defining feature for their identity and the language that best described who they are. They saw it as a true symbol of the Arab culture. Nevertheless, they acknowledged other contributing factors that defined their identity, the two most highly rated of which are the “historical role of Arabs” and “the interconnectedness of Arabs.” However, although the majority felt proud of their ethnicity, half of the participants considered that they belonged to both Arab and western cultures. This reflects how the variety of their linguistic identities is shaping their perspective and behavior as they are interested in the western culture but not at the expense of losing their ethnic affiliation with the Arabic language. Thus, similar to so many youths in the Gulf regions (as per; Hopkyns, 2016; Dahan, 2017; Hopkyns et al., 2020; Mustafawi, 2021; Hayat & AlBader, 2022), English for the participants does not impose any threat on their identity because its role is purely instrumental. Moreover, their control of their different linguistic identities and their attachment to the Arabic language and ethnicity reflected their lack of concern about the future of the language. The majority of participants were not concerned about the impact of English on the Arabic culture, and only one third seemed worried about the Arab identity in Lebanon amidst the rising use of the English language across different sectors. Such confidence is also shared by the youth in other Arab regions as found by Hopkyns (2016), Dahan (2017), and Mustafawi et al. (2021). Accordingly, English is to be seen as an “ally to Arabic rather than a competitor” (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015, p. 21 as cited in Hopkyns, 2016).

When it comes to the linguistic practices of participants, the findings show that they vary depending on the social context and the social power between speakers. The participants use LA mainly with family members who represent authority figures like their parents and grandparents. LA is also more used than English with participants’ siblings, friends, partners, helpers, and in some other settings like with their physicians and public places. Such areas of use for the local Arabic language are similar to those described by Hopkyns (2006), Dahan (2017), Hayat and AlBader (2017), and Hopkyns et al. (2020). However, the current study showed a higher percentage of the use of the local Arabic with friends, in public spaces, and at university than did other studies done in the Gulf. One reason might be that Gulf countries are more cosmopolitan than Lebanon. Another possibility is the percentages, as well as the language used in this study, might have been different had the scope of participants been wider.

In terms of the Arabic use, the Lebanese participants connected it with religion as was found by Hopkyns et al. (2020) and Hayat and AlBader (2022). Similar to the Emirati context explored by Hopkyns (2016) and Dahan (2017), the Lebanese participants were more comfortable with the local Arabic when involved with emotive situations related to expressing emotions, greeting, telling jokes, or showing anger. On the other hand, English was highly rated across domains related to university/job applications, education, entertainment, internet exploration, reading, sending emails, and social media. Translanguaging and Arabizi were also normalized by the participants, especially when chatting, text messaging or communicating with people of the same age group. The participants’ positive attitude towards linguistic hybridity “negates concepts such as language purity or native-speaker norms and challenges the implied hierarchy which accompany such notions” (Hopkyns et al., 2020, p. 14).

Conclusion

Lebanon is a middle eastern country with a diverse and complex nature in terms of religious, ethnic, political, and ideological affiliations and polarization. Adding to this diversity, many of its youths are either bilingual or trilingual, using mainly English and/or another foreign language with Arabic. Just like the other Arab youths in the Arab countries, the Lebanese undergraduates are witnessing the increasing use of English as a lingua franca across the different domains of their life. Thus, all of these various factors that shape the background of the Lebanese undergraduates might have an impact on how they define their identity and align it with their linguistic practices. Accordingly, the researchers aimed to investigate to what extent the use of English as a lingua has impacted the identity and the social linguistic practices of the Lebanese undergraduates who have been residing in Lebanon for more than three consecutive years. This paper explores only the quantitative findings as the qualitative results are still under analysis.

The findings show how the Lebanese context is rich with linguistic dualism when it comes to the use of English and Arabic. Both languages are part of the daily communication of the participants, each prominent in different domains. Also, just like the other undergraduate youths in the Arab peninsula, the Lebanese participants appreciate the value and symbolism of the Arabic language. Participants also view English as a linguistic power and a key to success for their future career. In fact, its prominent role in the Lebanese communication reflects the impact of globalization and Westernization on the Lebanese youth.

The Lebanese participants show a new understanding of the relationship between language and identity. For them, language is not the only factor that shapes one's "broad" identity, especially that not all of them are proficient in SA. Their Arab identity is shaped by a mixture of identity markers, hence, aligning by that with the post-structuralist perception of identity and its several defining factors.

The use of Translingualism and Arabizi is also an evidence on how English has currently shaped the identity of participants as a result of their conscious language switch and language mix that happen with the variation of the social context. Their comfort with and acceptance of language hybridity project the unsustainability notion of language purity. So, as scholars, we need to embrace the linguistic change in order to avoid the loss of our languages.

Limitations and Recommendations

In general, the findings derived from the Lebanese participants align with those unveiled by other studies done in the Arab region. Consequently, the calls for the need to protect the Arabic language without resisting English should continue in order to preserve the local identities of the Arab youths. Stakeholders who are responsible for giving English a dominating role in the Lebanese education should carefully study the impact of such practice on the Lebanese national language, identity, and culture amidst the invasion of the English language across all aspects of the Lebanese society. Bilingual approaches in classrooms should be on the academic agenda of scholars, especially that it helps bridge the gap between learners coming from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds, who differ in their English language education and their attitude towards English and Arabic. In this way, both languages are empowered and maintained.

As for the limitation of the study, though the researchers used purposive- sampling technique, the sample was not as diverse as the researchers had expected. Like any non-probability

sampling technique, this could have affected the findings and hence their generalizability. That's why the researchers are going to conduct a complementary study on a wider scope to guarantee a more probability sample from different Lebanese regions and with different religious and political affiliations.

Moreover, though the questionnaire was piloted, the researchers found out from the quality of the answers that quite a few participants got confused among the 3 varieties of Arabic (SA, LA, & AZ). Also, few participants found difficulty answering the questionnaire items because, according to them, this was the first time they probe deep into who they are and how they view their relationship with their native language. They have never been asked about their identity, and the study was an eye-opener of their perceptions.

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