

IMPLICATIONS OF NEW GULF ENGLISH IN DUBAI

By: Dr. Yassin M.A. Ibrahim
University of Kerbala

1. Introduction

English is considered as an international language, basically because it functions as a symbol of modernisation and has a wide use in international business, technology, science, travel, and so on. Kachru (1986: 21) remarks in his article 'The functions of the English language today' that many and perhaps the majority of third world countries and new nations have adopted English as an official language or second language. Platt (1984: 13) focused on this point in his article 'The Role of English' stating that:

The choice of English as an official language in many of the new nations is not surprising as it has become, the world over, a language for international communication, diplomacy, and business dealings. It has been one of the major languages used for scientific and technological research and publication.

In multilingual countries or nations, the English language can be considered a neutral language of communication and must be looked at against the background of the other languages of the region with which it shares its functions in the community as Platt (op. cit.) referred to the situation of English in Nigeria.

Dubai can either refer to an emirate in the eastern Arabian Peninsula, or that emirate's main city, sometimes called 'Dubai city' to distinguish it from the emirate.

Dubai has a diverse and multilingual society. The city's multilingual imprint as a small, ethnically homogenous community was changed with the arrival of other ethnic groups and nationals — first by the Iranians in the early 1900s, and later by Indians and Pakistanis in the 1960s (see Dubai, Culture, *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*). The majority of local people in Dubai used to be uneducated Arabs and Bedouin whose main resources of living were only trade, fishing, and diving for pearls.

Now Dubai is a rich and multilingual city where the English language is used as a vehicle for communication among local people whose native L1 (first language) is Arabic, immigrants whose L1 is Urdu, Hindi, Farsi, etc., and for whom Arabic is an L2 (second language), and residents whose native and L1 are Arabic, English German, French, etc. They work for a period of time and leave Dubai after the expiry of their job contracts. In other words, Dubai citizens, namely, local people and immigrants are making the English language 'lingua franca' to communicate with other western residents – not just the native English speaking residents. Smith (1983: 7) focusing on a similar situation, remarks that 'Many countries are making English their lingua franca to communicate with the rest of the world - not just the native English speaking world'.

Although no studies have been undertaken to ascertain the frequency and range of English usage in Dubai, intuition suggests that English is dominant in most aspects of life in Dubai, both professional and private. Accordingly, the English language should be promoted so that Dubai citizens can function effectively in the language.

However, I relied in this study on analogies between the position of the English language in Dubai and other parts of the world such as West Africa, Singapore, South Asia, etc.

2. Multilingualism in Dubai Society

During the last two decades, Dubai has emerged as one of the rich and developed city in the region. It must be admitted that after discovering oil, many experts as well as

workers from abroad, in particular, from the western world with various languages and cultures have been brought to contribute to the progress of Dubai. This diversity helped to create a multilingual

society in the city. Although no studies have been undertaken to ascertain this situation there, intuition suggests that one may find oneself speaking more than two languages or dialects in order to communicate effectively with other people.

At this stage, one should maintain that many languages are used in Dubai society such as Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Farsi, etc., by local people and immigrants, whereas English, French, German, etc., are used by many residents. However, it must be admitted that Arabic and English are the only two languages used as a medium of communication by the vast majority of people there. This situation resembles – to a certain extent – what Kachru (1981: 2-18) stresses in the conclusion of his article, 'Language Policy in South Asia', that 'whatever the total number of languages and dialects in the region, there are only two languages which cut across linguistic, ethnic, and political boundaries'.

Local people and immigrants are sometimes obliged to use English rather than Arabic to communicate effectively with non-Arab residents as English is a simplified language. Aitchison (1987: 116) refers to this point in her article, 'Multilingual communities' by saying:

Multilingual societies in which all the speakers are proficient in all languages spoken are sometimes of a rarity. Quite often, one language or simplified language is adopted as a common means of communication.

Local people and immigrants also use English rather than Arabic in order not to be isolated from non-Arab residents and because English is dominant in most sectors of their daily life despite the fact that this may work against nationalism. In this respect one may agree with Fasold (1984: 48) that although 'multilingualism may work against nationalism, on the other hand, it provides individuals with international resources and societies with social and cultural enrichment'. In fact,

Dubai is today an enormously complex linguistic area where multilingualism can be traced in all spheres of life.

3. Uses of English in Dubai

English has attained the status of an important language in Dubai for similar reasons to those identified by Kachru (1982: 327) for South Asia: 'English symbolises elitism, prestige and modernity'. So, local people in Dubai are so keen to take great pride in their ability to use English. They also use English among themselves as well as in the presence of native English speakers to emphasise that they are highly educated people.

Dubai is a multilingual city and the situation there may be described as one involving a variety of unrelated languages, each with its own literary tradition. English is used in most spheres of life in Dubai by many more speakers of diverse linguistic origin. This may agree with what Pride (1982: 56-59) emphasises in his studies on uses of English in Singapore that 'English has not only become a more widely used language in many spheres of life; it has also come to be used by many more speakers of diverse linguistic origins, differing proficiency and so on'. In this concern, one may suggest that English is used with varying degrees of competence by members of Dubai society.

English has a wide spectrum of domains in Dubai. It is mainly used in the workplace domain. A worker may not be able to find a job in an oil company, for instance, unless he speaks English fluently. The more fluently he speaks, the more efficiently he does his job. In other words, English may be called a working language (Pride, op. cit.).

English functions as a language of wider communication both in the professional sectors as well as in the private sectors of Dubai. It is used in designing, planning, or devising projects mainly in the oil companies. Should one lack English proficiency, he/she may find it difficult to reserve a seat in an aeroplane at a travel agency. English appears to be used when the

vendor is Indian, Pakistani, or Iranian and the shopper is Arab or any resident who does not speak the same language. This situation might agree with what Platt focused upon in his study on Singapore English.

In Dubai it would be better that addresses on envelopes are written in English as well as Arabic because some of the employees or officials who work at the post offices are either Indian or Pakistani. Private schools are multilingual. Arab teachers and students use English as a medium of communication with other non-Arabs such as Indians, Pakistanis, Iranians and other minorities inside schools whether they are students, employees, or sometimes teachers. Nowadays most local people in Dubai prefer employing servants in their houses from India, Pakistan, Indonesia or Philippine as they charge low wages and can speak little English in addition to their mother tongue. So, local people need training in the use of English to communicate with their servants effectively. Smith (op. cit.: 35) reminds us that in third world countries 'non-native speakers of English need training in the use of English not just with native speakers, but with non-native speakers as well'. Therefore, it seems that there is a widespread agreement among the general public in Dubai that speaking English makes people accessible to other members and institutions of the society.

4. Some Features of Gulf English in Dubai

Obviously, in a multilingual society like Dubai, there is a manifestation of interference of L1 (mother tongue) elements into English. As a result, a new variety of Gulf English is emerging in Dubai which implies a mixture of Gulf Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Pakistani and English. Gulf English, one may imagine, has been influenced by the mother tongue of its speakers. Although no research has been undertaken in Dubai to ascertain this phenomenon, studies done in similar situations could support this issue. For instance, Todd (1982: 119-133) attracts attention to English used in

Cameroon stating that, 'all varieties of Cameroon English are influenced by the mother tongues of their speakers'. Here, one should add that Gulf English is functionally different from other new Englishes in its phonological as well as in its lexical and syntactic features.

In what follows a certain amount of light will be thrown on two main points, namely, phonological features and lexical and syntactic features of Gulf English.

4.1. Phonological Features

As long as 'standard English constitutes the unifying element within the enormous diversity of the English language' (Smith, op. cit.: 88), most people in Dubai prefer to attempt to approximate standard British English in their daily life. However, several phonetic features reflect the first language or regional background of the speakers. This situation is similar to Nigeria; as BAMGBOSE (1982: 99-105) states in his article 'Standard Nigerian English', 'Several phonetic features reflect the first language or regional background of the speakers'.

Although no studies have been undertaken in Dubai to ascertain the phonological features of Gulf English, and with the promise that there is, of course, a very wide range of English competence there, I shall offer some generalisations, firstly, Gulf English tends to be syllable-timed, not stress timed, and therefore reduced vowels and weak forms are rare as in the following example:

I have seen him today.

[ai hav si:n him t.:dei]

Second, syllabic consonants are extremely rare:

bottle is realised as [b.ʌtul]

lesson is realised as [lɛ→s.ʌn]

Third, in Gulf English the classification of past tense between regular and irregular verbs is rare:

break and buy are pronounced as regular verbs [breikid], [baid]

worked and passed are pronounced as [w±kid], [pasid]

This feature can be noticed in the accent of local Arab people rather than in the accents of immigrants or residents in Dubai. It is similar to a feature of Singapore English (Platt, 1982: 390-397).

Fourth, the consonant [P] is pronounced as [B] by acrolectal speakers whose L1 is Arabic because Arabic lacks such consonant or has no equivalent:

appear is pronounced as [̄ :.b) :.r]

paper is pronounced as [beib :.r]

Giglioli (1972: 91) refers to this point in Haiti by saying:

French has front round vowel phoneme /u←/; 'pure' Haitian Creole has no such phoneme. Educated speakers of Creole use this vowel tatsamas such as Luk [lu←k] for Gospel of St. Luke. They use /i/ for it when speaking French. /i/ is the regular vowel in such tatsamas in Creole as linet 'glasses'.

The fifth, phonological feature is concerned with the phoneme /w/ which is pronounced as /v/ and vice versa by immigrants in Dubai whose L1 is Farsi as in the following example:

water, we, where, etc., are pronounced as [v←t :.r], [vi], [ve :.r]

and vice versa as follows:

vegetable, conversation, van, etc., are pronounced as [wed | t :.bl], [k :.nw :.zei♣n], [w←n].

A most noticeable feature of Gulf English is the Indian accent. One may discover through intuition the speaker of Gulf English is Indian by marking his phonological shifts and lack of reduced vowels and weak forms in his accent though, of course, this feature can also be traced in other parts of the world where there has been less contact with the Sub-continent. In West Africa, for instance, similar phonological shifts occur (Todd, 1982: 281-300).

4.2. Lexical and Syntactic Features

As mentioned earlier, most people in the multilingual society of Dubai have been

influenced by their L1. This feature is frequently apparent either at the lexical level or at the syntactic level while speaking Gulf English. Pride (op. cit.: 59) suggests that 'the linguistic background of the user of English influences the variety of English that he uses'. So, local people, immigrants and residents do not speak the same sort of Gulf English within Dubai. Ammon (1979: 5-8) in his introduction on dialect and standard in highly industrialised societies stresses that not everybody speaks the same sort of dialect within the same area. Therefore, when local people of Dubai, whose L1 is Arabic, want to show intimacy to somebody in Gulf English, they use exaggerated expressions such as 'I put you in my eyes', whereas immigrants, whose L1 is either Urdu or Hindi, use humble expressions such as 'Hello, my friend'. These two expressions reveal varieties of language which are functionally different from each other in the speech community of Dubai. Many researchers tend to concentrate on such linguistic point as a sociolinguistic phenomenon prevalent in many speech communities. For instance, Fishman (1971: 218-219) emphasises this point by remarking that:

Any speech community of even moderate complexity reveals several varieties of language, all of which are functionally differentiated from each other.

One of the most obvious lexical features of Gulf English in Dubai is the particle (la) which exists in Urdu and Hindi. It comes at the end of each sentence. For instance, an Indian cashier asks a client in one of Dubai banks if he has checked his money, he says:

'Have you checked your money, la?'

Although no research has been undertaken to ascertain the range of lexical shift and lexical borrowing in Gulf English, one can maintain that there is a wide range of these two shifts throughout the style of Gulf English. This phenomenon seems similar to 'Singapore English' to which

Richards (1982: 154-167) refers. He remarks that:

Lexical shift refers to the replacement of a known word by a word from a local language when the speech event calls for communication style.

Table 1 below indicates this phenomenon in Gulf English:

Table 1: Lexical Shift in Gulf English

Known English words	Local language words
very much	Wajid (Urdu, Hindi)
If God wills	Inshaallah (Arabic)
It means	Ya'ani (Arabic)
All right	Teekeh (Urdu, Hindi)
Sir	Sahib

Yet, one should admit that lexical borrowing in Gulf English is rather different from what has been defined by

Table 2: Lexical borrowing in Gulf English

Local languages	Terms from local languages	Meaning of Terms
Gulf Arabic	Harees, Machboos, Muhammer, Ikal, Dishdasha, Bisht, Ayyala, Na'asha	Food Clothes dances
Urdu, Hindi	Biriani , Tandoori, Chapatti, Saloona Sari	Food clothes
Farsi	Chelow Kebab, Zaafran	food

5. The Development of Gulf English in Dubai

As mentioned earlier, while Dubai was growing in importance during the last two decades as one of the richest Emirate in the Gulf region, people from various countries with their regional dialects and accents have been imported to participate in the process of development. It is worth noting that Gulf English has emerged and developed in Dubai from a mixture of pronunciations and forms from various regional resources.

It appears that multilingualism in Dubai is more or less linguistically, though on a smaller scale, like West Africa in its enormous complexity. Todd (op. cit.) remarks on English in West Africa that

Richards (op. cit.) in his study on Singapore English. Here, one may quote Richards (op. cit.):

Lexical borrowing refers to terms from local languages which have entered the speech code but which do not carry particular communicative or effective value and for which no equivalent exists.

Gulf Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, and Farsi terms have entered the speech code of Gulf English in Dubai, but they carry particular communicative or effective value. These terms from local languages of Dubai have no English equivalents such as the names of food, clothes, and local folklore terms. Some of these terms are presented in Table 2 below:

'West Africa is an enormous complex linguistic area in which stratified multilingualism is the rule than the exception'. One example may make this point clearer. For instance, in Dubai, a local man whose L1 is Arabic would speak Arabic with his children, Urdu with his Pakistani wife, Farsi with his immigrant neighbour, whose L1 is Farsi, and English with the Indian cashier in the bank. This indicates that monolingual man in Dubai is rare.

Although no studies have been undertaken to ascertain the attitude of local people in Dubai towards English, one may conclude that they were reluctant to use

English as a medium of communication with the new comers at the beginning as they regarded it as a matter of language disloyalty. However, they have been ultimately obliged to react favourably and positively towards Gulf English in order not to be isolated from Dubai society. These attitudes simultaneously facilitated the learning of English in Dubai. One should remember that language attitudes and their implications among English speakers have also been approached by Edwards (1982: 20-32) remarking that, 'Positive attitudes are likely to facilitate the learning of another language'.

The English language coexisted in Dubai primarily with an English-based pidgin as English did in Jamaica and Nigeria. Bailey (1982: 1-5) refers to the position of the English language in these two areas in portraying the picture of English as a world language. This kind of English-based pidgin has developed through interaction into what might be called today Gulf English in that part of the world, i.e., Dubai.

As mentioned earlier, Gulf English is a variety of English mixed with Gulf Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and Farsi which is emerging as a product of social change in Dubai. It is not only retained as a medium of communication and interaction as did Singapore English, but it is in a position of prestige and influence.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, it seems that no studies have been undertaken to ascertain the frequency and range of English usage or the emergence of Gulf English in Dubai. However, the English language appears to play a significant role in many spheres of Dubai life both professional and private. People in such a complex multilingual society - unless people know English -

would communicate ineffectively and vice versa.

English has gained the status of prestige, and symbolises modernisation, technology, business, science, travel and so on in Dubai. These functions have influenced the attitude of non-native English speakers towards English positively in that area, in particular the local people whose L1 is Arabic.

In that area, namely, Dubai a new variety of English has emerged because of the impact of multilingualism in the region. It has been regarded as a vehicle of communication. This new English, which might be called 'Gulf English', has been promoted - to a certain extent - to fulfil some of the dimensions of new Englishes in other parts of the world.

Despite all debates and controversies, Gulf English might work effectively in some other Gulf countries such as Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar insofar as they share with Dubai the similar characteristics in societal standardisation and stratification. However, Gulf English requires the application of new linguistic means and strategies to be accessible to many people of Dubai who use Gulf English in their daily life. Some of those new linguistic means and strategies are: more courses for local people, simplified news bulletin, adopting new communicative or functional approaches in teaching the English language, etc. This point may suggest further research or investigation to discover what criteria are suitable for this. It would also be crucial to emphasise one key point which suggests that the more flexible Gulf English is, the more it will motivate many Dubai people to use it effectively. Therefore, efforts should be made and investigators should be urged to consider new approaches of promoting Gulf

English in Dubai and evoking positive attitudes towards it.

Finally, unless all people in Dubai, in particular the local people whose native language and L1 are Arabic, are enthusiastic to adopt the language patterns of Gulf English, they will lack social mobility and advancement because Gulf English is dominant in most sectors of Dubai life both professional and private.

7. References

- Aitchison, J. (1987). *Linguistics (Teach Yourself Books)*. United Kingdom: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Ammon, U. (1979). 'Introduction' in Ammon, U. (ed.), *Dialect & Standard in Highly Industrialised Societies (Internal Journal of the sociology of language)*. Mouton: The Hague.
- Bailey, R. W. and Manfred Gorchach (eds.) (1982). *English as a World language*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- BAMGBOSE, A. (1982). 'Standard Nigerian English' in Kachru, B. B. (ed.), *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*. Champaign and Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Edwards, J. R. (1982). 'Language attitudes and their Implications among English speakers' in Ryan, E. B. 7 Giles, H. (eds.), *Attitudes towards Language Variation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Fasold, R. (1984). *The Sociolinguistics of Society*. England: Basil Blackwell.
- Fishman, J. A. (1971). *Sociolinguistics: A brief Introduction*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers Inc.
- Giglioli, P. P. (ed.) (1972). *Language and Social Context*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- <http://en-wikipedia.org/wiki/Duabi#Culture> (accessed, 2002)
- Kachru, B. B. (1981). 'Language Sociology in South Asia' in Kaplan, R. (ed.), *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers Inc.
- Kachru, B. B. (1982). *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*. Champaign and Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1986). *The Alchemy of English*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Platt, J. (1982). 'Use of English in Singapore' in Bailey, R. W. and Manfred Gorchach (eds.), *English as a World language*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Platt, J. (1984). *The New Englishes*. London: Routledge and Keyan Paul.
- Pride, J. B. (ed.) (1982). *New Englishes*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers Inc.
- Richards, J. C. (1982). 'Singapore English: Rhetorical and communicative styles' in Kachru, B. B. (ed.), *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*. Champaign and Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Smith, L. E. (ed.) (1983). *Readings in English as an International language*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Todd, L. (1982). 'English in Cameroon' in Pride, J. B. (ed.), *New Englishes*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers Inc.
- Todd, L. (1982). 'The English language in West Africa' in Bailey, R. W. and Manfred Gorchach (eds.), *English as a World language*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan press.

خلاصة البحث

الذين تعتبر اللغة العربية والإنكليزية والألمانية والفرنسية لغاتهم الأم والذين يعملون لفترة معينة من الزمن ثم يغادرون دبي بعد نفاذ عقود عملهم، أما مواطني دبي والأساس المحليين والمهاجرين يستخدمون اللغة الإنكليزية لكي يتواصلوا ليس فقط مع المقيمين الذين تعتبر اللغة الإنكليزية لغتهم الأم بل مع المقيمين الغربيين الآخرين، ولقد ركز العالم اللغوي سميث (٧: ١٩٨٣) على هذا حالة مينا بأن "العديد من البلدان يستخدمون اللغة الإنكليزية لكي يتواصلوا مع بقية أنحاء العالم وليس فقط مع العالم الذي تعتبر اللغة الإنكليزية فيه اللغة الأم.

بالرغم من عدم وجود دراسات وبحوث تؤكد على تداول اللغة الإنكليزية واستعمالها في دبي، ولكن من خلال مشاهداتي يمكن اعتبار اللغة الإنكليزية هي اللغة السائدة في معظم مجالات الحياة في دبي خاصة في المجال المهني والخاص، وعلى هذا الأساس لابد من تشجيع مواطني دبي على استعمال اللغة الإنكليزية لكي يكون دورهم ذا تأثير كبير في كافة مجالات الحياة.

وعلى أية حال اعتمدت في هذه الدراسة على قرأتين بين حالة اللغة الإنكليزية في دبي وحالتها في أنحاء أخرى من العالم مثل غرب أفريقيا وسنغافورة وجنوب آسيا ومناطق أخرى لكي تؤكد على وجود لغة إنكليزية جديدة سائدة في دبي تتضمن بعض المفردات العربية والأردية والهندية والفارسية التي تم إدخالها من قبل مواطني دبي والناس المهاجرين والمقيمين في هذه الإمارة، ويمكن تسمية هذه اللغة الإنكليزية الجديدة باللغة الإنكليزية الخليجية كما هو الحال بالنسبة للغات الإنكليزية الجديدة الأخرى في مناطق عديدة من عالمنا اليوم مثل اللغة الإنكليزية النيجيرية واللغة الإنكليزية السنغافورية واللغة الإنكليزية الكامبونية ولغات إنكليزية جديدة أخرى.

تعد اللغة الإنكليزية لغة عالمية لأنها ترمز إلى الحداثة ولها استعمال واسع في الأعمال التجارية العالمية والتكنولوجيا والعلوم والسفر والمجالات الأخرى، ولقد بين العالم اللغوي كاجرو (٢١: ١٩٨٦) في مقالته حول "وظائف اللغة الإنكليزية في عالمنا اليوم" بأن العديد بل أغلبية دول العالم الثالث والأمم العصرية تبنت اللغة الإنكليزية لتكون لغتها الرسمية أو لغتها الثانية، كما وسلط العالم اللغوي بلات (١٣: ١٩٨٤) الضوء على هذه النقطة بالذات في مقالته حول "دور اللغة الإنكليزية" مينا بأن "اختيار اللغة الإنكليزية لتكون لغة رسمية في العديد من الأمم العصرية لا يثير الدهشة وذلك لأنها أصبحت لغة التواصل والدبلوماسية والمعاملات التجارية العالمية في كافة أرجاء العالم، كما وأصبحت إحدى اللغات الرئيسية التي تستعمل في البحوث والنشر العلمي والتكنولوجي"، ويمكن اعتبار اللغة الإنكليزية في البلدان والأمم المتعددة اللغات لغة التواصل المحايدة آخذين بنظر الاعتبار خلفية اللغات الأخرى في هذه البلدان والأقطار التي تشترك معها في الوظيفة في المجتمع كما أشار بلات في نفس المصدر أعلاه حول وضعية اللغة الإنكليزية في نيجيريا.

في بحثنا الذي تناول "مضامين اللغة الإنكليزية الخليجية في دبي" يمكن أن تشير كلمة دبي إما إلى إمارة تقع في الجزء الشرقي من شبه الجزيرة العربية أو المدينة الرئيسية لإمارة دبي وتسمى في بعض الأحيان "مدينة دبي" لتمييزها عن إمارة دبي، حيث يعتبر مجتمع دبي متعدد اللغات وخاصة بعد وصول الجامعات الإثنية خاصة الإيرانية في أوائل القرن التاسع عشر والهنود والباكستانيين في مطلع الستينات (أنظر الموسوعة الحرة على الإنترنت حول دبي وحضارتها)، في حين كانت الأغلبية السكانية في دبي من البدو العرب وكان المصدر الوحيد لمعيشتهم آنذاك التجارة وصيد الأسماك والغوص بحثاً عن اللؤلؤ.

تعد دبي حالياً مدينة غنية متعددة اللغات حيث تستعمل اللغة الإنكليزية كوسيلة للتواصل بين الناس المحليين الذين تعتبر اللغة العربية لغتهم الأصلية والمهاجرين الذين تعتبر اللغة الأردية والهندية والفارسية لغاتهم الأصلية، وحيث تعتبر اللغة العربية لهؤلاء اللغة الثانية، وهناك المقيمين