Identity beyond Ethnic Boundaries: Non-Arabic Speaking Muslims' Attitudes Towards Arabic

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Abstract. In this study, the author reports the findings of an attitudinal study of a number of non-Arabic speaking Muslims on their emotional and intellectual perception of Arabic. The subjects with diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds from different countries around the world came to work in the southwestern region of Saudi Arabia. Using the attitudinal mentalist approach, this study attempts to deal with the following issues:

a) assessing the relation between the non-Arabic speaking Muslim respondents' adherence to Islam, and their attitudes towards Arabic and the role it may play among Muslims.

b) detecting the influence of a set of variables on the linguistic attitudes of the respondents towards Arabic. The set includes five major independent variables: age, education, sex, fluency in Arabic and adherence to Islam through reversion or by birth.

c) determining the basis on which the respondents formed their attitudinal judgments towards Arabic and their implications on the theory of ethnocentricity.

Introduction

There has been a lot of variance in defining attitude, which led to disagreement vis-à-vis a monolithic view. A variety of definitions were proposed by Jahoda and Warren[1], Jaspars[2]; Shaw and Wright[3]. Nonetheless, Ajzen[4] and McGuire[5] seem to have a workable definition in common. An attitude is 'a disposition to respond favorably or

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[1] M. Jahoda and N. Warren, *Attitudes*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1966).

[2] J. M. Jaspars, *The Nature and Measurement of Attitudes.* In: *Introducing Social Psychology*, Eds. H. Tajfel and C.Fraser (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1978).

[3] M. E. Shaw and J. M. Wright, *Scales for Measurement of Attitudes*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 132.

[4] I. Ajzen, *Attitudes, Personality and Behaviour* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), cited in Colin Baker, *Attitudes and Language*. (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1992), 13.

[5] W. J. McGuire, "Attitudes and Attitude Change." In: *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Eds. G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (New York:Random House, 1985), 4

unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event'. Attitudes here are directed toward an object, which is language. Attitudes about language have been viewed with great importance in social psychology and sociolinguistics. They reveal more than just the respondents' reaction towards certain linguistic varieties. People's attitudes reveal their perception of the speakers of such languages. In this way, language attitudes are linked to views of identity[6]. Accordingly, positive attitudes regarding a linguistic variety might also connote a positive attitude towards its speakers.[7] Studying attitudes "provides an indicator of current community thoughts and beliefs, preferences and desires. Attitude surveys provide social indicators of changing beliefs and the chances of success in policy implementation"[8]. Attitude towards language function is one of the most important indicators of identity and affiliation. This becomes more salient when that language is closely attached to one's religion and association with a certain community, as is the case with Arabic. Throughout history, Muslims have expressed a very strong attachment to Arabic as the language of the Qur'an.[9] Research about attitudes has also become very important, especially because it deals with issues towards a language that may affect second language acquisition.[10] Nevertheless, Gardner and Lambert were pioneers in assessing the effect of attitudes and motivations in second language acquisition.[11]

Subjects

Out of the 240 questionnaires distributed by the researcher, 148 respondents returned their completed questionnaires. They were filled out by members of the target population of Muslim non-native speakers of Arabic who reside in Assir region. Due to specific nature of the study, 240 questionnaires were distributed to non-Arabic speaking Muslims living in the city of Abha and its surroundings. Only 148 questionnaires were completely filled out and returned. The rest were either returned incomplete or not filled out at all. This is probably due to the questionnaires being written in English. The questionnaire was designed as such to be filled out by respondents who are competent in English. So, we have to assume that only respondents with good command of English could satisfactorily fill out the questionnaire.

Muslims by birth filled out 104 of them. Revert Muslims filled out the remaining 44 questionnaires. As for the educational level, which is one of the variables considered

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[6]   R. W. Fasold, *The Sociolinguistics of Society*. (New York:Basil Blackwell, 1984), 146.

[7]   Fasold, The Sociolinguistics of Society, 148.

[8]   Colin Baker, *Attitudes and Language*. (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1992), 9.

[9]   A. H. Al-Kahtany, "Linguistic Genocide: Colonial Language Policies Towards Arabic and Arabic Script in Non-Arabic Speaking Muslim Countries," *Geolinguistics*, 28 (2002), 1-21.

[10]   R. W. Shuy, "On Discovering Language Attitudes." In: *American Attitudes Toward Foreign Language and Foreign Cultures*, eds. E. Dudley and P. Heller (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1983).

[11]   R. C. Gardner and W. E. Lambert, "Motivational Variables in Second Language Acquisition." *Canadian Journal of Psychology,* 13 (1959), 266-72.

in the study, 101 of the respondents finished high school. The remaining 47 have a higher qualification than a high school certificate. 25 (16.9%) of the respondents were female while 123 (83.1%) were males. Adherence to Islam, by birth or by reversion, was one of the independent variables. 44 (29.7%) of the participants were Muslims by reversion while the rest (70.3%) were Muslims by birth. As for age, the respondents were divided into two categories: above 35 years old and below. 70 (47.3%) were above 35, and about the same number, 71 (48%), were below 35. The remaining seven respondents (4.7%) did not respond to this item. The sample was randomly selected, and therefore the researcher had no control over the number or type of subjects participating in the study, a factor that tends to enhance the validity of the results.[12]

Table 1. Distribution of subjects by variables and categories

Independent variables	Categories	# of subjects	%
Educational level	High school	101	68.2%
	Above H.S.	47	31.8%
Sex	Female	25	16.9%
	Male	123	83.1%
Islam	Revert	44	29.7%
	Birth	104	70.3%
Age	35+	70	47.3%
	35-	71	48.0%
	No response	7	04.7%
Fluency	1-4	39	26.4%
In Arabic*	4-7	109	73.6%

Questionnaire design and data collection

A questionnaire consisting of 29 items was prepared in English to elicit respondents' attitudes towards different aspects of Arabic (Appendix 1). It was based on a semantic differential instrument similar to that developed by Osgood[13] and Linn and Pichè.[14] A seven-point scale was adopted for attitudes rating the different aspects of Arabic. The use of such a closed-question questionnaire to study attitudes towards language is useful in eliminating the problem of respondents failing to focus on the expected dimension, since all they had to do is choose from a set of provided categories.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was divided into two sections. Section One

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[12] W. Popham, *Educational Evaluation* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1988).

[13] C.E. Osgood, "Semantic Differential Technique in the Comparative Study of Culture." *American Anthropologist* 66, (1964), 171-200.

[14] M. Linn and G. Pichè, "Black and White Adolescent and Preadolescent Attitudes toward Black English. *Teaching of English* 16. (1982), 53-69.

was designed to obtain demographic information about the respondents. Section Two consisted of 22 items, in the form of statements, which are purely attitudinal. The respondents indicated their attitudes in relation to different aspects of Arabic presented by these statements. The remaining part of the questionnaire consists of items (23-29), assesses each respondent's knowledge of Arabic based on their self-reporting. All the responses were designed to fall in a scale from 1 (very strongly agree) to 7 (very strongly disagree). For example, item (16) elicits the respondents' attitudes towards adopting Arabic as the language of communication among Muslims, on a scale of points, as follows:

Very strongly agree 1..... , 2...., 3....., 4...., 5...., 6...., 7..... Very strongly disagree

The questionnaire was purposely prepared in English for a number of reasons:

a. The respondents were expected to come from different linguistic backgrounds. It would have been difficult to prepare the questionnaires in different languages including Arabic.

b. The targeted population of the study was non-Arabic speaking Muslims with a good command of English, so they could properly respond to the questionnaire. As a matter of fact, the majority was fluent in English.

c. Whether as native or second language speakers of English, the respondents had access to an international language. Thus, their attitudes towards Arabic include an awareness of the linguistic diversity of the world and its attendant communication problems.

Results and Discussions

Quantitative data analysis

In this study, we used the SPSS (PC) to help in calculating the respondents' quantitative data collected through the surveys, regarding their attitudes towards Arabic. In this section, mean will refer to the statistical measure through which dependent and independent variables of the study were calculated. First, we will discuss the compiled average means for the entire population's attitudes towards the different aspects of Arabic with no reference to specific independent variables. Afterwards, means of respondents' ratings of the different aspects of Arabic will be analyzed in correlation with the independent variables of age, sex, educational level, fluency in Arabic and affiliation to Islam (by birth or reversion). The t-test was applied to find out whether there is a statistically significant correlation between any of the independent variables involved and the combined average means towards linguistic attitudinal traits. The data was checked for significant differences at the (.05) level of significance. Nevertheless, reference will be directed to the average mean scores of the 10 subgroups of the five independent variables involved in the study.

A summary of the entire population's attitudes towards Arabic in general and to each aspect of Arabic in particular is provided in Table 2. The mean results show that the non-Arabic speaking Muslim respondents have a positive attitude towards Arabic. The combined average mean of the respondents' attitudes towards the linguistic and the functional and communicative aspects of Arabic (items 1-22) was 5.38 out of 7.00. The highest rating was towards general linguistic aspects of Arabic (items 1-13) at 5.45. Of all the items in the survey, the highest rating was given to item 21 (mean= 6.68), which states that 'every Muslim needs to learn Arabic because it is the language of the Holy Qur'an'. The entire population's rating of item (21) in comparison to other items was highly significant ($P = 0.005$). Their attitudes towards the functional aspect of Arabic (items 14-22) were positive as well (mean = 5.33). The combined average mean of the entire population reporting of fluency in Arabic (items 23-29) was 4.86. Although the subjects' fluency in Arabic is based on self-reporting which tends to be a subjective measure, it is an indicator of the subjects' own attitudes towards their own skills in Arabic.

Table 2. The combined means for the entire population's responses to the three different aspects of Arabic: general linguistic features, functional aspects and the respondents' fluency in Arabic: general linguistic

Traits	Mean	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum	N. Label
General linguistic	5.45	.97	1.46	7.00	148
ITEMS 1-13					
Functional aspects					
ITEMS 14-22	5.33	1.07	1.22	7.00	148
Fluency in Arabic					
ITEMS 23-29	4.86	1.21	1.00	7.00	148

Age

Means of the entire population's attitudes towards the different aspects of Arabic, in correlation with the respondents' age, are summarized in Table 3. The combined average mean for the younger non-Arabic speaking Muslim participants' attitudes toward Arabic was slightly higher than the older group. The combined average means of the two groups' attitudes towards the linguistic aspects of Arabic (items 1-22) were similar: 5.34 for the older group and 5.37 for the younger group. The younger group's attitudes towards the general linguistic aspects of Arabic (items 1-13) were higher than their older counterparts: 5.53 in comparison to 5.33. Conversely, the older group's attitudes towards the functional and communicative aspects of Arabic (items 4-22) were higher: 5.36 in comparison to 5.22 for the younger group. In that sense, the older the respondents the more positive attitude they seem to have regarding the functional and communicative aspects of Arabic. This is the only aspect of Arabic, which was rated higher by the older respondents (Table 3). This variance in mean between the respondents' attitudes towards the functional aspects of Arabic and their age, thought not statistically significant, is

probably related to another factor, which is their higher self-reporting regarding their fluency in Arabic. Their higher fluency in Arabic may have enabled them to use Arabic more and therefore to have a more favorable attitude towards its functions. What makes the results more interesting is that the population sample participating in the study is almost evenly divided, with 70 belonging to the older group while 71 belong to the younger group. The remaining seven did not report their age and hence were excluded from the calculation for this part.

Table 3. The combined average means of the respondents attitudes toward the different aspects of Arabic based on their age. Group 1 refers to subjects who are 35 and above. Group 2 refers to respondents below 35 years of age

Traits	Number of cases	Mean	Standard deviation	t- value	Level of significance
General Aspects ITEMS 1-13					
Group 1	70	5.3330	.882		
				-1.17.	24
Group 2	71	5.5276	1.077		
Functional aspects ITEMS 14-22					
Group 1	70	5.3635	.990		
				.81	. 418
Group 2	71	5.2160	1.159		
Fluency in Arabic ITEMS 23-29					
Group 1	70	4.8286	1.284		
				-.41	.686
Group 2	71	4.9115	1.142		

Sex

Means of the respondents' attitudes to the different aspects of Arabic in correlation to their sex are summarized in Table 4. The t-test values for the differences between female and male respondents in their attitudes towards the general linguistic were (t =2.4) computed as statistically significant at (P = .01) level of significance. The variance between the means of female and male respondents rating of their attitudes towards the functional and communicative aspects of Arabic was computed as highly significant (P = .001).

The female respondents' mean of attitudes towards the general linguistic aspect of Arabic was 5.87, as compared to 5.36 for their male counterparts, a difference of 0.51. Female respondents also scored a significantly higher mean (6.01) towards the functional and linguistic aspects of Arabic (items 14-22). This was the highest cumulative average mean ever achieved by any group in correlation with all the independent variables involved in analysis. The cumulative mean for the same traits in the male participants was 5.19; a significant difference of 0.82. This explains why the correlation between

sexes of the respondents' attitudes towards the communicative role of Arabic was highly significant.

Table 4. The combined average means of the respondents attitudes toward the different aspects of Arabic based on their sex. Group 1 refers to male subjects. Group 2 refers to female subjects

Traits	Number cases	Mean	Standard deviation	t-value	Level of significance
General aspects					
Items 1-13					
Group 1	123	5.3627	1.007	-2.40	.01
Group 2	25	5.8677	.655		
Functional aspects					
Items 14-22					
Group 1	123	5.1861	1.047	-3.66	.001
Group 2	25	6.0133	.944		
Fluency in Arabic					
Items 14-22					
Group 1	123	4.8281	1.189	-.73	.464
Group 2	25	5.0229	1.308		

A glance at Table 4 will clearly reveal that the female respondents have expressed more positive attitudes towards Arabic. The combined average mean of the females regarding items (1-22) was 5.94, in contrast to 5.28 for their male counterparts; a significant difference of .66 in mean. The mean of their self-reporting regarding their knowledge of Arabic was also higher than their male counterparts, 5.02 in comparison to 4.83. We can positively claim that non-Arabic speaking Muslim women participating in the study have significantly more favorable attitudes towards both linguistic and functional aspects of Arabic. The t-value for the female respondents towards the general aspects of Arabic was (t = -2.40) at the (p = .01) level of significance. Their attitudes towards the functional aspects of Arabic reached the t-test value of (t = -3.66) with the statistically significant level of (P=.001); the highest level of significant achieved for variance among all groups.

We think that the type of work the majority of female subjects are doing, as nurses, has affected their own attitudes towards Arabic. They are in constant contact with patients who mainly speak Arabic. This constant linguistic contact and interaction has probably heightened their attitudes towards the language of their religion and provided them with confidence regarding their reported fluency in Arabic.

Educational level
Means of the independent variable of educational level of the respondents in relation to the respondents' attitudes towards Arabic are presented in Table 5. The cumulative average mean of the respondents' attitudes towards both the general linguistic and the functional and communicative roles of Arabic in correlation to their educational level has shown some consistent variance, which however was not statistically

significant. Although both groups show very positive attitudes towards Arabic, the cumulative mean of high school educated respondents' attitudes towards the general linguistic, communicative and functional roles of Arabic (items 1-22) combined mean was 5.43 in comparison to 5.31 for their more educated counterparts.

The combined mean of high school educated respondents attitudes towards the general aspects of Arabic (5.456) was very close to that of the more educated respondents (5.430). Their self-reporting regarding their proficiency in Arabic was almost identical, which indicates that difference in education does not seem to have affected their attitudes towards the general aspects of Arabic and self-reporting regarding their linguistic abilities in Arabic. However, there are minor differences in the combined average means of the respondents' attitudes towards the functional aspects of Arabic but the variance was not as statistically significant.

Table 5. The combined average means of the respondents attitudes toward the different aspects of Arabic based on their academic status. Group 1 refers to subjects with high school diploma. Group 2 refers to respondents with educational level higher than high school

Traits	Number of cases	Mean	Standard deviation	t-test	Level of significance
General aspects ITEMS 1-13					
Group 1	101	5.4562	.975		
				.15	.881
Group 2	47	5.4304	.980		
Functional aspects ITEMS 14-22					
Group 1	101	5.3949	1.062		
				1.15	.252
Group 2	47	5.1773	1.096		
Fluency in Arabic ITEMS 23-29					
Group 1	101	3.5901	1.117		
				.99	.325
Group 2	47	3.6000	.995		

Affiliation to Islam

The correlation between the combined average mean of the respondents' attitudes towards Arabic based on their adherence to Islam was particularly interesting though not statistically significant. Respondents who accepted Islam through reversion scored combined average mean of all aspects of Arabic slightly higher than their Muslims since birth counterparts: 5.24 for the former versus 5.20 for the latter. Though, the means for their attitudes towards the general aspects of Arabic were somewhat similar, those for reverts were slightly higher (see Table 6). A significant difference was computed regarding the cumulative mean of their attitudes towards the functional aspects of Arabic. Respondents who were Muslims by reversion achieved a cumulative mean of 5.61, the second highest combined average mean to be accomplished by any group. Muslims by birth scored a combined average mean of 5.21 in regard to their attitudes towards the functional aspects of Arabic: a 0.40 difference in combined average mean

than their revert counterparts. This variance was computed as statistically significant at the t-value of (t =2.09) with (P= .03) level of significance. Such difference might be attributed to their desire to know more about their new religion to which Arabic is the main vehicle. The two groups were also different in their attitudes toward their self-reporting of their fluency in Arabic. The Muslims since birth scored a higher accumulative mean (4.95) than their revert counterparts (4.65). This is expected because Muslims from a very young age are introduced to some form of Arabic in order to conduct their prayers and read Qur'an. Harrell-Band, Howard and Skinner[15] reported the role Arabic played in West Africa by stating that:

> In the north (of Sierra Leone), education was essentially Islamic, with almost every village having a Muslim teacher. Here students learned no English, and students were taught Arabic and sometimes learned to write their native language in Arabic script. There is considerable evidence that literacy in Arabic or an African language written in Arabic script was widespread . . .

Hence, this is the only trait where Muslims since birth scored higher than the reverted Muslims. We think that one of the factors that affected the variance of being insignificant is that the former make more than two thirds of the whole population.

Table 6. The combined average means of the respondents attitudes toward the different aspects of Arabic based on their affiliation to Islam. Group 1 refers to subjects who reverted to Islam. Group 2 refers to subjects who are Muslims since birth

Traits	Number of cases	Mean	Standard deviation	t-test	Level of significance
General aspects ITEMS 1-13					
Group 1	44	5.4580	1.082		
				.08	.935
Group 2	104	5.4438	.929		
Functional aspects ITEMS 14-22					
Group 1	44	5.6061	1.095		
				2.09	.03
Group 2	104	5.2073	1.047		
Fluency in Arabic ITEMS 23-29					
Group 1	44	4.6494	1.304		
				-1.39	.166
Group 2	104	4.9505	1.159		

Fluency in Arabic

Fluency in Arabic was assumed, based on the respondents' self-reporting of their linguistic abilities in Arabic (items 23-29). They were divided into two groups based on

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[15] B. E. Harrell-Bond, A. M. Howard, and D. E. Skinner, *Community Leadership and the Transformation of Freetown, 1801-1976.*(The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978)

the combined average mean of their scoring (below 4 and above 4). Thirty-nine (26.4%) of the respondents reported higher fluency in Arabic. The remaining 109 (73.6%) reported a lower level of fluency. The correlation between the respondents' self-reporting and the combined average means of their attitudes towards both the linguistic value of Arabic and its communicative and functional importance was highly significant statistically (Table 7).

Respondents with lower reporting of their fluency in Arabic scored a higher combined mean of attitudes towards the different aspects of Arabic. Their combined average mean towards the linguistic aspects of Arabic was 5.56, compared with 5.13 for their more fluent counterparts; a significant variance of (P = .01). The combined average mean of their attitudes towards the functional aspect of Arabic was significantly higher than their counterparts: 5.45 for the less fluent in Arabic in comparison to 4.98 for the more fluent; with 0.47 difference in mean. Variance between the two groups resulted in high correlation between the respondents' self-reporting knowledge of Arabic and their attitudes regarding its functional aspects (P = .02). This is indeed a very surprising instance of correlation. The less proficient subjects in Arabic report significantly more positive attitudes towards its linguistic as well as its functional and communicative aspects. This seems to contradict with Al-Kahtany's[16] findings regarding English learners' attitudes toward different English dialects. "The results show a trend that the more proficient subjects tended to have a more positive attitude toward the English-speaking community than the less proficient one".

There seems to be a number of possible explanations for this phenomenon. One is that the less fluent participants realize the need to communicate in Arabic and use it to read the Qur'an and in daily prayers (*salaah*) more than their colleagues who are more proficient in Arabic. Hence, they have more favorable attitudes towards it. The other possible interpretation is that Muslims by birth have achieved a higher combined average mean in reporting their fluency in Arabic than the newly reverted Muslims: 4.95 in comparison to 4.65. This is not unexpected since Muslims study some form of Arabic and learn to read the Qur'an at an early age, even before they start their formal schooling[17]. This is why it is probably not surprising to find that the majority of those who reported less fluency in Arabic are from the newly reverted Muslims. Newly reverted Muslims do not have this opportunity to learn Arabic at an early age. They value the learning of Arabic as the key to becoming better Muslims. Hence, they have reported more positive attitudes towards both linguistics and functional aspects of Arabic.

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[16] A. H. Al-Kahtany, "Dialectal Ethnographic 'Cleansing': ESL Students' Attitudes Towards Three Varieties of English'." *Language and Communication*, 15,2 (1995), 171.

[17] Daniel A. Wagner, "Indigenous Education and Literacy Learning." *International Literacy Institute*, Technical Report TR 98-01(1998), 1-5.

Table 7. The combined average means of the respondents' attitudes toward the different aspects of Arabic based on their knowledge of Arabic. Group 1 refers to subjects with high scores 4 and above. Group 2 refers to subjects

Traits	Number of cases	Mean	Standard d deviation	t-value	Level of significance
General aspects ITEMS 1-13					
Group 1	39	5.1282	.974		
				-2.43	.01
Group 2	109	5.5625	.951		
Functional aspects ITEMS 14-22					
Group 1	39	4.9829	1.198		
				-2.36	.02
Group 2	109	5.4485	1.003		

Another factor involved in determining the respondents' attitudes towards Arabic along with the respondents' fluency is their affiliation to Islam. I think that the revert Muslims, in their desire to be affiliated with the Muslims, see their relationship to Arabic as part of the process of developing their new identity, thus giving more importance to knowledge of Arabic than those who have been identifying themselves as Muslims since birth. Norton[18] alludes to such a process in developing identity in a way that "people understand their relationship to the world, how that world is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future". Morgan saliently stated that "identities and beliefs are co-constructed, negotiated, and transformed on an ongoing basis by means of language".[19]

Implications for language attitudes: Ethnicity and identity

Edwards[20] mentioned that under the premises of accommodation theory, socio-linguistic accommodation might take place not because of social approval and coexistence but rather for "a wide range of different Machiavellian or opportunistic reasons, with highly conscious motivation...". Though it cannot by any means account for all possible variables and complexities existing within or among speech communities, according to Edwards then, superficial accommodation, in most situations, takes place for a number of possible reasons but not for identity reasons. The results of this attitudinal study have shown that Muslim non-Arabic speakers hold very positive views towards Arabic, though many have expressed their limited abilities in speaking it fluently. Their positive attitudes, and therefore accommodation of Arabic, were neither for ethnic nor Machiavellian reasons, as is the case with a number of other languages in different contexts, but rather for maintaining identity and universal linguistic affiliation via Arabic.

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[18] Bonny Norton, "Language, Identity, and the Ownership of English." *TESOL Quarterly* 31,3 (1997), 421.
[19] Cited in Norton, 421
[20] J. Edwards, *Language, Society and Identity.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 155.

The sociolinguistic phenomenon in this study presents a unique case in the literature of language and identity. People are usually very ethnocentric when it comes to identifying with other languages. However, during its long history as the language of the Qur'an and Islam, Arabic has presented itself as the Muslim lingua franca *par excellence*. Muslims have never looked at it as the language of the Arabs, come to replace their languages, as is the case with colonial languages.

Giles[21] postulated that individuals are more likely to define encounters with out-group members, or in this context, out-group languages, by what he termed 'positive linguistic distinctiveness' in the form of maintaining identity through more attachment to their own speech community. This takes shape in a number of ways: (a) They identify with one's speech community because of linguistic links; (b) they are aware of options to their own group social and other statuses; (c) they regard their group as having high validity; (d) they perceive their group boundaries as hard and closed; or (e) they identify with few other social categories.

Nonetheless, the case of the non-Arabic speaking Muslims' attitudes towards Arabic, as presented in this study, is not in harmony with Giles' proposed framework regarding maintaining ethnicity and affiliation to one's speech community. This may be attributed to the significant role Arabic plays in the life of Muslims. It does not seem to denote negative connotations in terms of ethnicity. Muslims feel related to Classical Arabic, at least emotionally, regardless of all other dialectal variations associated with different ethnicities. They seem to have special loyalty to Arabic as the language of the Qur'an.

In defining his accommodation theory, Giles[22] was concerned with 'interactive behavioral events'. The theory rests on the concept of the ethnic group defined as "those individuals who perceive themselves to belong to the same ethnic category". Afterwards, Giles[23] mentioned that "a basic postulate of accommodation theory is that people are motivated to adjust their speech style, or accommodate, as means of expressing values, attitudes and intentions towards others". Those non-Arabic speaking Muslims' identification with Arabic is beyond such a definition of identity, which is limited to ethnocentrism. These individuals create their own pattern of linguistic behavior so as to resemble those of the group with which they like to be identified.

According to Coulmas[24] (1997), Identity could have a number of meanings in different settings. One of the semantic contentions the word identity denotes in a sociolinguistic context is "language is taken as the means of 'identifying' oneself". "The link between language and identity is often so strong that a single feature of language

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[21] H. Giles, " Ethnicity Markers in Speech." In: Social *Markers in Speech*. Eds. K. R. Scherer and H. Giles. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 253.

[22] Giles, "Ethinicity Markers in Speech," 255

[23] H. Giles, "Accommodation Theory: Some New Directions." *York Papers in Linguistics,* 9 (1980),132.

[24] Florian Coulmas, *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 315.

use suffices to identify someone 's membership in a given group"[25]. As a matter of fact, a chosen name by a person may fulfill the same function. Though, many non-native Arabic native speakers do not speak Arabic fluently, they identify themselves with it. Many among the newly reverted Muslims choose to change their names as a sign of adopting a different identity. Some of them become upset when called by their previous names because they feel that the new name they have selected is a consequence of a new identity they have acquired, being Muslim. However, they feel that their attachment to Arabic is not because it happens to be the language of the Arabs but because it is the language of Islam. When an American Muslim revert was asked 'why do you think that many non-Arabic speaking Muslims desire to study Arabic?' His response was ' Because it's the language of Qur'an and the best way to understand Islam and its applications'. In his response to the question 'Does Arabic belong to the Arabs only? 'His reply was: 'No, it belongs to the Muslims.' Linguistic identity in terms of belonging to a linguistic group because of ethnic or dialectal allegiance in the sociolinguistic sense does not seem to be paramount here. It is, rather, identifying oneself with a universal belief that Arabic is the linguistic bond among its members of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. So, language embodies this bond through the positive attitudes that Muslims of diverse backgrounds have towards Arabic.

We think that sociolinguistic theory has a long way to go in order to accommodate the unique phenomenon of Arabic sociolinguistics. Al-Kahtany[26] described the vague and inadequate treatment the diglossic nature of Arabic has received. Some sociolinguists seem to be very hesitant to admit that the limited success in understanding some of the sociolinguistic features of the colloquial dialects of Arabic can never surpass the stumbling failures in understanding the real nature of Classical (Standard) Arabic sociolinguistics in its universal context.

Conclusion

The results of this study show clearly the unanimous agreement among the respondents on the importance of Arabic and the necessity for non-Arabic speaking Muslims to learn the language as the medium to know and practice Islam. This is born of the positive attitudes our respondents have shown. There is, however, some evidence that the independent variables of age, sex, fluency in Arabic and affiliation to Islam contribute to variance among the different subgroups within the sample. Variances correlated to sex and self-reporting fluency in Arabic were calculated as statistically significant.

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[25]   Florian, "The Handbook of Sociolinguistics," 317.

[26]   Abdallah H. Al-Kahtany, "The 'Problem' of Diglossia in the Arab World: An Attitudinal Study of Modern Standard Arabic and the Arabic Dialects." *Al-'arabiyyah* 30 (1997), 1-30.

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ملخص البحث. تساهم العوامل الاجتماعية – النفسية بدور مهم في زرع روح الانتماء بين الأشخاص للغاتهم وأعراقهم ، وبذلك تصاغ اتجاهاتهم نحو اللغة والهوية ولذا عنيت هذه الدراسة بعرض النتائج التي توصل إليها الباحث من خلال التعرف على اتجاهات مجموعة من المسلمين الناطقين بغير العربية نحو اللغة العربية . وقد حوت عينة البحث مشاركين من أعراق ولغات وبلدان مختلفة جاءوا للعمل في جنوب غرب المملكة العربية السعودية . وتم التعامل مع نقاط البحث التالية من خلال المنهج العقلي في تحديد اتجاه العينة نحو اللغة العربية :

١– تقييم العلاقة بين انتماء العينة من المسلمين الناطقين بغير العربية واتجاهاتهم نحو الدور الذي يمكن أن تقوم به اللغة العربية بين المسلمين .

٢– التعرف على تأثير بعض المتغيرات الديموغرافية مثل : العمر ، مستوى التعليم ، الجنس ، والانتماء للإسلام (بالولادة أو بالأعتناق) على اتجاهاتهم نحو اللغة العربية .

٣– تحديد الأسس التي بنى عليها المشاركون في الدراسة اتجاهاتهم نحو اللغة العربية وعلاقتها بنظرية الروابط العرقية .