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# Languages Killing Languages: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Media Portrayal of the Struggle between English and Arabic

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**Abstract**: The English language has grown to become international, but at the same time, many indigenous languages have become endangered and extinct. Recognizing these trends, scholars have begun recording and cataloging endangered languages. Though Arabic is not considered to be an endangered language, the physical and cultural presence and influence of the West in the Middle East, makes the issue pertinent and popular media has addressed it as well. Articles and speeches addressing the trend of the globalizing English language and the endangerment and extinction of indigenous languages have joined the discussion. 65 arguments from popular media sources against the globalization of English or for the increased usage of Arabic are the samples of this rhetorical analysis. This is significant to understand the spectrum between the positive and negative impacts of English as a global language. Findings showed that certain themes around this issue are present. The sampled media sources include various forms of diction, various language associations, and various attributions of blame. These findings are useful to show the number of ways that this issue can be framed and shed light on the influence that media may have on the opinions of the public on English as a global language.

**Keywords**: *global language, language death, English, Arabic, rhetorical analysis*

"Sadly, today, languages are dying at an unprecedented rate. A language dies every 14 days," English educator Patricia Ryan says in her 2010 TEDtalk. Ryan explained that approximately 6,000 languages were left in the world, and it was estimated that within 90 years, only 600 would remain. Many scholars, including researchers at the Rosetta Project, give similar estimates, indicating an unprecedented rate of language death (Wiecha). In addition to the remarkable rate of language death, unparalleled rates of globalization are occurring. Simply put, globalization refers to the spread of various things (e.g., people, finances, culture) around the globe. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "globalization" as "The action, process, or fact of making global," and adds that this process may, "widely considered to be at the expense of national identity" ("globalization").[1] An important

aspect of globalization to note is its transformative effects of societies' economies, politics, cultures, and individuals (Pennycook 513). However, some would argue that with historical patterns of trade and travel, globalization is nothing new. While globalization has occurred to some extent for centuries, a fact noted through European expansionism, transatlantic explorations, and colonial expansion throughout human history (Pennycook 514), fewer limitations on trade, communication, and travel and technological advancements in these areas have created a "historically unprecedented" state of globalization today (Bordo 56-57). Due to technologies in our modern world, globalization of tradable goods, finances, and even people through travel, is easier and more convenient than it ever has been before.

As goods, finances, and people are moving around the world as part of globalization, language is doing the same. The English language specifically is spreading around the globe and has

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[1] One should be aware that there are numerous possible definitions of "globalization." Even within the Oxford English Dictionary, references are made to the global spread of businesses and corporations specifically, to economic aspects, such as the flow of finances and matters of imports and exports, governmental and political aspects, and issues

of power, dominance, and cultures. See Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan's article, "Definitions of Globalization: A Comprehensive Overview and a Proposed Definition," for further information about the varying definitions of this term.

become "the world's language," a process discussed at length in writer and editor Robert McCrum's Globish.[2] McCrum recounts the history of the English language and how it truly became the global lingua franca. Though whether the English language has truly reached the status of the global language is debated, and some argue that Chinese is the next global language, statistics on the most widely spoken languages in the world are clear. Figure 1 in Appendix B is a chart from Statista, which shows some of the most widely spoken languages in the world in millions. Although there are only about 375 million native English speakers compared to the 982 million native Chinese speakers, the total number of English speakers worldwide is 1.5 billion compared to the total number of Chinese speakers at 1.1 billion. Although 1.1 billion is not a great number away from 1.5 billion, what is significant is the gap between the native and total speakers. Roughly 1,125,000,000 English speakers are non-native speakers who have learned English as a second or additional language compared to 118 million non-native Chinese speakers, a difference of over a billion. When the extreme jump between native and total speakers of English compared to Chinese is considered, English clearly stands uncontested as the global language.
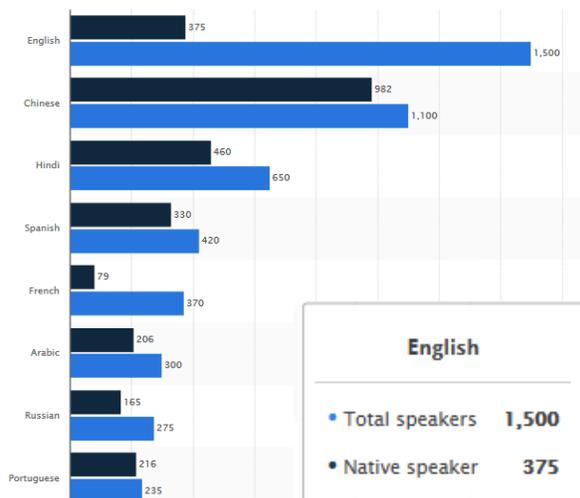


*Figure 1.* Statista's Native and Total Speakers of World's Most Spoken Languages

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[2] While McCrum is mainly concerned with the historical rise of the English language, whether the English language is "the world's language" presently is certainly a point of debate. Reporters and scholars are also currently focused on

The state of the Arabic language, however, is debatable. Arabic is not considered to be an endangered language and is in fact one of the 300 most widely spoken languages in the world, according to the Rosetta Project's Endangered Language Catalogue (ELCat) ("The 300 Languages"). Therefore, Arabic seems to be safe. The author of the blog titled *Arabizi* quotes an article referring to the popularity and prominence of the Arabic language, stating,

> Arabic language is one of the oldest languages in the world. Different statistics give various numbers of Arabic language speakers. Over 280 million people speak Arabic as their first language, while about 250 million people speak it as second language. It is one of the six official languages of the United Nations, and it is among the official languages of all the countries in the Arab League, amounting to 22 countries. So far, then, there seems to be no indication that the language is dying. ("Is Arabic in Danger or Not? When will We Agree?")

Due to the apparent status of the Arabic language in the world, it seems there is no reason to be concerned about it. After all, there are more than 1 billion Muslims worldwide (Desilver) who depend on the language as central to their religion. However, Arabic may not be as safe as it initially appears to be.

While hundreds and even thousands of languages die off, some larger and more widely spoken languages are growing and thriving. This is the case for many languages, yet is especially true for English. Although Patricia Ryan says she does not know whether the globalization of the English language has any direct connection to the staggering rate of language extinction around the world, research has shown connections between these phenomena. Alastair Pennycook, Professor

Chinese as the global language. See the University of Pennsylvania's *Language Log* post "English or Mandarin as the World Language?" filed by Vitor Mair and BBC's article by Jennifer Pak for a representation of this argument.

of Language Studies at the University of Technology in Sydney, states,

> It is not hard to make a case that English is intimately involved with processes of globalization. From its wide use in many domains across the world, or the massive efforts in both state and private educational sectors to provide access to the language, to its role in global media, international forums, business, finance, politics, and diplomacy, it is evident not only that English is widely used across the globe but also that it is part of those processes which we call globalization. (Pennycook 513)

Pennycook argues that English is part of the economic, political, and even cultural aspects of globalization taking place in our world today and claims that the English language has become the lingua franca of the world. As English is the language used for education, professionalism, international groups and organizations, media, finance, and international politics, denying the language's global presence is impossible (513). With a global economy as well as with technologies and communication that increasingly connect the world, a language for international communication has become necessary, and English has become the one to use (514), which has resulted in the English language gaining an economic value. Further, Elizabeth Malone at the National Science Foundation conducted a special report in linguistics and claims that while those larger languages, like English, globalize for international purposes of business and trade, fewer and fewer people tend to use smaller, local languages. Because of the seemingly greater importance of the global English language compared to those smaller, local languages, greater emphasis is placed on English, and native languages may become increasingly devalued. This process endangers those smaller, local languages.

**Problem**

Due to unparalleled rates of globalization, the growth of the English language, and the

phenomenon of language death, arguments against globalizing the English language have arisen. Arguments both for the increased use of local languages in the public sphere and for the decreased use of English in the public sphere exist. In fact, some scholars discuss the globalization of the English language as a new form of imperialism, subjecting other cultures to a more dominant Western one (Pennycook 513). Valuing their own languages, many people whose native language is not English argue to increase the usage of local languages to combat the overwhelming power of the English language in the public sphere. One example of such an argument is Suzanne Talhouk's TEDtalk "Don't Kill Your Language." Talhouk promotes the use of local languages over global ones, especially in expressions of creativity and artistry. Further, Talhouk promotes the belief that languages have within them power to create unity and a sense of national pride. Thus, the world's endangered languages may have some hope if these arguments can gain enough attention and support.

As previously noted, Arabic is not considered to be endangered. Thus, even with the predicted death of 50 to 90 percent of all languages during this century (Wiecha), Arabic would likely be safe. However, as the globalization of English and language death receives increasing amounts of attention, a concern for the Arabic language has emerged. Further, while Arabic is not classified as an endangered language, one would be hard-pressed to argue that it is not threatened in some way. In many Arabic-speaking countries, English is the language for the work place, for school, and for use in public places (Talhouk). It seems that in many places, the Arabic language is being pushed behind a veil, reserved only for private contexts. Further, the United States and other Western countries have been heavily involved in many Arabic-speaking countries for several years. With military forces heavily present throughout the region, part of the damage this Western presence causes is cultural ("What have been the role and effects"). While the US remains heavily involved in the Middle Eastern region exercising military and political influence, this parallels how we may

be a cultural – and therefore linguistic – influence as well.

With these conditions in mind, arguments that the Arabic language should be increasingly used and emphasized in education and academia, in creative expression, in professionalism, and throughout the public sphere in Arabic-speaking countries have surfaced. Some also argue that English should be used less frequently in these contexts. Talhouk is one example of these arguments, but countless others exist in popular news media outlets. The basis of these arguments varies, as some lean on statistics, historical trends, or the invocation of emotions. Considering the rhetorical framework of these arguments is critical to better understanding how the globalization of the English language may be conceived and how struggles between local and global languages may be framed.

### Research Questions

How are arguments in resistance to the globalization of the English language or in support of the increased usage of the Arabic language rhetorically framed in the media?

How do various media sources present the struggle between Arabic and English?

How has the conversation moved in the media throughout the past decade?

### Significance

It may seem that a global language would be helpful and even necessary in our ever interdependent world; however, when the consequences of the processes of language growth and language death are considered, a case can be made for a certain level of skepticism. Global languages do have the potential to connect people, creating greater unity and an ease of communication, as well as to simplify global business, legal, and political processes. Yet with the growth of global languages also comes the death of smaller languages. Karin Wiecha, blogger for the Rosetta Project, reports that researchers for the Rosetta Project's ELCat reported that 50 to 90 percent of all the world's languages are expected to die before the end of

the 21st century. Although some fail to see any significance in this trend, many realize the problem. In his book *Language Death*, linguist David Crystal argues that diverse languages are necessary for humanity and dying languages impact human culture, knowledge, and even survival. Crystal explains that with the death of languages comes the death of culture, the death of belief systems, the death of knowledge, the death of artistic expression, and the death of stories. Because of this impact, language deaths affect everyone, regardless of whether one's own native language is the one dying.

Further, language has a tremendous and complex relationship with both culture and identity. Scholars have produced an extensive amount of research regarding the complex relationship between language, identity, and socio-cultural contexts. One of the first theories on this relationship is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or linguistic relativity. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf argue that thought and one's conception of reality are heavily influenced by language. Their research shows that language directly impacts the way one thinks of his surroundings and himself (Steinfatt 605). Regarding language and thought, Whorf proposed that the majority of human thought was linguistic in nature, that language was a necessary component of the interpretation of experiences. Whorf argued that because language gives meaning to the world around us and thoughts have no way of having meaning without language, language directly impacts the way we see the world. Thus, because of linguistic variations, the worldview of different language speaking groups would also vary (Steinfatt 606). However, Noam Chomsky argues against Whorf's principles (Schaff & Chomsky) and provided evidence for universal properties of languages (Steinfatt 606). Chomsky and other mentalists believe language exists in the minds of language-speakers individually, and not in the external world, arguing that "the world contains only marks and sounds" and that language within one's mind serves to assign meaning (Smith 189). Nevertheless, although a strict Whorfian view of

the connection between language and worldview might be extreme, Chomsky's strict structural approach still includes a deep relationship between language, thought, and meaning.

Although several linguists have criticized the views proposed by linguistic relativity, this does not mean that no connection between language and identity or language and culture exists. Linguist Bonny Norton writes about this relationship, explaining that identity shifts may occur with changing social conditions, using the theories of Cornel West and Pierre Bourdieu (410). Norton states that language learners may have multiple and changing identities due to the way language impacts thoughts and meanings (412). Further, the influences of language on social and cultural settings are addressed by anthropologists Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin. As one of the main purposes for language is for social interaction (57), the authors argue that linguistic differentiation goes along with social differentiation (61). Further, the research shows that language is connected to thoughts of surroundings as well as to thoughts of self and therefore has an impact on how we view our social and cultural settings. Changing languages influences aspects of identity and culture. This is significant because one's conceptions of self-value and the value of one's language is highly related to the relationship language has with identity and culture. Linguist Peter Auer discusses the social implications of code-switching and code-mixing, addressing "social powers" and the "linguistic market" (463). Language is closely tied to socio-cultural interactions, and different languages seem to have different relative power within the social context and different shares of that "linguistic market." Further, Mark Sebba states that while individuals and communities take on a second language involuntarily and voluntarily, for various reasons, especially when the first language is a minority and the second language is a majority, power dynamics between the languages make it difficult to maintain conceptions of identity, community, and culture (454-455). Therefore, the original

culture may be changed by the addition of another language, especially if that language is dominant.

Thus, the globalization of English may drastically change cultures and even damage native cultures and languages, impacting societies and the identities of the people in the process. Pennycook points out that "English is constantly promoted over other languages" (516), and because of this, the spread of the English language has been considered a form of "linguistic imperialism" (513). The Oxford English Dictionary defines imperialism as "the extension and maintenance of a country's power or influence through trade, diplomacy, military or cultural dominance" ("imperialism"). The globalization of the English language may be a form of cultural imperialism in that the influence of the language – and the culture that comes with it – is dominating over other cultures. If the globalization of the English language is a form of imperialism, a culture may be changed by the addition of the English language.

Since the world is so connected by the various aspects of globalization, a global language is helpful, and many even see it as necessary. This may be true, but the research shows that the globalization of the English language has had several negative consequences as well. While knowing English does provide more opportunity, as scholarship suggests, there is also a tremendous cost as identities and cultures are transformed and even erased with the globalization of the English language. Those who argue against the globalization of the English language have often been cast off. This research attempts to give their arguments the attention and voice they deserve in the conversation. The purpose of this research is both to help the reader understand the range of ways the globalization of the English language may be conceived and presented and to make a broader connection to the status, power, and influence of the English language and western culture as a whole. While positive aspects of the globalization of English doubtlessly do exist, negative aspects are just as real and present. However, the positive aspects typically are more discussed, while these negative areas are often

neglected and ridiculed. Additionally, because globalization seems to go with progressivism, and because the English language and western culture are both so prominent in that process, the English language may be associated with progress. Thus, going against the English language or striving to place a greater emphasis on the native language of a culture may be seen as too traditional, old-fashioned, or as irrelevant.

Thus, this research will give exposure to a less recognized side of the issue, one that opposes the spread of the English language and promotes local language in the effort of protecting and preserving it. Often, those who go against the flow of this process of globalization are frowned upon and seen as being unprogressive. However, rather than considering these voices as "backwards" and "ignorant," this project will show readers the details and purposes of the arguments and the importance of local, indigenous languages. Through studying the mechanics of these arguments and exposing the issue more clearly, readers will see that the globalization of the English language is not a black and white issue to be seen as solely positive or solely negative, but rather gray with many nuances. Additionally, this research will give insight into the reasoning behind resisting a global language. Further, this research is also important in terms of the present political status of our world. This study enters a deeply political realm by bringing to light the potentially saturating influence of the Western world and its culture, specifically that of the United States, on a global context, but specifically in the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) region. The influence of the United States is further intensified by their current and historical presence in MENA countries, and this presence can be seen as a physical manifestation of the cultural influence of the US in that region ("What have been the role and effects of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East?"). While the US is physically present in this area and has made a significant impact via this physical presence, the cultural presence of the US may have just as large of an effect. This study is therefore meant to give

attention to that cultural presence, specifically through the lens of language.

## Approach

To study my research questions, a rhetorical analysis of arguments was performed by conducting a rhetorical close reading on both oral and written arguments that either oppose the use of English as a global language or express concern for or promotion of the Arabic language in the MENA region. Rhetorical analyses involve the critical examination and evaluation of three pieces of an argument, or three types or methods of appeals. The three pieces can be broken up in different ways; however, ultimately, breaking the pieces down to those coined by Aristotle, ethos, pathos, and logos, is most inclusive and offers the most encompassing means of survey. Ethos, the ethical appeal, according to Aristotle, "depends upon the moral character of the speaker." Pathos, the emotional appeal, focuses on, "putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind." Finally, logos, the logical appeal, depends "upon the speech itself." For the purpose of this study, logos, or the logical appeal, was emphasized. This research closely examines the texts of several articles to construct a representation of the media portrayal of the state of Arabic; therefore, the textual content is more important than either the author/speaker or the audience.

In this research, an analysis of sources from popular and widely accessible media was performed. The rhetoric in news sources, such as *BBC* and the *New York Times*, and in TEDtalks were analyzed. Additionally, articles in popular Arabic news sources like *Arab News*, *Al Jazeera*, *The National*, and *Gulf News* were also included in this study. All selected sources are available to the general public rather than those that are solely accessible for academics. The reasoning behind this is that while not everyone has access to discussions that happen in academic circles, either due to lack of availability or lack of knowledge, discussions that happen in the media are more accessible to and thus more influential on the general public. The sampled sources were found via internet searches, and the goal was to include

a wide variety of different types of sources to make the sample as representative of the publicly accessible discourse as possible. A full, chronological list of the sample of 65 sources is included in Appendix A.

**Analysis and Findings**

Through analysis of 65 sources, a total of fifteen themes were most consistent and were grouped into three categories, diction, language associations, and responsibility and blame, as shown in Figure 2 in Appendix B.

*Diction*

The analysis of the sampled media sources revealed certain dictions to address language death. That is, authors chose certain ways to write about language death and/or the state of the Arabic language. Word choice matters as the same facts may be conveyed differently through different words. Although others were present, this analysis revealed three main dictions consistently used to address language death: language death as a systematic process, language death in the terms of endangerment and extinction, and language death through violent means.

*Figure 2*. Categories and Themes from Analysis
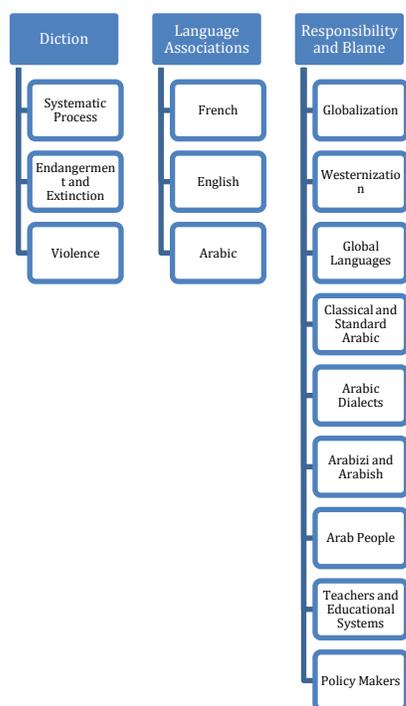


*Systematic process.* While language death seems tragic when expressed in terms of life and death, authors may choose to express this process in a more detached and clinical way. The attitude of authors who choose to use this diction seems to be that language death is a process not unlike the rotation of the earth, something that happens, something that we cannot stop, and something that we do not necessarily need to be concerned about. Thus, there are often no good or bad connotations with this diction. Instead, the process is expressed as something factual; languages exist, decrease in usage, stop getting used all together, and then cease to exist.

The sort of diction indicative of viewing language death as a systematic process was present in several of the sampled sources. For example, one *WordPress* blogger states, "'Arabizi' means including some English words while speaking in Arabic," and "English to me is more important than any other language." Although he does not contest that the English language is impacting Arabic, the author argues that this does not have any real consequence; although English is influencing the Arabic language, this is simply a process due to the importance of the English language in the world and is not something to be particularly worried about (B00041200). Further, one author from *Arab News* argues that since English is the language of the "most advanced" and "most achieved" nations, logically, other nations should adopt it to further their education and cross-cultural communication (Al-Zuhayyan). Nonetheless, this author only emphasizes the importance of the English language in terms of its practicality in the present state of the world. He seems to see the globalization of English as just a process with no essentially negative or positive connotations. Finally, *The National*'s Khalid Al Ameri comments on the importance of Arabic; however, he spends most of his time discussing the importance and value of English. To Al Ameri, "the English language is essential," and he urges readers to realize the global importance of the language. He addresses the global spread of English and recognizes it as a reason for the

language's significance. However, he does not address the globalization of English as either positive or negative. Rather, he only discusses the current state of the world in a factual manner and comments that he sees this as proof of the importance of the English language (Al Ameri).

*Endangerment and extinction.* Another way a language is discussed in the sampled media sources is through the diction of endangerment and extinction. Where the first diction also presents language death as a process, it is more detached and does not address language as a living thing, but rather tends to approach language as an inanimate object. Instead, the diction of endangerment and extinction addresses language as dynamic and living. Decreased usage of a language negatively affects its health and causes the language to be endangered. When a language ceases to be used all together, it becomes extinct. The diction of endangerment and extinction is often used for animal species, also with a negative connotation. With this diction, the authors often urge the audience to do something to prevent the loss of language.

Discussing language as living in terms of endangerment and extinction can be seen in John Noble Wilford's *New York Times* article. The title itself, "World's Languages Dying off Rapidly," refers to language as living and capable of dying. The author also refers to the "survival" of languages. The author states, "Most of the thousands of other languages now face extinction at a rate, the researchers said, that exceeds that of birds, mammals, fish or plants." This article is a prime example of the diction of language as a living being capable of being endangered and extinct and even compares it to animal and plant species. Additionally, in the *BBC* article, "The Death of Language?" languages are referred to as being or becoming endangered or extinct and the language of loss is heavy. The author claims that the loss of language means the loss of culture and expression, stating, "Languages are not simply a collection of words. They are living, breathing organisms holding the connecting and associations that define a culture. When a language becomes extinct the culture in which it

lived is lost too" (Colls). Moreover, an excerpt from an article quoted in *Arabizi* reads, "Languages have lives too. They have families, they are born, they give birth to other languages; they grow, develop, transform and change, and they die" ("Is Arabic in Danger or Not? When will We Agree?"). Finally, several articles question whether the Arabic language is dying and use a life-or-death metaphor in their discussion of the language. In February 2010, *Global Post* released an article titled, "Is Arabic a Dying Language?" focusing on the state of the language in Dubai, and *Arabic Literature* released an article with the same title about Cairo. *The National* also published an article by David Lepeska speculating about the death of Arabic in March 2010, and in June, an article titled "Arabic – A Dying Language?" about Lebanon came out. Some of these articles seem to reflect the publicity of Talhouk's organization, Feil Amer, translated as "Act Now" or "Do Something" as their first Arabic Language Festival was in Beirut in June 2010 ("Feil Amer").

*Violence.* Thirdly, language is discussed as dying through violent means. This is the most commonly found diction in the sampled sources. While language also dies out in the diction of endangerment and extinction, that diction presents it as a natural process without attributing the death to any source. In the diction of violence, language death has some perpetrating actor that causes it. Violence in regard to language death is often expressed through terms that show some sort of power imbalance, like "domination" or "colonialism."

Although Wilford's "World's Languages Dying Off Rapidly," includes endangerment and extinction diction, it also contains words and phrases like, "overwhelmed," "dominant language," "vulnerable," "threatened decline," and "threatened spoken language." Further, Wilford suggests that "the dominance of English threatens the survival" of several smaller languages around the world. These phrases are all evident of the diction of violence in which some more powerful force is dominating the less powerful one. Further, Lucy Fielder's article,

"CSI Beirut: Who murdered the Arabic Language?" reported on crime scenes in Beirut in which Arabic letters were the victims. These scenes were part of Feil Amer raising awareness for their first Arabic Language Day. Additionally, blogger Elizabeth Pfiester questioned whether English was the major threat to the Arabic language, discussing the prominence of English in Saudi Arabia. Pfiester argues that the English language is that dominating force that is threatening and overpowering Arab tradition, culture, and identity. Further, in Talhouk's TEDtalk urging her audience, "Don't kill your language," she discussed the power, unity, and national pride that could be found in the Arabic language if its speakers regained a vision of its importance. Talhouk stated, "It is often said that if you want to kill a nation, the only way to kill a nation, is to kill its language." With this statement, she warns the audience of the danger of neglecting the Arabic language. Talhouk addresses the importance of language to personal and national identity in her speech, using the diction of violence throughout.

**Language Associations**

The second thematic category is language associations. Three languages were discussed in the sampled media: French, English, and Arabic. The authors expressed that these languages and their associations may have a lot to do with the current state of the Arabic language. For example, one author related how her Arabic-speaking daughter was not understood by peers who she had met in a toy store and explained, "I understood from the mother that she only speaks to her girls in English and French. This way, she explained they will be fluent in two foreign languages early on. Fluent in two foreign languages, I thought to myself, but can't speak their own mother tongue" (Askoul). This is an example of the effects of language associations on the state of languages in the MENA region. If a language is negatively perceived, the population does not favor it, but likely chooses another when possible. The perceptions of French, English, and Arabic can be seen through the terminology used to describe these languages.

*French*

Although least addressed throughout the sampled sources, French is still addressed several times as it is a prominent language in parts of the MENA region, specifically in North African countries. The French language is generally associated with class and sophistication. French is seen as the language of those who are well-off financially and high in status and class. However, French is not always seen in such a positive light. For example, an article from *BBC News* associates the French language with "a legacy of France's colonial rule." Nonetheless, the author still acknowledges that many parents encourage their children to speak both French and English, "hoping this will one day help them find work and secure a better future" (Shawish). Thus, although French may be reminiscent of colonialism, many Arabs still reinforce the idea of the language as higher status. One article reads, "French has long conveyed high class and culture" (Fielder), and another article reads, "French is the bourgeois language… If you have a diploma from an Arabic-language university it is less valued than one from a French one" (Lindsey). Thus, it seems that, in general, French is valued above Arabic in terms of educational and social status implications.

*English*

English, however, is associated with opportunism more than anything. The English language is seen as the path to success. One who knows English is seen as educated, knowledgeable, and cultured. Knowing English means more opportunities, specifically related to employment, and this is emphasized over and over throughout the sampled sources. The blog *Arabizi* quotes Jordanian House of Representatives member, Mohammad Al Qatasha, as saying, "We are the ones who push our children to invest in the English language because we believe that it is a valuable investment. We believe we need this language because the owners of this language are the rulers of the world" ("Arabic Needs Protection, but Who Should Protect it?"). Further, in addition to English being

seen as an investment towards the future, it also is seen as "cool" by the younger generation. *The National* article "Cool Factor Boost Needed to Ensure Arabic's Survival" is one example of the association of English with "cool" (Pennington). However, while some argue that English should only be the "second language," subjected to the official and first language of Arabic (Youssef), others argue that English should be emphasized because, "the command over the English language makes a big difference in education and in cross-cultural understanding" (Al-Zuhayyan) or that, "the English language is essential… if you want to be successful" (Al Ameri). However, several articles associate the English language with power, and this is the most common association found in the sampled sources. One Qatari professor, interviewed by a reporter for *The National*, expressed growing concern for the Arabic language in the Gulf States because of the "dominance of English" (Lepeska). Additionally, Talhouk writes, "Most of the Arab countries submit to the hegemony of English," discussing English with political terminology ("Arabic – A Dying Language?"). With political diction, authors convey that English is taking over their culture and language, and thus affecting their identities.

### Arabic

The Arabic language is portrayed with two different sets of related associations. The first set reflects the poor condition of Arabic and includes agedness, traditionalism, difficulty, and irrelevancy. The second shows Arabic in a more positive light and is more of how Arabic should be seen than how it actually is and includes heritage, culture, identity, and pride.

First, with the prominence of English and its strong associations of being better for the future and creating more opportunities, Arabic has begun to be looked down upon to some extent. Though most of the authors who write about this association with the Arabic language claim to be expressing the opinion of the general public rather than their own personal opinions, the Arabic language is reported to carry with it some very

negative associations. For example, *BBC News* and *The Daily Star* both quote Talhouk as claiming that the young people in many Arabic-speaking countries see Arabic as being "outdated," "dull," and "too old" (Shawish; Maakaroun). Similarly, an article in *The Economist* reads, "…no one cares. Arabic no longer has any cachet. Among supposedly sophisticated Arabs, being bad at Arabic has become fashionable" ("The Arabic Language: A God-Given Way to Communicate"). Further, an article in *The National* states that the younger generation "shuns Arabic because they feel inferior when they speak in that language" ("Arabic Language is Losing Ground"). These examples demonstrate the negative associations with the Arabic language that may be endangering it.

However, positive and powerful associations also exist in the sampled sources. *Gulf News* article, "Arabic 'is an identity for Arabs, Muslims,'" portrays Arabic as "the Structure of Identity" for the Arab peoples. Further, *Gulf News* reporter Marten Youssef addresses Arabic as being central to preserving and protecting Arab culture. Additionally, the Arabic language is directly associated with identity, heritage, and culture in David Lepeska's article in *The National*, in the *Gulf News* article "Arabic is Part of UAE Culture," in *The Economist*'s "The Arabic Language: A God-Given Way to Communicate," in Hesham Shawish's *BBC News* article, in Suzanne Talhouk's "Arabic – a Dying Language?," in the Eliana Maakaroun's article in *The Daily Star*, in Lucy Fielder's " CSI Beirut: Who Murdered the Arabic Language?," and in articles and posts throughout the *Arabizi* blog. This kind of association with the Arabic language continues throughout the other sampled media sources as well.

## Responsibility and Blame

With the state of Arabic arguably declining, as many sampled sources suggest, the finger has been pointed in many directions. Blame for the decline of Arabic has been placed on globalization and westernization, global or more popular

languages such as English and French, Classical and Standard Arabic, various Arabic dialects, Arabizi or Arabish, Arab people themselves, educational systems and teachers, and laws and policy makers. Each of these actors has been subject to criticism and blame in the media for the decline of the Arabic language.

### Globalization

Globalization seems to be the first and most obvious thing to blame for many of the problems in the world today. While globalization has many good components, many people realize its downsides and tend to use it as a scapegoat for all the wrong in the world. John Noble Wilford in his *New York Times* article refers to linguistics professor, Dr. K. David Harrison, who attributes part of the reason for language death as a whole to the "global influence" of the largest 83 languages, which 80% of the world's population speaks. Further, Tom Colls in his *BBC News* article suggests that language loss happens when "small communities come out of their isolation and seek interaction with the wider world" as a result of globalization. Finally, *Arabizi* also suggests that globalization may have something to do with the present rate of language loss, noting that, "some people do still claim that globalisation is a threat" ("Globalisation – A Problem or Solution for Arabic?").

### Westernization

While globalization is by definition a process that involves the whole world and does not necessarily emphasize the West, instead of the world becoming smaller and everyone being put in contact with everyone, westernization alludes to a power imbalance. The West is stronger and more influential, so the world is disproportionately influenced by the West. Tom Hundley in the *Global Post* refers to the "relentless tide of Western-style consumerism" that threatens the Arabic language and national identities. Further, the author of an article in *The Economist* refers to English as the prevalent language in the "international sphere," thus giving English-speaking countries more influence ("The Arabic Language: A God-Given Way to

Communicate"). Finally, Patricia Ryan suggests English-speakers are favored because the influence of English and Western culture has created a situation in which the world regards one's abilities with English as a measure of intelligence. These examples show the English language and Western culture to have more power and to overwhelm other languages and cultures.

### Global languages

Not surprisingly, other languages have been blamed for the current state of the Arabic language as well. A particular amount of blame has been placed upon English and French as English and French are the most prevalent foreign languages in Arabic-speaking countries. As the use of the Arabic language seems to be declining, the use of English and French seems to be increasing. For example, in Lebanon, "English and French are widely used" (Shawish). Further, the language associations of English and French make these languages a challenge for the Arabic language. Ursula Lindsey reports, "command of a foreign language promises greater job opportunities and is a mark of social standing." Thus, English and French may be seen as more valuable. Therefore, as another article notes, "middle-class children often speak English or French at home… Arabic looks difficult and dowdy in comparison" (Fielder). Thus, global languages like English and French are blamed for the current state of Arabic.

### Classical and Standard Arabic and various Arabic dialects

While the English and French languages received a large amount of blame for the state of the Arabic language, these are not the only languages being blamed. In fact, Classical and Standard Arabic as well as numerous Arabic dialects are also being blamed. This may seem counterintuitive; however, the basic argument is that Classical Arabic is no longer spoken, but with so many different dialects of Arabic, the language has no unity. Because Arabic is divided by many dialects, and because Standard Arabic is difficult and lacking usage in everyday life, Arabic is weak and unstable.

The article in *The Economist* explains the blame of Classical and Standard Arabic, stating, "Classical Arabic, the language of the Koran, and its modern version, Modern Standard Arabic, known in academia as MSA, are a world apart from the dialects that people use every day… this kind of Arabic is no one's mother tongue" ("The Arabic Language: A God-Given Way to Communicate"). Additionally, Hesham Shawish writes, "Even with Arabic, there is a big difference between the classical, written form of the language and the colloquial spoken Lebanese dialect." Maha, an online Arabic teacher, explains this difference in her promotion of learning Standard Arabic (LearnArabicWithMaha). However, several sampled sources reported that many young people in Arabic-speaking countries are losing their ability to speak Standard Arabic. One article reads, "Many young Arabs don't have a command of classical Arabic and its contemporary equivalent, modern standard Arabic… Instead, at home and in almost all settings, they use their local dialect" (Lindsey). In fact, in the United Arab Emirates, "poor literacy in Arabic" has been compared to being "the new disability" (Salem). This usage of dialects rather than MSA may indeed be seen as "a threat to linguistic heritage and cultural identity" (Lindsey).

### Arabizi and Arabish

Not only are young people "turning away from their mother tongue" to French and English, but they are also beginning to use Arabizi and Arabish, which are also blamed for the state of the Arabic language. Arabish includes using local dialects with foreign words (usually from English and French) mixed in. Another commonly blamed language has been Arabizi. Arabizi is "a Roman character-based Arabic language slang" (Ghazal). Arabizi arguably destroys the integrity of the Arabic language, and it is said to weaken and even be a "threat to the Arabic language" (Ghanem). Arabizi is apparently used by the younger generation frequently over email, text, and social media like Facebook. It is said to be easier, more convenient, and more fun than using either MSA or dialects of Arabic. However, the result is that many people, like Hala Hamodeh, interviewed by *The Jordan Times* reporter Mohammal Ghazal, "can no longer write proper and grammatically correct Arabic." Thus, Arabizi is being called a "malignant language" and seen as a "crime against our mother language" (Ghazal).

### The Arab People

While it may seem unsurprising that the finger has been pointed outward at external sources like globalization and westernization as well as at the English and French languages, blame is also turned inward. Several of the sampled sources placed the blame upon the Arab people themselves. As native speakers of Arabic, the Arab people are addressed as having the duty and responsibility to protect their language. Since it is the younger generation who are supposedly moving away from Arabic and gravitating towards languages like English, French, Arabizi, and Arabish, often throughout the sampled media sources, they are the ones admonished to change their patterns and recognize the Arabic language as something to be proud of. However, some articles address the Arab people as a whole. A blog post on Arabizi titled "Arabic Needs Protection, but Who Should Protect it?" begins by answering that question with, "The short answer is nobody. Except of course the speakers of the Arabic language themselves." The way the article in *The Economist* starts off is a prime example of this kind of responsibility and blame allocation as well. It reads, "The Arabic language is dying. Its disloyal children are ditching their mother tongue…" ("The Arabic Language: A God-Given Way to Communicate"). Additionally, an article by Rana Askoul in *The National* attributed the blame for the state of Arabic to the Arab people's lack of pride in their language. Finally, Talhouk uses similar rhetoric in her 2012 TEDtalk, placing the responsibility of ensuring the language's survival on the Arabic-speaking people themselves instead of on any other source that might be responsible.

### Educational Systems and Teachers

The blame is placed internally on an even more specific group when the educational systems and teachers are blamed for the state of the Arabic language. This is more of a current trend in the sampled media sources and cannot be seen clearly until about mid-2013. The main argument is that the Arabic language is losing ground because the teachers are failing to adequately do their jobs. A report in *The National* opens with, "Arabic is not dying but the way it is taught has to be revived," suggesting that the teaching methods are already dead (Al Khan). This author, Mohammed Al Khan, explains five areas an organization called Arabic for Life suggested receive attention to ensure the safety of the Arabic language. These all had to do with improving the curriculum, teaching methods, and teachers' training to improve the perceptions about the Arabic language. In the Second International Conference on the Arabic Language, these problems were again addressed ("New Approaches to Teaching Arabic Language"). As a result, an attempt to make Arabic classes fun (Issa, "Fun Classes Teaching Children to Love Arabic") and an effort to better train and screen potential Arabic teachers (Issa, "Tough New Tests for Prospective Arabic Teachers in Dubai") were implemented in Dubai and in other Arabic-speaking countries. Because of the blame of teachers and the educational systems, these areas received more attention in many countries.

*Policy Makers*

Finally, language policy and policy makers are yet another group allocated the blame for the state of the Arabic language. The decision to make Arabic the official language in the United Arab Emirates was applauded by the intellectual and academic community who regarded Arabic as a source of national heritage and identity (Youssef), but not every Arabic-speaking country has looked upon its policy makers' decisions as favorably. In fact, in 2012, eight years after that UAE legislation, some called for more language laws in the UAE. *Arabizi* blog post "Arabic Must be the Focus in Pursuit of 'True' Bilingualism in the UAE: Why a Serious Language Policy is Needed" relates the desire for greater protection of the Arabic language through language policy. Further, *Arab News* published an article by Ghazanfar Ali Kahn that reported on Saudi Arabia's Arab Institute for Arabic Language and Ministry of Education making efforts to promote and protect Arabic as well. Finally, laws and language policy were also called for in Dubai to protect the Arabic language, and a blog post reflects the responsibility and blame put on the Arabic-speaking people as a whole and policy makers specifically ("Arabic Needs Protection, but Who Should Protect it?").

**Conclusion**

Although the approach of a rhetorical close reading and analysis is fitting for a research project in the humanities, there are certain limitations to this approach. One major limitation is that the media chosen for the analysis might not be reflective of the discussion as a whole. To ensure a wide representation and therefore make the media discussion as reflective of the popular conversation as possible, a large number of sources from a variety of newspapers, blogs, speeches and other media from various countries were selected. Another limitation of this method is that the sampled media sources might not be reflective of the opinions of the general public. Because this study is aimed at assessing the discussion and argumentative representation in popular media, the opinions of the general public are not as essential. However, to better represent specific opinions and arguments on this issue, interviews or surveys could be helpful. In fact, one direction for future research might be using surveys and/or interviews to ask people about their experiences and opinions in related areas. Nonetheless, the analysis of the media sources was useful and informative about the current and past popular discussion about the state of the Arabic language, specifically in relation to the globalization of the English language.

The discussion in the sampled media sources can be followed throughout the past decade, and shifts are apparent both in the way the state of Arabic is discussed and in the object of blame. When arranged chronologically, various themes emerge from the sampled media in patterns, and the discussion can be easily followed. Figure 3 in Appendix B is a timeline of the discussion from the sampled media sources. The first of the media sources came from 2004, and there were only four sources in the study from 2004 to 2009 because of lack of media coverage of the topic. Throughout the sampled sources, the discussion shifts to various prominent topics, and although there were always some that did not focus on the current trend, these can be seen as outliers.

that language is. If the Arabic language is in danger, which language is it that needs saving?

Yet, this research found that there are still sources that do not believe the Arabic language is in danger at all, mainly because of its prominence in the Islamic religion. Indeed, Arabic is regarded as sacred and holy by many Muslims.

Arabic is used in mosques, and many Muslims believe that translating the Quran into any other language defiles their sacred text since Allah is believed to have given the contents of the Quran to Mohammed in Arabic ("The Arabic Language: A God-Given Way to Communicate"). In the context of Islam, there seems to be little concern for the Arabic language. Arabic is central to Islam

*Figure 3.* Timeline of Prominent Topics of Discussion from Sampled Sources
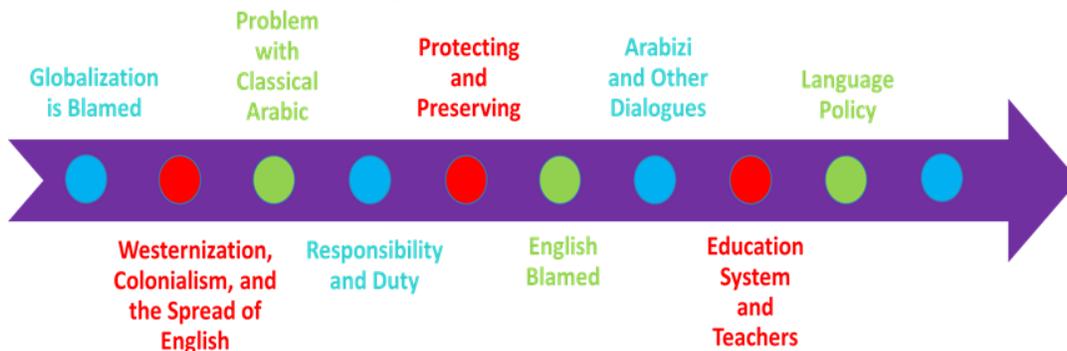


Though many processes, languages, and people were blamed and held responsible throughout the movement of the media discussion in the last decade, one interesting thing to note is the blame of the various forms of the Arabic language. Classical Arabic, the language of the Quran, was seen as too difficult and irrelevant, as was Standard Arabic, its modern relative. However, Arabic dialects used in various places were blamed as well for causing division in the language and among the Arab people. Still, the modern and emerging languages of Arabizi and Arabish were blamed for being too progressive, not truly Arabic, and corrupting the language. This raises the question, what is the true Arabic language? Many media sources called for the pride, protection, and preservation of the Arabic language, yet they do not seem to agree on what

and is therefore not seen as threatened. The Arabic language and its close ties with Islam cause the nature of the relationship between language, identity, and culture to be made even more complicated.

The entrance of religion into this mix may be unique to Arabic and Islam because of their close relation. For instance, there is no parallel with Christianity; there is no particular language considered to be a sacred part of Christianity. This incorporation of religion into the tight relationship of language, culture, and identity may be unique; however, more research should be done in this area.

Nonetheless, just because a language is used in a mosque does not mean it is not in danger. Some of the authors of the sampled media sources

expressed that they or people around them are either unable or unwilling to use Arabic in areas of their everyday lives. For example, the younger generation's lack of fluency and literacy in their supposedly native language of Arabic is indicative that the language may not be as secure as some believe. However, the younger generation is not the only population apparently losing the language. Suzanne Talhouk tells that she was looked down upon for using Arabic in a restaurant in Lebanon, Mohammad Ghazal tells of a salesman who prefers to only use Arabizi because of its easiness, and Hesham Shawish tells of a teacher who must communicate with some of her Arab students in English or French because of their lack of understanding in Arabic. Thus, while Arabic appears to be safe for the purposes of Islam, it is significantly less secure in other areas of everyday life, causing speculation about the stability of the Arabic language.

So what does the future of the Arabic language look like? According to the sampled media sources, it is extremely uncertain. However, when considering both the prominence and likely permanence of Arabic in the context of Islam and the ever-decreasing usage of Arabic in everyday life, the speculation of a Qatari professor from the sampled sources is relevant. Professor Abbas al Tonsi has written textbooks for and taught the Arabic language for over 40 years, but his major concern came to light when he stated, "I am afraid that after 20 years, Arabic will just be a language of religious ritual" (Lepeska). Though the Arabic language will not likely become altogether extinct, its future may parallel that of Latin, a language once widely spoken that became only the language of the church and some scholarship, then falling out of use in scholarship, and then gradually falling out of use altogether. Nonetheless, the Arabic language has a particular centrality to Islam that it seems Latin did not have to Christianity. This could be because while Christianity has a history of many languages, including Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, Islam has a history of only Arabic. Arabic is central to Islam in a way no language is to Christianity. Thus, while Arabic

may move in the same general direction as Latin did, becoming only a language of religion, it seems unlikely to ever fall out of use altogether.

The possible movement of Arabic to be only a language of religion raises the question, "what does it mean for a language to be dying?" If a language cannot be used to communicate in basic, everyday situations among its speakers, and if they choose another language to express themselves instead, it may indeed be dying. Aijaz Zaka Syed, in his article in *Arab News*, quotes a UNESCO report that says that "a language is endangered when parents are no longer teaching it to their children and it is no longer being used in everyday life." By this definition, the Arabic language is well on its way to extinction if not already there. Because Arabic is declining in every day usage, according to the sampled media sources, the language may be considered to be endangered. Additionally, though Arabic is widely spoken, it may accurately be looked at as an endangered language in some specific places in the MENA region. If this is the case for Arabic, which is one of the 300 most widely spoken languages in the world and therefore supposedly safe from the drastic 50 to 90 percent language loss within this century, the situation for smaller languages is high-risk as well. Further research investigating what it truly means for a language to be dying needs to be conducted, as more languages than we realize might be in danger.

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