Book review

Sarah Hopkyns and Wafa Zoghbor, eds, *Linguistic identities in the Arab Gulf states: Waves of change*

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"If the Gulf region were to be given a signature word it would be 'change'" (p. 1), Hopkyns and Zoghbor propose, addressing the significance of their recent book *Linguistic Identities in the Arab Gulf States: Waves of Change*. Such rapid change, be it demographic, linguistic, or otherwise, has long gone under-documented and under-theorized, making this work a long-awaited addition to the shelves of anyone interested in researching or better understanding the sociolinguistic scene in the Arab Gulf region. Just as importantly, the book, to my knowledge, is the first of its kind, addressing various aspects of language identity and ideology in the region.

The four-part volume starts with an excellent introduction by editors Sarah Hopkyns and Wafa Zoghbor. Each of its four parts includes three chapters dealing, respectively, with issues of (1) language and power, followed by Gulf identities (2) in the media, (3) in transition, and lastly (4) in English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts. The introduction contextualizes the region, touching on its multitude of diversities, not shying away from the stratifications and inequalities that are also present within such waves of change. Relevant to the subject of inquiry, the region boasts over 100 languages, the most dominant of which are English and Arabic (in its different dialects). This is expected following a rapid growth in the region's population beginning in the late twentieth century, where transnational (im)migrants currently make up the vast majority of the population in some Gulf states, like Qatar and Kuwait.

What is more commendable than the book's expansive exploration of how English altered Gulf identities is its exploration of minoritized and marginalized linguistic identities. It comes as no surprise that many chapters (see, e.g., Chapters 1, 2, 5, 9, and all of Part 4) deal with English, exploring the circumstances and neoliberal policies and ideologies that have given way to its marked dominance. Yet, an investigation of the Gulf is not complete without considering its transnational (im)migrant population and other marginalized groups as evident in some analyses. As part of its analysis, Chapter 2 discusses indigenous languages in Oman, proposing that English – and Arabic, for that matter – are prioritized over Oman's less empowered indigenous languages. Chapter 7 discusses the narratives of Bangladeshi 'third culture kids' in the Gulf, while Chapter 11 discusses the narratives of multilingual foreign schoolteachers. Additionally, Chapter 8 addresses social stratification through a timely investigation of Abu Dhabi's signage pertaining to the coronavirus crisis. While Chapter 3 discusses foreign domestic workers (FDW) raising children in the Gulf, it concerns itself not with the perspective of FDWs, but their role in linguistically shaping the children they take care of.

Another strength of the book, as evident in its third part, lies in its interest in how its subject of inquiry manifests in "various forms of media" (p. 3), such as social media in Chapter 4, literary fiction in Chapter 5, and television drama in Chapter 6. What makes the volume even more well-rounded is its interdisciplinary approach to investigating identity. As thoroughly explained in its introduction, the book employs a range of theoretical frameworks, from linguistic anthropology to critical applied linguistics, among others. The introduction does an excellent job of explaining such approaches along with some of the key concepts that help explain them. As a result, this volume is fairly accessible to the general as well as the specialized reader. Moreover, a consistent theme of the book is that the authors conclude with some recommendations – although at times too broad or too ambitious – that are meant to help alleviate the linguistic phenomena or tensions in question.

While this is an overdue and insightful volume on the multilingual contexts of the Arab Gulf region, there are some areas of limitation to be expected. While 7 out of its 12 chapters are empirically founded, a more thorough exploration of the titular notion of identity would have required more, or different, empirical data in some cases. For example, the arguments in Chapter 5 would have been more convincing had the author presented an ethnography on the writer behind the literary novel it uses as a window to the cultural-linguistic scene in Kuwait. Another missed opportunity is the analysis of an Egyptian-produced television series rather than a Gulf-based production in Chapter 6. More crucially, while – as mentioned earlier – attention to social inequalities pertaining to less empowered populations is a major strength of the book, more narratives (like the ones in Chapters 7, 11, and 12) would have made this strength even more remarkable. Chapter 3 specifically makes a flawed correlation between education level and parenting skills, interpreting the lack of Arabic proficiency in FDWs as a key reason behind Arabic deficiencies in the children under their care. This proposition does not directly consider some other factors, such as the large-scale spread of English and EMI education that is increasingly gaining popularity, as discussed in the final part of the book. Moreover, while it is understandable that one volume is not sufficient to cover the region in more detail, it would have been nice to see Bahrain get at least one dedicated chapter along with its counterparts.

Additionally, the introduction refers to the region as a product of "globalization on steroids" (Morehouse 2008, as cited on p. 2) resulting in some anxieties surrounding English and sentiments of nostalgia toward Arabic, and the "good old times" prior to the oil era (an excellent discussion of this can be found in Chapter 1; see also Findlow 2006). However, while Chapter 10 – similarly to Chapter 11 – makes a solid argument in favor of *translanguaging* pedagogies (Williams 1994; García & Wei 2014), it does so on the basis that the ultimate goal is "to truly globalize and internationalize" (p. 183), an assumption that seems to consider only the neoliberal policies already in place, disregarding some of the sentiments on the ground.

The volume concludes with a chapter on identity tensions in Qatari students attending EMI international-branch campuses of the Qatar Foundation's Educational City, who oscillate between feelings of pride and shame regarding their English-language use and education. These conflicting identity representations are to be more and more expected

with the growing visibility and dominance of English in the region (cf. Al-Alawi 2022 on youth linguistic identities in Bahrain).

Overall, *Linguistic Identities in the Arab Gulf States: Waves of Change* is an expertly presented volume that takes into account the sensitivity of context in its wide scope of investigating Gulf identities in a multitude of domains. Hopkyns and Zoghbor do not leave much to be desired in their introduction, providing whatever the reader – general or specialized – may need in terms of background information and relevant literature. The introduction also serves as a wonderful map for the book, with comprehensive summaries of each chapter that enhance its readability. This accessibility is especially important for Gulf readers to better understand how the changes their region has undergone, and continues to go through, may affect them linguistically. Moreover, this work will hopefully encourage more Gulf-based students to enter majors concerned with language and identity, which are currently less favored in the region. Lastly, I hope that this volume will pave the way for more research from Gulf-based and Gulf-concerned scholars to gain a better understanding of the linguistic scene in the region, and to enhance the value of humanities scholarship among its populations.

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