

## Englishes of the Middle East: A focus on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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### Introduction

The countries of the Middle East<sup>1</sup> are part of what Kachru (1986) calls the Expanding Circle countries. As opposed to the Outer Circle countries, where English was established during colonization, countries in the Expanding Circle are those where English has been gaining status and use in the recent past. The expanding circle includes most countries of South America, South East and East Asia, Europe, parts of Africa, and, of course, the Middle East. However, it needs to be clarified at the onset that the Middle East is not a homogeneous region. The histories, cultures, politics, and economies of the countries included in this region are radically different from each other and it would be erroneous to put all of them into a single group for any in-depth analysis. Keeping this in mind, this chapter first provides a broad-brush review of research on English in the region from a World Englishes perspective and then looks at the English language in Saudi Arabia in some detail.

### World Englishes and the Middle East

Given the population of almost 300 million people and a reasonable (although variable) literacy rate, there are perhaps between 25 – 35 million users of English in the Middle East. This number might be higher still if we consider the expatriate population living in the region. English is taught as a subject in all the countries in the region, although it is introduced at different grades. There are print and online English language newspapers published in all the countries. And, there are a small, but growing, number of people who choose to write novels and other creative literature in English. English is also widely used in business and industry by both the local populations and expatriates. All these signs suggest that English has already taken root in the Middle East and is used for a range of functions. However, even with the reasonably high profile of English in the Middle East, there are only a handful of published research papers that focus on the use of English in the region from a World Englishes perspective.

A review of the journals *World Englishes* and *English World-Wide* – the two leading serial publications in the field - reveal that there have only been about

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the following 14 countries are considered as part of the Middle East: Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestinian Territory, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

eight articles published in these journals that focus on the region (all of them in *World Englishes*)<sup>2</sup>. Of these, two consider pedagogical issues, three look at macro sociolinguistic issues (such as language policy and planning etc.), and three examine the use and structure of the English language as it is used in the region. This extremely low representation of the region in the flagship journals in the field of *World Englishes* underscores the need for further research on this region.

<i>Country of focus</i>	<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Year of publication</i>	<i>Area of research</i>	<i>Title</i>
	Paine	1984	Pedagogical	The case against delaying the introduction of English script in Arabic intermediate schools
Egypt	Reynolds	1993	Linguistic	Illocutionary acts across languages: editorializing in Egyptian English.
Egypt	Stevens	1994	Linguistic	The pragmatics of street hustlers' English in Egypt
Egypt	Schaub	2000	Macro-sociolinguistic	English in the Arab Republic of Egypt.
Jordan	Hamdan & Hatab	2009	Macro-sociolinguistic	English in the Jordanian Context
Palestine	Atawneh, Sridhar, S. N	1993	Linguistic	Arabic-English bilinguals and the directive speech act
Saudi Arabia	Al-Haq & Ahmed.	1994	Pedagogical	Discourse problems in argumentative writing.
Saudi Arabia	Al-Haq & Smadi	1996	Macro-sociolinguistic	Spread of English and Westernization in Saudi Arabia

Table 1: List of papers on the Middle East published in *World Englishes* (1981 – 2010). Arranged by country and year of publication.

The eight papers published on the Middle East in *World Englishes* are listed in Table 1 above. A quick look at the table will further reveal that of the eight papers listed, only half of them have Middle-Eastern authors/co-authors; with the remaining written by expatriates or outside experts. Table 1 also indicates that of the 14 countries that are considered part of the Middle East in this paper, there

<sup>2</sup> It needs to be clarified that I am not stating that there are only eight papers published on English in the Middle East. There is extensive scholarly research on English in the Middle East from language policy, language learning, and language teaching perspectives (including a large number of unpublished PhD dissertations). However, very few papers take a *World Englishes* perspective and only a handful of them describe the English language as it is used in these countries.

are no published discussions on the nature of the English language in ten (10) of these countries. Given this limitation, it is difficult to draw any conclusions on the nature of the English language in the Middle East, or even about a particular country in the region. However, even with this limited information, we do observe that the English language has local characteristics and shows signs of undergoing a process of nativization, as can be seen when we review the studies of English in Egypt below.

The story of the English language in Egypt dates back to the 1880s when the British established control over the region; however, until around the 1930s, English shared its position as a major foreign language with French, and, later on, during the time of Gamal Abdel Nasser, with Russian (Schaub, 2000). It was only in the mid-1970s that English became a more prominent language in Egypt – under the influence of the Americans. By the 1990s English had gained a central position in Egypt. To support this claim, Schaub (2000) refers to Nour (1992):

Most advertisements for job openings today seem to carry one condition for applicants: he or she must be a language school or AUC [American University in Cairo] graduate. The first to place such advertisements were large banks and investment companies, then their example was followed by medium and small financial firms, and now it is common in all types of ads. (p. 8)

While English is a prominent language in the economic life of Egypt, its role is limited in interpersonal communication between Egyptians and other Arabs, where Arabic is the preferred language.

Where English is used by Egyptians, there are attested signs of localization. In his 1993 study, Reynolds observes that the newspaper editorials written in Egyptian English did not conform to either American English or Egyptian Arabic “with regard to the use of representatives and declaratives. It uses more declaratives and fewer representatives than American English, but fewer declaratives and more representatives than Egyptian Arabic” (p. 35). Similarly, in his work, Stevens (1994) observes that the language of street hustlers (shopkeepers, taxi drivers, boat operators etc.) is often perceived as rude by Americans. Stevens notes that this is because the linguistic choices made by the Egyptians are different from those of Americans in similar contexts and can be interpreted in ways that are different from their intention. He argues that there are issues of cross-cultural miscommunication that are grounded in the differences in the use of particular linguistic features in the two communities:

These include both matters of phonology (including intonation, stress, rhythm and loudness) and matters of lexical choice and grammar.

Although these are basically linguistic choices made by the ‘hustler’, (e.g. yelling ‘Hey!’ at a tourist), they have social implications, in so far as they create an (unintentional) impression of rudeness” (p. 71).

Stevens (1994) and Reynolds (1993) document that English is used with a local flavour in Egypt and that the impact of nativization can be observed at all structural levels: phonetic, phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and discourse. This localization of English in the region is also observed in other studies. In a study based on data collected from Palestinians and Americans, Atawaneh and Sridahar (1993) found that the Arabic users of English used a different set of linguistic resources from that of the Americans to mark politeness. In their study of the use of directive speech acts, Atawaneh and Sridahar (1993) observe that since Arabic has far fewer modals than English, Arabs marked politeness by using a different set of strategies which could be misunderstood by Americans. Atawaneh and Sridahar (1993) also noted that while the English of Palestinians living in Palestine was quite different from that of the Americans, the English of Palestinians living in the United States was closer to that of the Americans. They explained this by arguing that it “shows that learning a language outside of its sociocultural setting will produce a different set of communicative behaviors from that of the native speakers of the language (cf. Kachru, 1986)” (p. 295).

While there are only a few published studies of Middle Eastern Englishes, the evidence collected from these papers suggests that the English language in the Middle East has local patterns of use, which are distinct from American English, (dialects of) Arabic, or other languages of the region. However, all three studies published in *World Englishes* look at pragmatics; there are no studies that describe the lexical or syntactic features of these varieties. Given the limitations of the data available, it is difficult to describe the features of Middle Eastern Englishes. This paper, therefore, will now focus on one country and examine the use of English there in some detail.

### **World Englishes and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia<sup>3</sup>**

The status, role, use, and teaching of the English language in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have gone through major changes over the last century. English was initially introduced in the educational system of the KSA in the

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<sup>3</sup> This paper focuses on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for a few reasons. KSA is the largest Arab country in the Middle East with a strong economy. KSA, being the guardian of the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina, holds a unique and very influential position in the Muslim world. KSA has a long history of English language teaching and currently uses textbooks that are developed by its Ministry of Education and includes texts written by local experts – thus providing good samples for linguistic analysis.

1920s (Al-Seghayer, 2005) as one of the foreign languages on offer (along with French). With the discovery of oil and the ensuing American interest in the region, English gained prominence and became the dominant language of business and trade in Saudi Arabia and the region. The growing acceptance of English as the language of international business was reflected in the education sector reforms to introduce English as a core subject.

As with the other countries in the region, there are few studies of English in Saudi Arabia within a World Englishes framework. There are two studies published in *World Englishes* on Saudi Arabia: Al-Haq & Ahmed (1994) and Al-Haq & Smadi (1996). Al-Haq and Ahmed's (1994) study explores the problems in student texts. Their paper takes on a deficit approach and lists problems with Saudi students writing of argumentative essays. It does not provide any detailed textual analyses of the student writing; nor does it posit any descriptions of what might be considered features of Saudi English.

The other paper published on Saudi Arabia in *World Englishes* looks at the perceived relationship between English and Westernization. In their paper, Al Haq and Smadi (1996) argue, based on the results of a large student survey, that while some people think that learning English leads to Westernization, there is a larger group of the participants who state that "the use of English does not make the participants Westernized, neither their national identity gets weakened, nor their religious commitment becomes corrupted" (p. 307).

These two papers published in *World Englishes*, while limited in their approach, do raise two important questions:

1. Is there a Saudi English? If so, what are some of its linguistic features?
2. What, if any, is the relationship between Islam and English in the context of Saudi Arabia?

The rest of this paper explores these two questions.

### **Saudi English?**

An analysis of published Saudi texts suggests that it is possible to identify a 'Saudi English'. This section of the paper will provide some initial evidence to support this position.

As stated earlier, there are no current descriptions available of Saudi English. As a country in the expanding circle, it is largely assumed that the models of English used in the country are based on inner circle varieties (i.e. American and British Englishes). This leads to researchers such as Al-Haq and Ahmed (1994) to label

textual features in local writings as ‘problems’ or ‘mistakes’ rather than trying to identify patterns of language use that are emerging locally. While a full description of what may be considered linguistic features of Saudi English is beyond the scope of this paper, I will attempt to outline some features that are observed in published texts in Saudi Arabia. To give more credence to this description, I will only share examples from a current high school textbook. Given that textbooks provide instruction in and serve as models that the students are expected to copy and learn from, the linguistic features included in them can be considered ‘correct’ and ‘acceptable’ in the local context.

The education sector in Saudi Arabia is highly regulated and all the textbooks are endorsed and/or developed by the Ministry of Education. In the case of English, Al-Seghayer (2005) notes that the main textbook used in KSA from 1960s to early 1980s was ‘Living English for the Arab World’. This book was broadly targeted to all Arab countries and used in many countries in the region. In KSA, this book was replaced by a new series called ‘Saudi Arabian School English’ developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with Macmillan to meet local needs. This series was later replaced by another series called ‘English for Saudi Arabia’ in the mid-1990s. The ‘English for Saudi Arabia’ is regularly revised and is still being used in KSA. In this paper, we will examine one of the textbooks in the current series closely to study Saudi English.

The textbook analysed in this paper is the 2007-2008 edition of “English language for Saudi Arabia: 1st year secondary term 1: Student’s book”. This book was first published in 1999 and is revised regularly. In this paper it is assumed that given the regular revisions and updates, it is unlikely that the patterned grammatical variations observed here are due to typing or other editorial mistakes. However, given that only one textbook has been analysed for the purposes of this paper, I have taken a number of steps to minimize the possible misinterpretation or misanalysis of the data. Two steps taken to enhance the validity of this analysis were:

1. Consultation with another linguist on the analysis and interpretation of the data
2. Consultation with 6 Saudi experts (these were Saudi ESL teachers who are currently working on their MAs or PhDs in TESOL and/or Applied Linguistics) regarding the analysis and interpretation of the data

The feedback from the linguists has been assimilated into the discussion below. The feedback from the Saudi experts is quoted below to strengthen the analysis.

The textbook analysis shows that there are a number of grammatical structures used in the book that are different from ‘standard’ Englishes. Four of these

include: variation in the use of tense markers, variation in the use of articles, variation in marking subject-verb agreement, and number (singular/plural ‘-s’). Each of these features is described below with examples from the textbook.

#### *Variation in use of tense markers*

In one lesson, the textbook focused on the ‘Present Perfect Tense’ and provided instructions on how to use this tense. Figure 1 below shows the description of the present perfect tense as given in the textbook.

Do you remember this tense? *has/have + past participle*  
Example: *I have saved up* for a long time.  
This tense is called *present perfect*.  
It connects the past with the present.

Remember            \*do not use an exact time (e.g., yesterday, a week ago) with this tense;  
                          \*do not ask when ...? questions with this tense;  
                          \*you can sometimes add words like before, up to now, so far or  
                          already;

Figure 1: Instructions on how to use the present perfect tense from Unit 6 – Lesson 2, p. 70.

These rules on how to use the present perfect tense are based on Standard English. However, the authors of the textbook do not always follow these rules themselves, as can be seen in example 1 below.

1) He has had two or three jobs since he returned to the Kingdom. He **has worked** for Saudi Radio for two years. Then he **has interviewed** people for various programmes on TV for six months. He is soon going to have his own programme “In Focus”. (p. 11)

Contrary to the rule stated in Figure 1 that the present perfect tense “connects the past with the present”, the authors of the textbook used the present perfect tense twice (bold) to describe events that happened in the past. These events started and were completed in the past and do not connect to the present. As such, the use of the simple past tense would have been appropriate in both these instances.

In responding to this example, one of the Saudi researchers noted, “present perfect does not exist in Arabic, therefore we do mix present perfect tense with the past tense as your example (1) showed”. Similarly, another Saudi expert pointed out that, in general, Saudis avoid the use of the perfect aspect because Arabic does not have a present perfect tense.

In addition to exemplifying variation in the marking of past tense, this example illustrates a problem with using rules based on Standard English to teach English in contexts where local varieties have emerged (or are emerging). In this case, we note a contrast between the ‘correct’ use as prescribed by the authors and the actual ‘usage’ of the form as used by the same authors. This leads to a number of issues. For example, it could lead to marking students down for inappropriate use of the present perfect tense (as measured by the students’ ability to follow the prescribed rules) when the variations that they use may be features of a local variety of English.

#### *Variation in the use of articles*

Another noticeable feature in the textbook was the variable use of articles. In some cases, such as in examples 2 and 3 below, the authors of the textbook used a null article instead of an indefinite article.

2) Hamza got off and **porter** carried his luggage into the building. (p. 71)

3) Look at this box. Make **sentence** from it. (p. 35)

One of the Saudi experts invited to comment on the analysis noted, “one of the linguistic features of ‘Saudi English’ is the use of article. We Saudis *overuse* the definite article (the), and *misuse* the indefinite articles (a/ an)” (emphasis added). Another Saudi expert stated, “Most Saudi English users tend to omit ‘a’ or ‘an’ in their writing but they use ‘the’ *correctly*” (emphasis added). While agreeing with the analysis presented in this paper, the researchers used the terms ‘*overuse*’, ‘*misuse*’, and ‘*correctly*’. These terms suggest that the Saudi experts, in evaluating the analysis, took a deficit approach – i.e., marking things that are not acceptable in ‘Standard English’ as being mistakes. This approach reflects the viewpoint that resists the recognition of emerging local norms of English in the expanding circle countries (see, for example the discussion on Al-Haq & Ahmed, 1994, above), where the dominant model is exo-normative (Kachru, 1992). However, as the statements of the Saudi experts show, there is some (growing?) recognition that these are not random ‘mistakes’ but (rule-governed?) variations in Saudi English that may be features of (an emerging) Saudi English.

#### *Variation in subject verb agreement*

There were a number of examples where the authors of the textbook did not follow the prescribed rules for subject-verb agreement. In example 4 below, the authors of the textbook do not mark the verb ‘like’ with third person singular marker ‘-s’.

4) He is a keen tennis player and he also **like** swimming. (p. 11)

The Saudi researchers noted that “omitting the third person singular markers is a common feature in Saudi English”.

*Number (singular/plural –s)*

There were a number of instances where the authors of the textbook did not mark plural nouns with the plural marker ‘-s’. Example 5 below illustrates this:

5) Welcome back, viewers. Let’s ask James some more about **secondary school** in Britain. James, can you choose the subjects that you study in secondary school? (p. 33)

In other instances, the authors of the textbook marked singular nouns with the plural marker ‘-s’, as in example 6 below:

6) But that’s another **subjects**. (p. 46)

The Saudi experts were not confident about this feature. One of them said that this “is not common in Saudi English” while another said that these might be “authors' personal mistakes”. However, given that the book has undergone several revisions since it was first published in 1999 and because there were several examples of this in the textbook, we do want to consider this feature here. The concern of the Saudi experts does, however, stress the importance of collecting and analyzing additional data.

In addition to variation in the use of the four syntactic features described above, there were a number of other noticeable variations in the textbook as well. One consistent feature was the use of the masculine pronouns ‘he’ and ‘his’ as generic pronouns. The use of the masculine pronouns as generic pronouns was a common feature in English until the 1980s. However, since then, there has been a move to use gender-neutral and gender-inclusive pronouns in contexts where the referents include both men and women. While this change has been quite widely accepted and incorporated in the inner circle countries, it is still not very common in outer and expanding circle countries (see, for example, Pauwels & Winter, 2004). The data from KSA suggests that this change has not been picked up in KSA. Examples 7 and 8 illustrate this. In both these examples, the referents include both males and females.

7) For example, a student may need 120 credits to graduate. If **he** takes an English course, **he** will get 10 credits. (p. 37)

8) Who uses physics in **his** work. (p. 38)

The Saudi experts noted that the generic use of the masculine pronoun was common in KSA. One of them stated, “using masculine pronouns (he) is a common feature in Saudi English”.

There were also a number of other isolated examples of deviant syntactic structures in the textbook. However, given that there were only single tokens of these variations, they may or may not represent patterns of local usage and have not been included here. Additional data collected from a variety of sources needs to be considered to describe additional patterns of language use in Saudi English.

As illustrated here, a linguistic analysis of the textbooks used in Saudi Arabia indicates that there is a range of linguistic features that are used in these books that are different from standard American and British Englishes. If we agree that textbooks project a locally accepted variety of a language (as it is an instrument of corpus planning), then the variations and features described above may be considered features of Saudi English. However, to make any conclusive claims about Saudi English and its features, we do need to collect and analyse additional data from a variety of published and recognized sources.

In addition to having particular linguistic characteristics, Saudi English can also be seen as construing and projecting a local socio-cultural worldview. This is examined in the following section.

### **English, Islam and Saudi values**

In their survey of university students to explore the relationship between Westernization and English in Saudi Arabia, Al-Haq and Smadi (1996) note that “the majority do not find a link between learning English and Westernization” (p. 311). While an accurate reflection of the survey results, their conclusion glosses over the sizeable minority of participants who did find such a link. For example, 30.5% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘I believe that there are imperialistic purposes behind the spread and promotion of English in KSA’ (p. 310); and, 19.3% of the participants felt that ‘Learning English makes a Muslim less pious’ (p. 313). These findings show that the relationship between English, Islam, and Westernization is not as simple as Al Haq and Smadi’s interpretation of their findings lead us to believe. However, regardless of the negative attitudes of a proportion of the population, English is seen as a major component in KSA education and the move toward modernization. Al-Haq and Smadi refer to Shafi (1983) who points out that the English language “has a crucial role to play in the achievement of the ultimate aim of Muslim education” (p. 35). This link between English, education, and development has led to making English part of the core curriculum. However, to allay the fears that English will lead to Westernization, many of the Muslim countries have developed their own curriculum and textbooks that take an Islamic and a local perspective on issues.

In a previous paper, I have described how English serves as an Islamic language in Pakistan (Mahboob, 2009). The main argument supported in that paper is that “far from being a colonizing language, the English language in Pakistan represents Islamic values and embodies South Asian Islamic sensitivities” (p. 188). The same argument appears to hold in the context of Saudi Arabia, as will be documented below.

The relationship between Saudi English, education, Islam, and Saudi cultural values can be examined in at least two ways. One way of doing this would be to conduct a content analysis of textbooks used in Saudi Arabia. A second way of examining the complexities of how language and ideology work together would be to carry out a linguistic analysis of texts in Saudi English that project Islamic and/or Saudi perspectives. In this paper, we will do both, albeit briefly. To be consistent, we will primarily draw data from the same textbook that we used for an exploration of features of Saudi English, ‘English for Saudi Arabia’ (First Year Secondary Textbook for term 1; 2007-2008 edition); however, we will make references to other textbooks, where relevant.

All textbooks in the series ‘English for Saudi Arabia’ have units that focus on Islamic issues. Each of the three textbooks reviewed for this paper included six units of study. Of these, at least one is on Islam. For example, the sixth unit of the First Year Secondary Textbook is called ‘Before Al-Hajj’. This Unit, as the title indicates, focuses on the Haj. Performing a Haj, pilgrimage, is one of the ‘five pillars’<sup>4</sup> of Islam, and this unit shares the adventures of a Sudanese pilgrim who is planning to perform Haj. Similarly, the other textbooks in the series also include units on Islam. For example, Unit 3 of Second Year Secondary Term 1 book is on ‘The Early Spread of Islam’, and Unit 4 of Third Year Secondary Term 1 book is on ‘Ramadan’.

In addition to having at least one unit on Islam, some of the textbooks include focussed units on Saudi Arabia. While the First Year Secondary Textbook does not have a dedicated unit on Saudi Arabia, all the units provide detailed information about the Saudi context. For example, in Unit 3, ‘School in Britain’, the text and activities lead to comparisons between Saudi schools and schools in Britain. Similarly, Unit 5, ‘Money’, includes lessons on describing Saudi currency notes etc. The other textbooks in the series include specific and detailed discussion of life, culture, and practices in Saudi Arabia. For example, Unit 5 of Second Year Secondary Term 1 book is titled ‘Saudi Arabia Yesterday and Today’, and Unit 6 of Third Year Secondary Term 1 is on ‘Arab Aid’.

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<sup>4</sup> The four other pillars of Islam are: ‘shahada’ (belief in Allah and in Muhammad as being his last prophet, ‘salaht’ (prayers), zakat (Islamic tax/charity), and ‘sawm’ (fasting).

In addition to some dedicated units on Islam and/or Saudi Arabia, the textbooks include regular textual references to Islam and Saudi Arabia. In the First Year Secondary Textbook, this is apparent from the very beginning of the textbook. After the opening credits, the textbook includes a full page with Arabic text

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ , which translates to: “I begin in the name of Allah who is the most gracious and the most merciful”. The inclusion of this phrase in the beginning of the textbook represents the Islamic tradition of starting all things in the name of Allah. The use of Arabic – and not its English translation – shows the iconic power of this Arabic text and its relationship to Islamic values and systems. This is a feature that is found in other Muslim countries as well (see, for example, Mahboob, 2009).

Additional examples of references to Islamic and Saudi cultural and social practices can also be found throughout the textbook. For example, Unit 1 of the textbook, ‘Let’s Meet the Team’, starts with a cartoon strip introducing one of the main characters in the book to the readers. The text starts with “Assalamu Alaikum, I’m Ahmad Al-Ali” (p. 7). ‘Assalamu Alaikum’ is the Arabic / Muslim greeting and literally means ‘May the blessings of Allah be upon you’. It is similar to ‘hello’ or ‘hi’ in English; however, it carries a specific religious reference and is the common greeting throughout the Muslim world. ‘Assalamu Alaikum’ is used throughout this unit and is part of several activities. The choice of using ‘Assalamu Alaikum’ instead of its English equivalent reflects the value given to the local practices and customs; and, it can also be taken as an indication that English in KSA is being nativized.

In addition to textual references, the textbook also projects the local Saudi cultural beliefs and practices through the images used. The textbook has numerous pictures; however, most of these are men. In the First Year Secondary Textbook there are only three pictures of women, two on page 9 and one on page 10. In the first picture, there is a man pointing towards a woman clad in a black burkah from head to toe and the man in the picture is saying ‘She’s Saudi’. It is worth noting that while the man is pointing towards the woman in the background with his thumb, he is not looking at or toward her. The second picture is that of an Indian woman. This woman is holding a flag of India, is wearing traditional clothes, and has her head covered with a dupatta (long scarf). In this picture, the man is again pointing towards (but not looking toward) the woman in the background and saying ‘She isn’t a Saudi’. The third picture, on page 10, is smaller in size and is black and white. In this picture a man is pointing towards a woman (again with his thumb and without looking at her) and saying ‘She’s Syrian’. This woman is also fully clad and wearing a hijab, which identifies her as a Muslim woman. These visual texts reinforce the Saudi social practice of requiring women to fully cover themselves in public and to wear burkah. Foreign women, on the other hand, can be identified because they don’t

wear a burkah. There are no other images of women in the textbook. There are numerous pictures of Saudi and other men. In these pictures, the Saudi men wear a local costume while the foreigners wear other clothes: suits and jeans for westerners, shalwar kameez for South Asians, etc. Furthermore, all western men are shown to have blonde hair, while the locals have black hair. The visual traits portrayed in the textbook consistently project the locally 'approved' and 'accepted' ways of being and looking at the world. In addition to these images, the use of 'he' as the generic pronoun (as discussed in a previous section) also reinforces the male-dominant culture of Saudi Arabia. The textual features of Saudi English together with the images used in the textbook construe and represent a Saudi understanding of the role of gender in society and they conform to the Saudi interpretation of Islamic codes as well as to Saudi cultural practices

An analysis of the content and the text (both verbal and graphic) indicates that the textbooks in KSA project an Islamic and a Saudi worldview. This is similar to findings in Mahboob (2009) that document how English in Pakistan is also used to project a Pakistani Muslim perspective. A study of these textbooks also provides support for Al-Haq and Smadi's (1996) survey results in which they note that students in Saudi Arabia do not find a tension between English, Islam, and Saudi cultural values. With texts that are infused with Islamic and Saudi references, the links between English and Islam are highlighted and the reading of English as an Islamic language normalized.

## **Conclusion**

This brief paper first reviews the World Englishes literature on the Middle East and then considers whether there are local varieties of Englishes. The studies from Egypt and Palestine reviewed do suggest that there are local ways of using English. However, these studies do not provide any descriptions of the features of these Englishes. This paper then takes on the job of examining the use of English in one country in the Middle East. By focussing on the textbooks used in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we were able to identify some local linguistic features that are included in the locally produced textbooks. The brief analysis provided in this paper suggests that it is very likely that 'Saudi English' exists as a recognizable variety of English and that features of this English can be described by conducting detailed analyses of an appropriate corpus of texts. Then, in the final section of the paper, we considered the relationship between English, education, Islam, and Saudi socio-cultural practices. The textbook examined provided ample data to support the argument that English as used in the Saudi textbooks projects an Islamic and a Saudi identity. This further strengthens the case that there is a 'Saudi English' and that it would be worthwhile for future studies to examine Saudi and other Middle Eastern Englishes.

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