
The Peculiarities Of Endangered Languages

Introduction

A language is considered moribund or endangered if it is at risk of being forgotten due to the emergence of another language. Language shift occurs when speakers change to a more widely spoken or a more social-economic powered language. Once this occurs, the language is passed to children by fewer native speakers than expected and with time, therefore, the kids are unable to speak the language leading to its extinction or 'death of a language'. In this regard, Arabic is a language spoken by over 300 million people in about 20 countries across the globe (Gharaibeh et al. 10). Nonetheless, the Arabic language has spread on several continents and extends to non-Arab people. On the other hand, language shift has been experienced across many Arab-speaking nations due to exposure to either English or French. Perhaps, not in the less advantaged sections of society where native Arabic still remains popular, but amongst professional people in the Arabic-speaking world from the middle classes and above are using less Arabic in their lives and more and more English and/or French.

Literature Review

The Arabic language is having been widely used in the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe since the 7th century. According to (Beeston et al. 16) the Arabic language is more of a written than spoken. This is because the language proficiency requires more time as compared to European languages. The shift in Arabic use, therefore, has been a topic of interest leading to the great emphasis put in place by the language and Human Development Authority (KHDA) of Dubai (Al-Issa 11). Nonetheless, globalization, an influx of foreign workers in Arabian speaking countries, use of English in social media as well as replacement of classical Arabic by local dialect are among the factors endangering Arabic language (Below et al. 110). Review of scholarly work indicates that Spoken Arabic dialect is becoming more widespread, but classical Arabic is at risk as it fails to modernize (Sadek and Gihane 21). Nonetheless, the huge numbers of expatriate workers in the Arabian Gulf mean that English, Tamil Hindi-Urdu, Bengali, and Tagalog directly mirrors the in use when compared to Arabic (Toth 160). This paper sheds light on the reasons behind shifting in the use of Arabic language, why Arabic is an endangered linguistic and provides ways in which this can be mitigated.

Research Methodology

Due to the nature of the study, a qualitative research methodology was applied. The basis of this technique is to describe the current status of the Arabic language in UAE as well as provide insight into the dynamics surrounding the situation (Harding 66). The study involved a questionnaire and interview on two key targets; primary targets that involve school going children of the ages 4-11 and a secondary target involving adults in the age bracket 16-24 years. This ensures that the research focuses on the general public specifically the younger generation (Harding 22). Additionally, a focus group was selected in which participation and observation methodologies were applied (Al Hussein and Christina 100). This is crucial in order to collect raw data on the actual field work. Nonetheless, scholarly work on endangered

linguistics was reviewed to check on similarities and emerging issues in regard to research objectives.

Data Analysis

The research topic revolves around the linguistic field of anthropology, this allowed use of structuralism anthropological theory in data analysis. The theory stipulates that one may understand human culture based on a structure modeled on a language (Wolfreys et al. 16). This theory gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s when its use became widespread across many disciplines. Social change is a general concept, however, by using the structuralism theory, it is easy to pinpoint and analyze the observable and unobservable human expressions and their effects on human behavior, culture, and society (Wolfreys et al. 16). The data collected via observation and participation easily fits in structural linguistics bringing up the cultural shifts especially in language. The data also indicates that Arabic language use is declining sharply especially based on the fact that fewer children can frequently use the dialect. Based on the results, the young adults had a better understanding of Arabic by over 11% as compared to school going children.

Other methods integrated to analyze questionnaire data involves; the use of the SPSS software which is considered appropriate due to the use of the structured questionnaire hence presenting an easy way to analyze the data (Harding 11). Descriptive statistics analyses comply with research done by Sadek and Gihane on endangered language (20). Finally, editing, coding, classification, and tabulation, clearly indicates that the Arabic language could be in the brink of distinction if appropriate measures are not taken.

Discussion

Endangered languages result from the shift in cultural activities and social beliefs of a group of people. Surprisingly, despite the importance placed by the international society on native languages, language shift is dynamically causing the death of various dialects across the world (Al Hussein and Christina 100). This is attributed to globalization and the dynamics in the social-economic settings in global perception. Endangered language does not only lead to the death of a language but also causes changes in a certain culture which if not mitigated could lead to the total shift in traditional beliefs, culture and moral values of a community (Sadek and Gihane16). Cultural and economic marginalization is also to blame on the witnessed Arabic language endangerment. This is caused by the education structure that calls for consistent use of English. Cultural hegemony may also arise due to contact with a more spoken language as compared to one's native language (Thomason). Based on this, it is hard for people especially the youths to realize that they are endangering their native dialect (Wolfreys et al. 17).

Urbanization, intermarriages as well as globalization allow people to interact widely which necessitate the use of a common language (Beeston et al. 7). When a community loses their language, they lose their cultural aspects such as a sense of identity which is caused by replacing social values and traditions with new ones. Language revitalization may lead to loss of traditional practices such as medicine, dances, and ceremonies. On the other hand, grammatical or phonological complexities of the Arabic language are likely to change. Logically, communities adopt new languages in order to fit the new economies as well as gain international acceptance (Al Hussein and Christina 109). Technological advancement calls for a

more harmonized language. However, linguistics considers language loss as an ethical issue and postulates that people would prefer to maintain a native language if it were to be possible. In contrast, this remains a dominant problem especially in regard to globalization. Currently, we see university students lacking command on the Arabic language; therefore, its usage among students is minimum.

Measure Taken to Protect the Arabic Language

Following its decline in use, various measures have been put in place to ensure that Arabic language use is upheld especially in schools. Following this, the Continuing Education Center at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) together with the Society whose mandate is to protect the Arabic Language (Beeston et al. 77). In Dubai, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), responsible for the growth, direction, and quality of private education and learning has put great emphasis on the Arabic language (Kurzweil 27). These mitigation procedures are meant to enhance Arabic use. Currently, Arabic is mandatory in all schools in the UAE, the government has also ensured that government departments and instructions frequently use Arabic in a day to day activities. This has been embraced by local authorities in UAE Nonetheless, the emphasis placed by the UAE on the use of Arabic language in schools as well as in the global economy cannot go unnoticed (Beeston et al. 17). Other measures involve surprising use of pidgin Arabic which is emerging due to foreign dominance in Arabia. Teaching children in Arabic and ensuring perfection could also be advantageous to the Arabic language.

Conclusion

Language endangerment remains a topic of interest especially with many native languages at risk of endangerment. The Arabic language is widely used in the Muslim religion and the main language used in the Quran. However, despite having over 300 million users, the language is slowly being replaced by new dialect in schools and the global market economy. This has led to cultural changes and loss of social-cultural values in Arabic counties. In the UAE, many schools going children do not perfect in the Arabic language due to the introduction of English in schools. In addition, social media, globalization, international studies, and international travels have greatly contributed to language endangerment. In the UAE, there are millions of workers from all over the world who speak diverse languages. Most of these are domestic workers entrusted with taking care of children; this has resulted in the development of the pickling Arabic dialect.

The study's hypothesis is true and valid since based on the research conducted, the young UAE youths are continuously embracing new languages. Interestingly, the youths do not understand the impact of language shift and do not seem to notice their contributions in Arabic language engagement. Additionally, the local authorities have put in place various measures to protect the Arabic language including emphasize on the use of Arabic language in government departments and in all schools across UAE. This proves the chosen hypothesis to be right and calls for further regulations based on protecting the Arabic language. Ultimately, language endangerment remains a topic of interest amongst many scholars especially in social anthropology.

Works Cited

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