

**Negotiating rates of exchange: Arab academic sojourners'  
sociolinguistic trajectories in the UK**

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## **Abstract**

This doctoral project investigates the sociolinguistic trajectories of eight Arab academic sojourners in the UK. Although there is a considerable body of empirical study abroad research, this research has been criticised for its imbalance and inconsistency. Coleman (2013) asks study abroad researchers to see sojourners as ‘whole people with whole lives’ instead of fragmenting their ‘minds, bodies, and social behaviours into separate domains of inquiry’ (Kramsch, 2009, p. 2). In addition, Kinginger (2009) explains that study abroad research has been limited to North American, Cross-European and Asia-Pacific contexts.

This study springs from the need to document the unheard stories of Arab academic sojourners in the UK to explore the impact of mobility and sociocultural heterogeneity on sojourners’ conceptualisations of English, perceptions of themselves as speakers of English, and on their social encounters in the UK. This qualitative, longitudinal inquiry has been conducted through in-depth interviews over a period of eight months. Research data comes from initial pair interviews conducted within one month of the participants’ arrival in the UK as well as five rounds of individual interviews, resulting in a total of 44 interviews.

Thematic analysis of the dataset has featured striking commonalities in the group. The study found that participants’ perceptions of their investment in English were profoundly affected by their mobility. While they valued their investment in English as a tool to access Higher Education in the United Kingdom, their unexpected experiences of shifts in their language value made them aware of the limitations of their linguistic and social capital, thereby affecting their perceptions of their English and contributing to new conceptualisations of English. Not only did these realisations destabilise participants’ perceptions of themselves as speakers of English, but further affected their social encounters, which ultimately led to some sort of ghettoisation that significantly limited their social networks in the UK.

## Academic Publications Arising from This Thesis

### Refereed Publications in Conferences

Badwan, K. 2015. *Learning to see through the fog: cultivating conscious learning inside the foreign language classroom to assist out-of-class communication* [PowerPoint Presentation]. BAAL/Routledge Applied Linguistics Workshop Programme 2015: Beyond the Classroom: researching second language learning in out-of-class contexts, 18 September, University of Oxford.

Badwan, K. 2015. *What is international about the internationalisation agenda in UK HE? Insights from the sociocultural encounters of Arab academic sojourners in the UK* [PowerPoint Presentation]. Research Reflections Conference, 10 September, York St. John University.

Badwan, K. 2015. *More theories, less certainty: (Un)thinking the sociolinguistics of mobility in light of Arab academic sojourners' trajectories in the UK* [PowerPoint Presentation]. BAAL 2015 Conference, 3 September, Aston University.

Badwan, K. 2015. *English language education and preparing for the unpredictable* [PowerPoint Presentation]. Languages in the Globalised World, 27-28 May, Leeds Beckett University.

Badwan, K. 2015. *Social hurdles of academic sojourning: Insights from Arab international students in UK HE* [PowerPoint Presentation]. Rethinking Internationalisation in Higher Education: Methodological and Conceptual Challenges, 13-15 May, Newcastle University.

Badwan, K. 2015. *Whose language and why? Reflections on dealing with multilingual interview data* [PowerPoint Presentation]. Research Students' Education Conference, 29 April, University of Leeds.

Badwan, K. 2015. *Attracting a lower exchange rate? A sociolinguistic investigation of the impact of mobility on academic sojourners' social and linguistic capital in the UK* [PowerPoint Presentation]. iMean 4@Warwick, 10 April, University of Warwick.

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**York St. John University, The Language and Identities in InterAction Research Unit (LIIdIA)** (10 December 2014) 'Between Blommaert and Canagarajah: A call for less certainty'.

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## List of Abbreviations

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| BLT    | Bespoke language teaching   |
| CUP    | Cambridge University Press  |
| EAP    | English for academic purposes   |
| EFL    | English as a foreign language   |
| ELAP   | English for local academic purposes                                       |
| ELF    | English as a lingua franca  |
| ELT    | English language testing  |
| ENAP   | English for new academic purposes   |
| ENL    | English as a native language  |
| ESL    | English as a second language  |
| EU     | European Union  |
| HESA   | Higher education statistics agency  |
| IELTS  | International English language testing system                             |
| IEREST | Intercultural education resources for Erasmus students and their teachers |
| KSA    | Kingdom of Saudi Arabia   |
| L2     | Second language   |
| LSM    | Language subordination model  |
| MA     | Masters of arts   |
| MLA    | Modern language association   |
| MSA    | Modern Standard Arabic  |
| NGOs   | Non-governmental organisations  |
| NSE    | Native speaker English  |
| OECD   | Organisation for economic cooperation and development                     |
| OUP    | Oxford University Press   |
| SDT    | Self-determination theory   |
| SLA    | Second language acquisition   |
| SLI    | Standard language ideology  |
| TOEFL  | Test of English as a foreign language                                     |
| TOEIC  | Test of English for international communication                           |
| UAE    | United Arab Emirates  |
| UK     | United Kingdom  |

UK HE United Kingdom higher education  
UKCISA UK council for international student affairs  
UNRWA United nations relief and works agency  
USA United States of America

## Chapter 1: Setting the scene

### 1.1 Prologue

*Because Arabic and English are such different languages in the way they operate, and also because the ideal of eloquence in one language is not the same as in the other, a perfect bilingualism of the kind that I often dream about, and sometimes boldly think that I have almost achieved, is not really possible. There is a massive technical literature about bilingualism, but what I've seen of it simply cannot deal with the aspect of actually living in, as opposed to knowing, two languages from two different worlds and two different linguistic families. This isn't to say that one can't be somehow brilliant, as the Polish native Conrad was, in English, but the strangeness stays there forever. Besides, what does it mean to be perfectly, in a completely equal way, bilingual? Has anyone studied the ways in which each language creates barriers against other languages, just in case one might slip over into new territory?*

(Saïd, 2004)

This is a thesis about 'knowing' and 'living in' English, the strangeness that persists in the narratives of eight Arab academic sojourners in the UK, and the consequences thereof on their conceptualisations of English, of themselves, and of others. It is also about crossing and carrying borders in trajectories of destabilisation and isolation. It is meant to offer space for these individuals to respond to, reflect on, and interact with the life-altering experience of academic sojourning in the UK. Through this space, voices that have been silenced by power can manifest more effectively through power (following Foucault, 1984).

### 1.2 Background and rationale

Although there is a considerable body of empirical research on study abroad students, this research has been criticised for its imbalance and inconsistency (Kinging, 2013). The study abroad literature disproportionately addresses particular departure zones, mainly North America and Europe (Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2009; Block, 2007). Kinginger (2015) provides a possible explanation for this by foregrounding political and economic perspectives. She argues that students from Europe, Japan, the USA, Canada, and Australia enjoy 'high levels of economic privilege conveying the right to imagine a geographically stable future' (p.11). Therefore, for most of them, the academic sojourn is temporary

and of a pre-defined duration. In contrast, she argues that students from countries such as India or Sri Lanka are not represented in the study abroad research because many of them usually take migration-related routes. Therefore their experiences are documented 'within the broader literature on second language acquisition (SLA) and the socialisation of international students, but it is not necessarily identified as related primarily to study abroad alone' (p. 10).

This explanation raises the question of what counts as study abroad research and what counts as 'broader literature' if both of them focus on language-related competence and cultural adaptation processes. Based on Kinginger's argument, the most obvious answer is that the difference is related to the study's population focus, considering that most of study abroad research 'tends to focus on the largest populations of students who have recently enjoyed the luxury of sampling foreign realities within a purely educational framework' (p. 11). Once again, the use of words such as 'luxury', 'sampling foreign realities', and 'purely educational' suggests that the study abroad literature has been preoccupied with documenting the experiences of students coming from rather stable economic and political backgrounds. This puts the study abroad literature at risk of being selective and imbalanced.

The theoretical focus of the study abroad literature has also attracted criticism. Coleman (2013) asks study abroad researchers to depart from cognitive Second Language Acquisition (henceforth SLA) approaches in order to see study abroad students as 'whole people with whole lives' instead of fragmenting their 'minds, bodies, and social behaviours into separate domains of inquiry' (Kramsch, 2009 p. 2). Block (2007) demonstrates that there is a division as regards the focus of study abroad literature between European-based and US-based publications. Whereas the former focus on the development of communicative competence (Alred and Byram, 2002; Roberts et al., 2001; Byram and Fleming, 1998; Byram, 1997b; Alred and Byram, 1993), the latter tends to focus on target language development (DuFon and Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1995). Despite the emergence of the social turn in second language learning literature (Block, 2003), there is still a need to depart from segmenting learners in order to see them as more than just language learners or people who are expected to

pass through anticipated 'production lines' during their cultural adaptation processes.

More recently, the work of Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott and Brown (2013), which focuses on second language identity in study abroad narratives, adopts the view that second language learning is part and parcel, both cause and effect, of the 'economic, military, technological, ecological, migratory, political and cultural flows' that jointly contribute to globalisation (Held et al., 1999, p. 7). Consequently, they assert that the focus should be on capturing situated experiences of individual sojourners in different contexts in order to come to grips with the multifaceted-ness of second language learners' identities, particularly in study abroad contexts. Similarly, Marginson (2014) calls for a paradigm shift, which departs from current trends in research on international students that look at their 'adjustment' processes to local requirements and perceive this process as a one-way street. Alternatively, he calls for the need to explore the self-formation journeys of international students and asserts that '[a]s the sojourn continues, many change the way they live, their consumption patterns, and their even personal beliefs... International students form themselves under social conditions they do not control, conditions that shape their "space of possibles" that differs from student to student' (p. 12-13).

This study is an attempt to depart from the 'typical' population and theoretical focus of study abroad research as it addresses an underrepresented population and embraces a more holistic approach which deals with study abroad students as 'rounded people with complex and fluid identities and relationships which frame the way they live the study abroad experience' (Coleman 2013, p. 17). It springs from the need to document the unheard stories of Arab academic sojourners in UK Higher Education (henceforth UK HE) to explore the impact of mobility and sociocultural heterogeneity on sojourners' conceptualisations of English, on their perceptions of themselves as Arabic speakers of English in the UK, and on their sociocultural encounters and socialisation practices. It is based on the premise that the hybrid, complex subjectivities of academic sojourners are not to be reducible nor bound by certain discourses (Chowdhury and Phan Le Ha, 2014). In order to explore these areas, a qualitative, longitudinal inquiry has been conducted through in-depth interviews with eight Arab academic



sojourners, over a period of eight months. Research data come from initial pair interviews, conducted within one month of participants' arrival in the UK, as well as five rounds of individual interviews, resulting in a total of 44 interviews (approximate recording time of 27 hours).

Some previous studies have touched upon the impact of mobility on individuals' English. For instance, in the literature on migrant education, Simpson and Cooke (2010) discuss the notion of 'movement and loss' in their study of a Nigerian migrant whose English was not a problem until he came to study in the UK to realise that his physical movement also involved a loss of linguistic, cultural, and social capital. In addition, in the study abroad literature, Benson et al. (2013) investigate the notion of 'linguistic self-concept' in the narratives of academic sojourners from Hong Kong to trace the changes in their 'linguistic affiliations' (Leung, Harris and Rampton, 1997) and their linguistic self-concept i.e. who they are and who they become as they learn and use English in study abroad contexts. Whereas these studies and many others have laid out a strong theoretical foundation for this research, this study embraces a more holistic approach, attending to academic sojourners' conceptualisations of English, the personal value of their sojourn in their lives, the impact of mobility on the exchange value of their linguistic and social capital, their sociocultural encounters in the UK, as well as their reflections on their previous formal language education and their initial assessment of their capacity to use their English in the UK.

Within the rubric of the above understanding, this study seeks to address issues in the sociolinguistic trajectories of Arab academic sojourners in the UK. The study springs from the premise that giving voice to Arab sojourners can offer a better understanding of their academic and social trajectories, and how they construct their identities and value their linguistic repertoires, as they move from their home countries to study in UK HE. In addition, researchers can better approach the linguistic and societal struggles of Arab academic sojourners in the UK and can compare Arab sojourners' sociolinguistic trajectories in the UK with other academic sojourners in the same context and in other higher education contexts. Language educators in the UK can benefit from sojourners' testimonies that explain their aspirations, motivation, expectations, and learning and socialisation difficulties. They can also be provided with enlightening testimonies

about how language ideologies in the Arab world affect sojourners' attitudes towards what English is, and this significantly shapes their expectations of life and education in the UK. Equally important, language educators in the Arab world can be better informed of the complexities of moving across contexts, and how these impact on the value of the social and linguistic assets of their students.

Therefore, language educators are encouraged not to take their students' linguistic and social capital for granted. With this in mind, this study provides food for thought and implications for practice. Language educators are encouraged to reflect on the ideological underpinnings of their classroom practices, and are advised to make their students aware that their linguistic requirements change depending on where they are and where they want to be next, and that there is no one-size-fits-all variety of any named language. In order to invoke this, this study subjects to scrutiny the implications of using the widespread ELT textbooks, or what Gray (2002) calls 'the global coursebooks', on language learners' conceptualisations of English and its use. It also addresses the gatekeeping powers of language proficiency tests such as IELTS and TOEFL and their role in perpetuating certain perceptions of the kind of English spoken in English-speaking countries, mainly the UK and the USA.

Moreover, with the help of this study, current Arab academic sojourners can better reflect on and engage with their sociolinguistic trajectories during their stay in the UK. Equally, future Arab academic sojourners are offered new insights into the sociolinguistic facets of life in the UK. Last but not least, the study attempts to bring to the fore a plethora of theoretical constructs (neoliberalism, academic branding and English language teaching, politicising and commercialising global English, English and power, Standard English ideology, globalisation and identity, positioning, othering, declassing, etc.) that remain silent until people are prompted to approach them from the prism of movement, which can render these issues more salient.

### **1.3 Key concepts and glossary**

The title of this thesis includes four phrases that have opened up new and exciting doors that have significantly contributed to its development: *negotiating*, *rates*

**of exchange, academic sojourners, and trajectories.** In this section, I demonstrate how these concepts come together in this study:

The word '**negotiating**' is used to denote three important meanings: first, it draws on Foucault's (1982) understanding of any discursive practice as a means of oppressing and resistance. Evidently, negotiation is not always possible or successful as its outcome is relational. Second, I use the word 'negotiating' in relation to sociolinguistic norms to indicate that academic sojourners do not simply (or necessarily) conform to the norms and expectations of their native-speaker interactants (Benson et al., 2013). Rather, they choose to conform or depart from these norms to negotiate issues of power and positioning in interaction (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré and Langenhove, 1991). Third, it also indicates the continual negotiation of power that persists in sojourners' 'discursive practices' (Foucault, 1984) in the UK, thereby contributing to shifts in the value of sojourners' linguistic and social capital. That is to say, the exchange value of sojourners' social and linguistic capital vary and is determined by a set of dynamic factors which are context-dependent and are always changing. A detailed account of what these factors are and how they impact on the exchange value of sojourners' linguistic capital is theoretically and empirically presented in this study.

The term '**rates of exchange**' dwells on an economic metaphor within a 'neoliberal epistemology' (Flores, 2013) that applies the notion of capital to language, education, skills, culture, social attributes and even to humans (Keeley, 2007; Fine, 2002). In this regard, English can be viewed as a high-value commodity whose learning is perceived by many as a key to the prosperity of individuals, under the conception of sending money in search for more money (Harvey 2010 on '*Capital*'). Consequently, users of English can regard it as a distinction marker on the 'market of symbolic exchange' (Kramsch, 2015, p. 406). This gives rise to Bourdieu's (1977) notion of 'linguistic capital' that has been widely cited in the literature. Bourdieu proposes that knowledge of a certain language can have a high exchange rate in a certain market, and once this language dominates the market, 'it becomes the norm against which the *prices* of the other modes of expression, and with them the values of the various competences, are defined' (p.652, *my emphasis*). When this 'linguistic norm' is

different from individuals' own languages/varieties, they can be tempted to 'invest' in learning the dominant language (currently English), which is also an investment in their social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995 p.18). Norton (2013, 1995) demonstrates that investing in the target language aims at obtaining a range of symbolic and material resources, which contribute to increasing the social and cultural capital of language learners.

Within this understanding, Nino-Murcia (2003 in Seargeant, 2012 p.19) describes English as a 'dollar', which is 'the currency for social and geographical mobility in the world' today. However, this dollar does not have a stable rate of exchange, as it differs according to where it is used, to whom it is given/addressed, and all of this depends on wider socio-political and socioeconomic contexts. This means that what matters politically is understanding who defines the 'values of linguistic commodities or more broadly who regulates the market' (Heller, 2010, p. 103). Applying the same 'dollar' metaphor to academic sojourners' linguistic capital, it is expected that the values of sojourners' English will always be changing, dynamic, relational, and emergent, and hence the plural form in '**rates of exchange**'.

Finally, scalar approaches to language use (Blommaert, 2010; Collins, Slembrouck and Baynham, 2009) have looked at how individuals move across spaces, expectations, norms, and scales which, altogether, contribute to assigning a high or a low value to the language varieties mobile individuals speak. Thus, the mobility of individuals in the globalised world inevitably entails elements of the metaphoric negotiation of rates of exchange. The economic metaphor of language use endorsed in this study is inspired by Bourdieu's 'linguistic capital' (1977), Norton Peirce's (1995) 'investment', Heller's (2010) 'linguistic commodities', Kramsch's (2015) 'symbolic exchange', as well as scalar approaches to language in motion (Blommaert, 2010; Collins, Slembrouck and Baynham, 2009).

Using the term '**academic sojourners**' when they are institutionally referred to as 'international students' is an attempt to refer to the research participants using a more ideologically-neutral label, if at all possible. In the UK, students who are not from the UK or the EU are referred to as 'international students'. Since the participants (and the researcher) are from Arab countries, they are labelled as

'international students'. This term, however, is problematic because of its political, ideological, and economic connotations. While it excludes EU/UK students, it includes US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand students, so it is not related to whether or not English is the student's first language. In addition, the term does not refer to the international experiences of students on campus because it is only given to some students on campus and this ignores the fact that even when UK/EU students interact with other students on campus, they also take part in international, intercultural communication. What is more, international students are dragged into particular corners in different official discourses. In the study abroad and SLA literature, they are positioned as language learners or people undergoing adaptation processes. In the UK Higher Education policy, they are framed as potential customers who pay premium fees, and therefore student recruitment teams are encouraged to recruit more of them every year. In the wider UK political spectrum, they are perceived as potential migrants whose attendance needs to be strictly monitored and whose life choices in the UK are framed around visa restrictions and anti-immigration policies. It is against this background that the term 'academic sojourners' is used in this study as a way to resist institutional discourses around 'international students'. In this sense, students who embark on a degree abroad are referred to as academic sojourner, regardless of their nationality or political and economic situations. Throughout this thesis, where references are made to institutional and political discourses around foreign academic sojourners in the UK, I will use the term 'international students'. Otherwise, I will generally use the term 'academic sojourners'

Finally, the word '**trajectories**' is used to capture the dynamic journeys and situated experiences of academic sojourners as well as the role of the accommodating or unaccommodating other in shaping the dynamic and amorphous encounters of these individuals who travel across time and space to study in the UK. That is to say, these trajectories are shaped around expectations of others e.g. family members and society and are constantly affected by others. It is worth mentioning that trajectories do get interrupted thus individuals might need to change directions or plans. To reflect these multiple possibilities, I used the plural form of the word.

## 1.4 Notes on the researcher's language history and professional background

I am Palestinian born in Saudi Arabia, where I lived until the age of 12. I attended Saudi governmental schools because my mother worked as an English teacher in the government sector. At that time, Non-Saudis were not allowed to attend governmental schools except if their parents work in the public sector, and the number of non-Saudi students should not exceed 3% of each school population. I spoke 'perfect' Saudi Arabic and my classmates could not tell that I was different. To maintain the 3% rule, at the beginning of every academic term, a teacher used to go to all classes to say, 'if you are a non-Saudi, stand up'. I used to stand up blushing to say, 'I am Palestinian'. After that, my classmates used to approach me with comments like, 'we thought you are like us'. Maybe I wanted to be like them or to 'pass' for a Saudi (see Rampton 2001 on 'passing and language crossing'). I did not want to be looked down upon, as many view Palestinians as poor refugees. I wanted to circumvent this 'political mess' and wanted to be identified as one of the group.

During summer holidays, we used to go to Palestine. Those were the times when I felt that I could possibly belong somewhere. Surprisingly, my Arabic was subject to criticism because I was not speaking *their* Palestinian variety. Again, the feeling of being an outsider recurred and I was made a stranger in my country. Eventually, my parents decided to stay in Palestine; I had to pay attention to the way people around me spoke; and I (willingly) started to lose my Saudi Arabic because I lost ties with that place. To add insult to injury, my father's side of the family are refugees who were forced to leave their lands in the Nakba of 1948. They speak a rural Palestinian variety, whereas my mother's side of the family are originally Gazans, and they speak an urban Palestinian variety. All that I knew, as a teenager, was that my father spoke differently because he is a man and as a girl, I should speak like my mother. I started to receive comments on my Palestinian accent from my father's side of the family, and I was lectured on the importance of speaking like them to keep the language of the 'lost land' alive. Soon, I realised that my language variety kept on attracting criticism, reminding me of issues of belonging, affiliation and identity. After that, I became talented at

switching varieties depending on whom I was with and what impression I wanted to make.

When I started learning English at the age of 11, I similarly thought English was English and it was one 'monolithic' thing. Gradually, schooling became more serious and teachers drew a distinction between two varieties of English: American and British. I decided I wanted to sound American like many language learners in Palestine who believed that American English is more accessible, understandable, and fashionable.

After graduating with a degree in English arts and literature, I worked at an American language centre. I valued my American English as an expensive asset that offered me a prestigious job in a community where speaking American English makes one happy, rich, and prestigious. I never dwelled on the issue of who I was as a speaker of American English. I was not aware of that until a big event changed my linguistic views altogether.

In 2009, I left Palestine to study in the UK. Taking my English for granted, I assumed that I would not face issues of belonging and affiliation again. During the first week of my Master's course, my colleagues made comments on my English and how American it must have sounded to them. 'I really wanted to know what Palestinian English was like. I did not know Palestinian English is American' was a usual comment. A week later, a colleague and I were talking about a new hat I was wearing in a public park when a British seven-year old girl happened to overhear our conversation and suddenly shouted, 'that's an ugly hat, you American!' She is not a sociolinguist to make that judgment, but my friend and I agreed that my English must have sounded odd to her and 'American' was the only word that she probably knew to refer to odd English. I decided to work on my /r/ to sound less American.

I returned to Palestine as a university lecturer. The first module that I taught upon my return was English pronunciation to first year undergraduate students. For them, my English sounded British, and they were not satisfied with the choice of British English in their pronunciation course. Many of them did not pronounce the words the way I did because they wanted to sound American. I could not tell them that their pronunciation was 'wrong'. I was aware of how language, identity and

ideology are related. For that reason, I was perplexed by the choice of the English I wanted to teach. Can I ever give them the chance to decide for themselves?

For the first time, I was convinced that I did not want to sound either British or American. I want to sound like myself. Instead of feeling proud when receiving comments on how American or British my English was, I started to feel disturbed that my English was always placed under a category to fit already-held social labels: American, British, Standard, etc. Even in my home country, these categories were at play, and I was never positioned as an Arab, Palestinian girl who speaks 'good' English. But then, who decides what 'good' is?

Returning back to the UK for my doctoral studies at the University of Leeds, I am once again familiar with the labels. However, this time I was asked to sit for the University of Leeds Language Test which is an institutional requirement for all 'international' students', perhaps with the assumption that it is simply easier to presume the worst of international students rather than take the time to review their abilities according to their qualifications. I was devastated that I was still asked to take the exam. I had always believed that with degrees and teaching experience I must have long ago transcended the stage of sitting for proficiency tests to measure how much English my brain has. This critical event brought to the scene the complexities of moving across time and space i.e. how one's language attracts value shifts depending on where one is, and in most official cases nothing can be done to resist the institutional power. Attesting to this power, I sat for the test and passed, with my score forwarded on to my departmental profile to vitally prove that I meet the admission criteria. Indeed, I was negotiating rates of exchange.

During my PhD years, I worked with international students all the time. I taught pre-sessional classes over the summer, examined IELTS, and taught communication skills modules to both 'home' and 'international' students. The theoretical and empirical insights brought by my PhD coupled with further professional encounters with international students made me passionate about the topic of my PhD. It also made me aware of how my positioning was constantly changing: inside the IELTS test room I am an examiner, and once I leave the room I am a foreigner, which is not a pleasant realisation. I was once told that



with reference to my doctoral project, I am both a process and a product. I cannot agree more.

## 1.5 Overview

Sociolinguistic investigations, if they are to create clear insights, must start by throwing some light into the contexts involved. To this end, **Chapter 2** looks at the context of the study. It provides some information about the Arab world, which is home for linguistic and religious pluralism, and whose history had a share of Western colonialism. Part of this discussion addresses some sociolinguistic vignettes from the Arab world. The remainder of the chapter identifies main trends and issues surrounding international students, as a pivotal reference point to address the institutional context of the study.

**Chapter 3** deals with the guiding literature that theoretically scaffolds the study. It looks at the following aspects: politicising and commodifying English within the globalisation discourse, English teaching and testing in an era of globalisation, study abroad motives and intercultural encounters, current debates addressing the sociolinguistics of globalisation, and finally internationalisation in UK HE. The chapter ends by introducing my research questions.

**Chapter 4** turns its attention to methodology and research design, outlining major methodological choices and decisions, tracing the evolution of the empirical side of the study, and highlighting the procedural aspects of how data generation and data analysis were managed. The chapter also addresses the study's epistemological beliefs and practical challenges, situates the study in a research paradigm, and discusses the relationship between the researcher and the participants. While doing that, the chapter raises the challenge of researching multilingually and the ad hoc-ness of translation practices in the absence of institutional and methodological guidance.

In **Chapter 5**, I move to present the five key research findings, the order of which fits within the trajectory metaphor endorsed in this study. The first research finding discusses the factors that affected sojourners' attitudes towards English. The second addresses reasons for studying in UK HE. After that, the third finding features sojourners' experiences of shifts in their language value in the UK. The

fourth finding is related to social aspects of academic sojourning, and the last finding addresses participants' reflections on their previous formal language education in their home countries.

In **Chapter 6**, I discuss the findings in light of theory, answer the research questions and move beyond them towards a more holistic understanding of sojourners' sociolinguistic trajectories in study abroad contexts. Finally, **Chapter 7** is devoted to research reflections, contributions of knowledge this thesis offers, implications for practice, limitations and directions for future research.

## **Chapter 2: The Context of the study**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on two areas: the Arabic context and the context of 'international' students in UK HE. It first addresses the geographic boundaries of the Arab world, problematises the term 'Arab', and offers brief sociolinguistic vignettes from the Arab world. After that, it discusses issues surrounding 'international students' in UK HE. Together, I hope that these references provide sufficient contextualisation of the circumstances surrounding Arab students in the UK.

### **2.1 The Arab World**

The Arab world, as a traditional term, stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf. There are 22 member states in the Arab League: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. In spite of the political separation of such countries, Arabic constitutes the basis of identity for millions who are divided by political barriers (Holt, 1996).

However, the term 'Arabic' is not as simple as it sounds. First, the term is not ethnic. Jones (1965, p.19) explains 'physically, the Arabs of today are a mixture of all the peoples who have lived in the Middle East and North Africa and of the people who came from time to time and conquered them'. Second, it does not denote a religious identity. There are Arabs who are Muslims, Christians, Jews or atheists. There has been a common misconception that Arab-ness is linked with Islam, assuming that all Arabs are Muslims and vice versa. Third, the term does not present a complete or perfect overlap with speaking Arabic. That is to say, there are Arabic speakers who refuse to be identified as 'Arabs'. For example, some Christian Lebanese prefer to be called 'Phoenicians'; some Coptic Christians in Egypt prefer to be called 'Copts'; and many of the Arabic-speaking Jews in Israel, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen do not perceive themselves as 'Arabs'. Similarly, the Druze in Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, who are speakers of Arabic, do not see themselves as Arabs (Suleiman, 2006).

Indeed, there have been several attempts to define the term. The 1946 Arab League's definition (cited in Francona, 2007) describes an Arab as 'a person whose language is Arabic, who lives in an Arabic speaking country, who is in sympathy with the aspirations of the Arabic speaking peoples'. The definition heavily and vaguely uses the word 'Arabic' and does not justify adding state members that do not meet all criteria e.g. Somalia and Comoros. In his attempt to define the term, Francona (2007) posits that 'there is no universal definition of who is an Arab. If you speak Arabic as your native language and *want* to be identified as an Arab, you are an Arab' [*my emphasis*]. For the purpose of this study, I will draw on Francona's understanding of the term.

## **2.1 Sociolinguistic vignettes from the Arab World**

Arabic is the main language in the Arab world. The most salient sociolinguistic feature of Arabic is the emergence of a tri-glossic situation with at least three identifiable Arabic varieties: Classical Arabic, Standard Arabic, and Dialectal Arabic 'amiyya' (Ennaji, 1999). Classical Arabic is the language of the Holy Quran. It unifies large religious communities which, according to Anderson (1983), can only be imagined by means of a sacred language and script. The membership of such communities is not conditioned by tribal affiliations or opinions, but by embracing the religious philosophy of the Holy script. In spite of being a written code that is currently spoken by no one, except during Quran recitations, its association with Islam, the Revelation, and its great literary and historical tradition have led Muslims all over the world to charge it with emotional meanings (Marranci, 2007).

Similarly, Standard Arabic, also known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), is a written variety deemed to be a simplified version of Classical Arabic. It also has no native speakers, but it is taught in schools all over the Arab world. Ennaji (1999) explains that the expansion of free education in the Arab world has resulted in the spread of Standard Arabic, the main mode of literacy and eloquence in the Arab world. It is mainly used in writing and in formal speeches.

The most important mother tongue in the Arab world is the Dialectal Spoken Arabic 'amiyya', which is a spoken variety. Each country has a range of amiyya varieties, keeping in mind that there are urban and rural amiyyas in each country.

Amiyya Arabic is a crucial identity marker for Arabs. With the rise of social media, the role of amiyya seems to flourish, as younger generations tend to use it in social media and mobile communication in a way that gives legitimacy to it as a written code. The implications of this and its effects on Standard Arabic fall outside the scope of this discussion (see Said, 2011; Suleiman 2004, 2006, 2011; Ennaji, 1999).

English as a foreign language knocked loudly on Arabic doors after World War I, the commencement of Western colonialism in the Arab world. The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) provided the framework for the partition of the Ottoman Empire, which had controlled most of the Arab countries for around six centuries, by the Western powers, namely Britain, France and Italy. This colonial period introduced new foreign languages to the Arab world. The British, French, and Italian colonizers used different ways to separate the Arab societies from their language and culture (Ennaji, 1999). The foreign languages brought by colonialism soon became the languages for education, press, and employment. It goes beyond doubt that this historical period contributed to the spread of English and French, the most durable colonial languages, and participated in the prevalence of certain language ideologies that position these languages favourably. Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity (1998) remind us that language ideologies are explicit and implicit cultural representations of the intersection of language and individuals in society. They are not only about language, but also about how language links to issues of power, identity, and epistemology. Language ideologies continue to be at the heart of social institutions and fundamental notions of being in the community. Therefore, the current favourable positioning of English and French underpins hegemonic discourses that privilege those who speak these languages, thereby attracting more individuals to aspire to these perceived benefits and attest to the powerful ideological machinery that reproduces these ideologies.

English is taught as the first foreign language in public schools in most countries in the Arab world. This might be the same in many other parts of the world. However, what is special about teaching English in many parts of the Arab world is that it is given more importance than Arabic in many different ways. Ronesi (2011, p. 61) explains that the 'caretakers of Arabic- educators, scholars, and

government officials- had not done their duty by the language and its learners and had failed to nurture Arabic and promulgate Arabic in pedagogically sound ways'. During pre-school stage, many children are sent to kindergartens that compete among each other to teach English and/or French. Parents are made to believe that bilingualism offers their children a prosperous future, therefore they choose places that claim to follow the latest 'fads' in teaching foreign languages. Television channels broadcast cartoon films that are mainly American or Japanese, and some of them are dubbed into Arabic. In this way children are attracted to a different culture and the sound of another language. The school system in the Arab world adopts a similar language ideology. Whereas Arabic is taught traditionally, English is taught interactively. Arabic instruction is based on old editions of unappealing books and the content is history-based. In her study on Arabic instruction, Ronesi (2011) adds that Arabic is taught by poorly trained and paid tutors, who generally feel that they have a lower status in comparison with teachers of English, math or science. Moreover, students do not feel the actual presence and importance of Arabic in their life due to its limited presence on the internet and the scarcity of research published in Arabic. These factors promote the ideology that Arabic is not the language of science, research, and sophistication. Said (2011) explains that using old books for teaching Arabic alludes to the ideology that Arabic is not useful for students now nor in the future. She calls for a serious revision for current language policies in order to redefine students' linguistic identities. The same ideology persists in university education in the Arab world where less applicants are attracted to departments of Arabic because they think that there are enough people who are doing this job and are overworked, underpaid and underestimated.

In a nutshell, the Arab world has been notoriously known for its linguistic, social, historical and religious pluralism, which has not only contributed to dividing its nations, but has also made it difficult to describe this geographical area without stumbling over various stones of oversimplification.

## **2.2 International students in UK Higher Education**

Since the introduction of policies of marketisation in the culture of academic life in the late 1970s, the academic system in the UK has been exposed to dramatic changes (McNamara and Harris, 1997). Whereas the marketisation of HE, Furedi

(2011) argues, provides better value for money and empowers universities to be responsive to the demands of society, the economy, and students, this move has introduced many rituals of commodification. These rituals include university ranking, student surveys, quality control, and auditing, etc., which have led to an increase in state intervention in the management of university life (Furedi, 2011). In the UK, the national approach to cross-border education is revenue-generating, i.e. promoting the higher education system to fee-paying students so as to control a large share of the educational market worldwide (Kinging, 2009; OECD, 2004).

One of the most influential consequences of the marketisation of HE in the UK is the tremendous expansion in international students numbers, or what Furedi (2011, p.2) calls 'the international student bazaar'. While in 1973, there were 35,000 international students in the UK, the numbers rose to 95,000 in 1992 (McNamara and Harris, 1997) and in 2013-2014, the numbers increased to 435,500 including EU students (UKCISA, 2015). In 2012, it was reported that the UK attracts one in 10 students who study abroad, generating around £8 billion a year in tuition fees alone, and this figure could rise to £17 billion in 2025 (BBC, 2012).

In spite of the lucrative business of attracting more international students in UK HE, their presence has sparked a heated debate in the UK wider political spectrum, where they are counted as migrants. Former immigration minister, Damian Green, insisted on counting international students in the UK immigration figures, '[a] student who comes here for a six month language course doesn't count as an immigrant but if you come here for three years, or four years, or five years, then you are not a visitor, you are an immigrant under the international definition, so we count you as an immigrant' (BBC, 2012). Following Cameron's 'no ifs, no buts' election pledge, the government pledged to cut the total net migration to the UK to below 100,000 (BBC, 2011). In pursuit of this target, there were series of changes to the student visa system and more changes are expected to take place, e.g. Theresa May's proposal to ban international students from working during their studies (The Independent, 2015).

There were many initiatives taken by some UK HE officials in an attempt to negotiate the situation of international students. An example of this is a May 29,

2012 letter to David Cameron, signed by nearly 70 university chancellors, governors and presidents. Part of the letter reads:

*In an age of increasing global mobility, the number of individuals considering a university education abroad is growing rapidly. In this market for talent – and export income – the UK performs exceptionally well, with 9.9% of the total market share in 2009, and export earnings of £7.9 billion. International students also play an important role in towns and cities up and down the country, and contribute significantly to local economies. There is a clear opportunity to build on this success, with forecasts suggesting that export earnings from this activity could more than double by 2025.*

*International students also bring significant cultural richness and long-term political and social benefits to this country, and return many benefits to the countries from which they come.*

*However, global competition for international students is intense and a number of other countries are increasing their efforts in this area.*

*We therefore ask you to consider how your government can do more to support our universities in their international activities. In particular we request that international university students be removed from the net migration statistics for policy purposes, bringing us into line with our major competitors. We believe that this would help government by creating a clear differentiation between temporary and permanent migration, help universities whose international character is essential to their future success, and help the UK by contributing to economic growth.*

(UK Council for Graduate Education, 2012)

In spite of these attempts, international students are still counted in immigration statistics and aggressive visa restrictions continue to be implemented. On 6 April 2012, the Tier 1 post-study work visa scheme was closed to all new applicants (UK Border Agency, 2012). This scheme used to allow UK international graduates to stay in the UK for up to two years to work. The new work visa regulations, under Tier 2 scheme, require international applicants to be sponsored by a trusted employer and to earn at least £20,000 per annum (Paton, 2012). Current proposals call for increasing this threshold pay and tightening the conditions under which an international applicant can be sponsored (BBC, 2012). The most recent change in student visas was introduced with effect from 6 April 2015 and it entails paying an immigration health surcharge (UKCISA, 2015).

Thus far, it seems that institutional discourses surrounding international students in UK HE are charged with doubt and mistrust despite the obvious economic and



non-economic benefits they bring to the country. This adds extra pressure on the shoulders of 'international students' in the UK who not only grapple with a new language, academic culture, lifestyle, and the consequences thereof on their identities and perceptions, but they are also thrown into an inhospitable system that pumps their fees and daily expenditure into its economy, limits their life choices by visa restrictions, and expects them to 'integrate' in and embrace the values of the 'host' community, to speak 'good' English, and most importantly to leave soon after their courses finish.

Finally, this chapter has presented two pivotal reference points to contextualise the study by looking at what is traditionally known as the 'Arab World' and what is institutionally referred to as 'international students' in the UK. The next chapter engages with the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

## Chapter 3: Guiding literature

### Introduction

Academic sojourners, like migrants, travel across time and space, are immersed in dislocations and are subject to disorientations. While acknowledging the literature on migrants' narratives (Baynham and De Fina, 2005) and migrants and adult education (Simpson and Whiteside, 2015), this study engages with the literature on English language education in an era of globalisation, second language identities, and study abroad, while bringing to the fore a plethora of theoretical constructs concurrently. These include language and globalisation, language and neoliberalism, language ideologies and conceptualisations, desire and motivation, intercultural communication, international student experience, othering and positioning in interaction, sociolinguistics of globalisation, and internationalisation in higher education.

To provide an engaging narrative of the literature which guides the current inquiry, this chapter is divided into five sections, the order of which is informed by a chronological dimension which starts with looking at English as a (post)colonial legacy and a valued commodity and ends with discussing internationalisation in UK HE.

The **first section** looks at English as a (post)colonial legacy which also happens to be a current valued commodity. The section provides historical glimpses at the political role of English and moves on to discuss the enormous English language industry, which is inseparable from the discussion of notions such as neoliberalism, human capital, and the ideal subject.

The **second section** looks at English language teaching and testing in an era of globalisation, and questions the reliability of how English is presented in ELT textbooks and language proficiency tests, as opposed to how English is actually used in discursive practices beyond classrooms and examination halls. The section problematises how English is conceptualised in many parts of the world and shows how these conceptualisations and the language ideologies thereof can be misleading to individuals who decide to go beyond their geopolitical boundaries.

The **third section** deals with goals, desires, and motives for study abroad in the UK. The discussion touches upon aspects of intercultural communication and socialisation and ends with a discussion of identity work in study abroad contexts. The **fourth section** discusses scalar approaches to sociolinguistics of globalisation and mobility, and moves on to call for less certainty. The **last section** looks at internationalisation in UK HE and addresses issues pertinent to commercial versus ethical education.

Together, these five sections offer considerable depth and breadth with which the study attempts to engage, and to which the study hopes to contribute. The section's final remarks open the door for the study's research questions, which will be presented at the end of this chapter.

### 3.1 English: A (post)colonial legacy and a valued commodity

*And who in time knows whither we may vent  
The treasure of our tongue, to what strange shores  
This gain of our best glory shall be sent,  
T' enrich unknowing nations with our stores?  
What worlds in th'yet unformed Occident  
May come refin'd with th'accents that are ours.*

(Samuel Daniel (1599) *Musophilus*, cited in Leith, 2007, p. 117)

Daniel's vision for sending the 'treasure of the English tongue' to strange, unknowing nations became a reality through a history of colonial and imperial intrusions, which took place within and beyond the British Isles. The colonisation process within the British Isles targeted the Celtic territories for political and religious motives. The political motives were to subjugate the population, whereas the religious reasons were related to the reinforcement of the Pope's Christianity (Leith, 2007). Beyond the British Isles, Leith (2007) maintains, the motives of colonisation were threefold: economic, social, and political, and they led to more than 300 years of colonisation, affecting four continents. In addition, he identifies three types of English colonialism: displacement, subjection, and replacement. An example of the first type is the settlement of English native speakers in North America. The second type, subjection, entails allowing some of the precolonial population access to learning English e.g. in Nigeria. The last

type refers to replacing indigenous populations by new labour from West Africa through slave trade, which depopulated many African territories, and sent around 11 million Africans to the New World, where they could not use their native languages (Gramley, 2012). This colonisation process caused striking linguistic consequences, which led to the emergence of new varieties of English in many parts of the world.

But why starting with this dark side of history when the world today undergoes immensely globalising processes? The most straightforward answer is that the dark side is not over yet. Globalisation is a 'fashionable' keyword of the contemporary discourse (Block and Cameron, 2002 p.1). According to Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 1), 'globalisation is a slippery term which carries different meanings to different people at different times'. Therefore, the way it is defined and perceived varies as evident in Fairclough's (2006) discussion of voices on globalisation. However, one of the most interesting insights into the history of globalisation comes from historian Robbie Robertson (2003) who argues that globalisation 'as a human dynamic has always been with us, even if we have been unaware of its embrace until recently' (p.3). He argues that globalisation started with the modern colonial period, about 500 years ago. He identifies three waves of globalisation: the first started with regional trade when Spain and Portugal established trade routes to Asia, in pursuit of resources from China and India. Robertson argues that this wave provided the basis for modern global trade and finance. The second wave started after 1800 following the industrial revolution, which sparked the 'demand for mechanisation' (p. 107). Whereas countries like Britain, Germany, Japan, and the USA benefitted from the globalisation process, which resulted from industrialisation, 'for the majority of the world's peoples, however, globalisation meant only one thing: colonialism. They were incorporated into the economies of industrialising nations to supply raw materials and cheap labour; nothing more' (p. 131). This wave ended when the hegemonic rivalries were led into the two World Wars. The third wave started after 1945, with the rise of the power of the USA and its cold war with the Soviet Union. Although that wave marked the independence of many Asian and African countries, Robertson (2003) cautions that:

*Despite decolonisation, the 'civilizing' zeal of former imperialists was far from dead. In Britain and the United States a new mantra*

*emerged: Western values, Western institutions, Western capital and Western technology. Only by Westernising could former colonies hope to achieve a modern future*

(2003, p. 182)

According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), this modern future, or modernisation, was led by the USA which took the lead following the Second World War, establishing three international economic organisations: the International Monetary Fund, the International World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (what became the World Trade Organisation in 1995). Besides the American influence on today's political economy, the current globalisation phase is marked by advances in digital communication which surpasses spatial boundaries (Fairclough, 2006).

Hence, it can be argued that the dark side of history with its colonialism and imperialism has not ceased to exist. Rather, their consequences have been perpetuated by what Hardt and Negri (2000) call 'Empire', which 'establishes no territorial centre of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers... Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command' (xii-xiii). As a result, a term such as 'postcolonial' can indeed be misleading. Commenting on this, Kumaravadivelu (2006) asserts that '[o]ne should also be aware (beware?) of the use of postmodern and postcolonial vocabulary that masks the attempts to preserve the status quo' (p.15). In a similar vein, Shin and Kubota (2008, p.208) warn against being misled by the prefix 'post' which implies that colonialism is not existent today. In fact, the domination of (neo)colonialism and the subordination of the other continue to exist in the globalising world we live in today. With these realisations in mind, the term 'globalisation' continues to be a 'vogue word'; the more attempts to make it transparent, the more it becomes opaque a term (Bauman, 1998).

In this regard, Fairclough (2006) cautions against being misled by the discourses of globalisation, which, on the one hand, tend to misrepresent and mystify the term, while on the other contribute to falsely shape people's understanding of what globalisation is. For instance, one of the most dominant discourses of globalisation is focus on terms such as 'mobility', 'crossing borders', 'flexibility'. Although this study uses the expression 'sociolinguistics of globalisation and

mobility', it is important to acknowledge and problematise the dangerous liaison between globalisation and mobility. Bauman (1998) posits that globalisation has led to new forms of social divisions such as the relationship between the 'globals', who are free to roam the world to enjoy the hybridity and the colourfulness of the global village, and the 'locals', who are confined and sometimes imprisoned within their tight local corners and for whom mobility is still a dream.

Another prominent discourse of globalisation is the neoliberal economic discourse (Fairclough, 2006). Neoliberalism promotes liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within the scope of free markets and trade (Harvey, 2005, p.2). Holborow (2012) maintains that neoliberalism is the official policy of several Western governments, whereas Block (2012) refers to it as the dominant economic ideology involved in all manners of activities. Flores (2013) distinguishes between the macro-level of neoliberalism (institutional) and the micro-level of neoliberalism (individual). He refers to the former as 'the merging of the state and the market in a new form of corporate governance' (p. 502) in a way that promotes the free flow of capitalism and the benefits of economic elites. He argues that this level of neoliberalism is the most cited and discussed and in spite of its significance, it overlooks an important aspect of neoliberalism that operates at the level of individuals, i.e. the conceptualisation of the 'ideal subject'.

Not only does neoliberalism entail the corporatisation of the state, but it also entails the corporatisation of the individual subject, as well (Flores, 2013). The corporatisation of the subject involves establishing an 'ideal subject', who is flexible, autonomous and willing to adapt rapidly (Besley and Peters, 2007). Keeley (2007, p.13) goes on to explain that the 'ideal subject' is a lifelong learner and comments: 'to go on working, we'll need to continue updating our skills throughout our working lives. Why? Because the skills we need in the workplace are evolving'. This understanding has shifted the concept of employment from 'a job for life' to 'employability for life' (Tomlinson, 2005, p.7). Kubota elaborates on this by explaining that:

*In order to stay employable, learning is considered to be an important means for success.... An expansion in human capital contributes to both individual economic benefit and corporate and national economic growth. Under the neoliberal discourse of individual accountability, each individual is seen to be responsible for*

*developing through lifelong learning in the knowledge and skills required to be fully employable.*

(2011, p. 249)

In light of this understanding, individuals' quest for valued skills such as higher English proficiency springs from institutional and individual motives that seem to promise a better life for those who dedicate more time, effort, and money to reach a higher level of English proficiency. This is the essence of linguistic instrumentalism, defined as 'the usefulness of language skills in achieving utilitarian goals such as economic development and social mobility' (Kubota, 2011, p. 248).

However, the extent to which individuals are free to choose their own path of personal and professional development is slightly restricted. This being the case, individuals are made to believe that widening their linguistic repertoires, which should include English, will increase their cultural awareness, thereby their chances of employability and promotion. Commenting on this, Phillipson (2012, p.410) reminds us that, 'within an individualistic paradigm of choice in a supposedly free market, choice is assumed to be rational, as in mainstream positivist science'. This rationality is usually linked to political ideologies that lie at the core of neoliberal governance.

English with its colonial history, ideological hegemony, economic power, political authority, and social dominance is currently the language of the globalised world. How it managed to obtain and preserve this position is still an ongoing debate in the literature. To start with, the current international dominance of English is one of the observable consequences of colonialism. In his discussion of linguistic imperialism as an encyclopaedia entry, Phillipson (2009) argues that 'language is one of the most durable legacies of European colonial and imperial expansion' (p.1). Whenever globalisation is mentioned, a discussion of language is triggered because 'it is partly language that is globalising and globalised' (Fairclough, 2006, p. 3). Traditionally, imperialism was chiefly linked with economic and political dominance (Hobson, 1902), and it usually led to an unequal distribution of resources between the Centre and Periphery and between social classes (Holborrow, 1999). In the contemporary world, language merges with economic and political dominance. It privileges people in the Centre by virtue of their

linguistic competence in certain languages and assigns unequal benefits in a world system that legitimates this modern exploitation (Phillipson, 1992). Even those who argue that English is a means to keep all countries engaged in the modern world economy and advancement, Phillipson (2009) argues, seem to overlook the point that this engagement entails becoming part of a 'Western-dominated globalisation agenda set by the transnational corporations, the international Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation' (p.4).

On the other hand, some scholars argue that the spread of global English was not a means to subjugate other nations or individuals. Rather, it was a tool to resist the power of the masters. Brutt-Griffler (2002, p.78) argues that British colonialist education did not show any consistent endeavours to promote English. Instead, English was viewed as the language of the elite, and access to it by the general public was not meant to be an easy quest. This suggests that the spread of English could have been a counter-discourse to resist colonialism. That is to say, '[t]he natives were using the language of the master only to curse him more effectively' (Canagarajah, 2000, p.126). These views accentuate the role of agency, resistance and appropriation in facing structural powers. Eventually, irrespective of whether English was empowered directly by colonialism or indirectly as a means to resist colonialism, colonialism continues to be an inevitable, controversial factor when discussing the global spread of English as will be further discussed in 3.1.1.

Furthermore, the spread of globalisation has summoned new market demands. Unlike the industrial economy that emphasised manual work, new capitalism highlights the importance of language and communication skills. This is largely because of the rise of service and creative industries, which place higher pressure on individuals (Cameron, 2002). Following Thatcherism, which commands individuals to look after themselves above all else, individualistic orientations value personal aspirations above the collective work (Jones, 2011). Consequently, the contemporary focus on communication skills has given rise to 'communicative imperialism' (Phillipson, 2009) because it involves 'a one-way flow of expert knowledge from dominant to subaltern cultures' (Cameron, 2002, p. 70). Evidently, part of this 'expert system' (Giddens, 1991) is linked with the mastery of forms and genres of communication that cut across geopolitical



boundaries, and these genres include those of transnational news media, websites of international organisations and corporations (Fairclough, 2006). Not only does the hegemonic power of these genres dominate the corporate world and media, but it also extends to education that currently tends to produce consumers rather than critical citizens (Phillipson, 2009). Admittedly, the mastery of English is at the heart of all of this because it functions as the world's 'working language' (Gray, 2002).

Because many applied linguists interested in highlighting 'interdisciplinarianism' often overlook the political economy of contemporary capitalism, a crucial basis for the social constitution of applied linguistics (Block, Gray and Holborow, 2012), I have chosen to push this forward in an attempt to address what Block and colleagues (2012, p.3) call 'one gaping hole in the work of many applied linguists'. In the following two sub-sections, I discuss the processes of politicising and commercialising English separately, while acknowledging the interrelatedness of politics and economics as captured by the term 'political economy'.

### **3.1.1 Politicising English**

*Politics is inseparable from any discussion of something so central to human society as language.*

Ricento and Hornberger (1996, p.411)

Language education is not a neutral activity because 'every education system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it' (Foucault 1972, p. 226). Joseph (2004) asserts that language teaching/learning is political because it always involves two languages and two cultures, with one of them gaining more prestige and power. Shohamy (2006) notes that while linguists describe speech and language use, politicians, educators and others in control prescribe how language should be used. To apply this understanding to English, Pennycook (1998, 1994) highlights the colonial discourse in language education by asserting that language education perpetuates the effects of colonialism in its focus on the superiority of the Self and the inferiority of the 'Other'. While it is supposed to be a place of diversity, heterogeneity, and fluidity, language education is a platform where language, culture, and identity are presented to be standardised, homogenised, and rigid to meet the interests of the white elite (Pennycook, 1998).

To illustrate, Seidlhofer and Jenkins (2003, p.140) quote the British Council Conference Prospectus saying:

*The incredible success of the English language is Britain's greatest asset. It enhances Britain's image as a modern, dynamic country and brings widespread political, economic and cultural advantages, both to Britain and to our partners.*

(The British Council, *Conference Prospectus*, ELT conference, 1998)

To capture the intricate fabric of politics, Charles Alderson (2009) has, interestingly, subdivided the term 'politics' into two constituents: macro-politics and micro-politics. Macro-politics deals with national and international politics and is a reflection of the decisions of governments, and policy makers. On the other hand, micro-politics refers to the roles of individuals and institutions. Yet, it is not to be understood that the two work separately; instead, 'it is evident that macro-politics often provides an important context for micro-political behavior' (Alderson, 2009, p.14).

To start with, the macro-politics of language represents governments' decisions and policies. Governments decide which languages are deemed official, which can be used in instruction, which to be regarded as second or foreign languages, and which to repress and ignore (Alderson, 2009; Ricento and Hornberger, 1996). Looking at the global status of English denotes the political power of the English speaking countries. Such power is not today's invention, as it started with the colonial legacy of Britannia and is still reinforced by British policies and the Americanisation that dominates the new world order, as articulated at the beginning of this section.

Moving to the other constituent of politics, the micro-politics of English operates in a more sophisticated manner. To start with, Blase (1991, p. 1) quoted in Alderson defines micro-politics as:

*Micro-politics is about power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves. It is about conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they want. It is about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends. It is about what people in all social settings think about and have strong feelings about, but what is so often unspoken and not easily observed.*

(2009, p. 14)

Therefore, micro-politics is related to the use of power by individuals and institutions to achieve their interests. Such power springs from certain ideological and political views that guide individuals and institutions. This political construct is analogous to Foucault's idea of the 'micro-physics of power' which is explained by Deleuze (1988, p. 23) as, 'the state itself appears as the overall effect or result of a series of interacting wheels or structures which are located at a completely different level, and which constitute a microphysics of power'. Hence, there is a two-way relationship between macro and micro politics. Evidently, the use of micro-politics is not a common theme for scholars and Alderson (2009) narrates the difficulties he had faced to publish his writings on micro-politics since publishers tended to focus on the positive aspects of big institutions with the excuse that there is no ample evidence to raise such accusations.

National and international institutions are part of the scope of micro-politics. Examples of these institutions include British/American language schools, foundation programmes, universities' regulations, British Council offices and their American counterparts, media, entertainment. All of them have their own ideological and political foundations, and the danger lies in their own influence on the public. In this regard, Lippi-Green wonders:

*How do the dominant bloc institutions manage to convince whole groups of human beings that they do not fully or adequately possess an appropriate human language? And more mysteriously, why do these groups hand over this authority?*

(2012, p. 68)

A vivid example can be found in the role the British Council, a government-funded body for promoting Britain and English worldwide (Phillipson, 2009), plays to feed into both macro- and micro-politics. On the one hand, it contributes to the image of the UK as a country enthusiastic about mutual understanding and the substantial development of developing countries. This reflects its power as a Mecca for those seeking 'native-ness' of English, and better employment options. On the other, the British Council nurtures the 'Standard Language Ideology' (SLI) that reinforces the institution's position as a main provider of 'authentic' Standard English'. (SLI) is defined by Lippi-Green as:

*A bias towards an abstracted, idealised, homogeneous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but*

*which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class.*

(2012, p.67)

Following Lippi-Green's (2012, p. 70) 'Language Subordination Model' (LSM), a few excerpts are taken here from the British Council website <<http://www.britishcouncil.org/about>> and are analysed to highlight the micro-political role of the British Council:

| Excerpts from 'About the British Council' Section  | Interpretative analysis based on Lippi-Green's (2012) (LSM)   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In line with our Royal Charter, <b>we aim to bring high quality English materials to every learner or teacher who wants them around the world. We work with governments</b> to transform whole education systems to increase <b>opportunity</b> and <b>employability</b> through English.</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explicit promises are made. Direct indicators to the advantages customers can gain from using BC materials.</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>We also deliver</b> English teaching and <b>train</b> teachers by radio, web and broadcast in <b>developing</b> and post conflict countries.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authority is claimed. (WE) are the authorised carriers of knowledge.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>All over the world</b>, people want <b>greater</b> educational <b>opportunities</b> to enhance their lives and <b>employment prospects</b>. We live in a globalised world so our focus in education is on bringing an international dimension to education in schools, technical colleges and universities,</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Again authority is claimed and promises are made.</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>on raising educational <b>standards</b> by sharing the <b>UK's expertise</b>,</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language is mystified. This discourse emphasises Giddens' (1991) 'expert system'.</li> </ul>                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>and on encouraging the <b>best international students</b> to study in the UK.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customers are held up as positive examples and success stories.</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>We create opportunity, trust, prosperity and security</b> for the people of the</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authority is claimed and the macro-politics of the</li> </ul>  |

|   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| UK and the many other countries we work in (my emphasis). | educational mission are hinted at. |
|---|------------------------------------|

### **Table 3.1 Insights into the micro-political role of the British Council**

*The British Council Annual Report 2013-2014* starts with the following words by its Chief Executive, Sir Martin Davidson, ‘I welcome the growing recognition of the value of the UK’s soft power and of the role the British Council plays in building it’ (p. 5). Indeed, it is the ‘soft power’ of English that has continued to make its spread an ongoing political missionary.

A major conclusion to close this sub-section with is that language institutions and universities’ policies, along with larger social and political formations, are responsible for many long-held views pertinent to language ideology, language discrimination, and the unfavourable positioning and the marginality of the ‘Other’:

*If you look closely at language-focused discrimination, you will find that it is not language per se that is relevant; instead we need to understand the individual’s beliefs about language and following from those beliefs, institutional practices. In short, these beliefs and practices are the way in which individuals and groups are denied recognition.*

(Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 67)

#### **3.1.2 Commercialising English**

In an attempt to develop the notion of ‘English as industry’, Gray (2012) discusses three areas of commercialising ELT: commercial ELT, English language testing, and academic publishing. He explains that commercial ELT refers to teaching English, training teachers, and producing ELT textbooks worldwide. For example, the *British Council Annual Report 2013-2014* describes its English and examination aim as: ‘[m]ore widespread and better quality teaching, learning and assessment of English worldwide’ (p. 24), asserting that the demand for English today is greater than before. The British Council financial aim up to 2016 is to ‘increase [their] total turnover from £693 million in 2010–11 to over £900 million by 2015, and over £1 billion in 2016’ (p. 11). In addition, English language testing remains a lucrative activity:

*IELTS remains the world’s most popular English language test for higher education and global migration. Over two million IELTS tests were delivered worldwide in 2013–14. Over 9,000 organisations*

*worldwide, including over 3,000 institutions in the USA, now accept IELTS scores.*

(British Council Annual Report, 2013-2014, p.25)

Furthermore, Gray (2002) indicates that accurate figures for ELT coursebooks' sales are difficult to obtain. One unexplained attempt at speculating the annual sales of British ELT coursebooks came from Pennycook (1994) who estimated that the sales were £70 to £170 million. More than a decade later, the size of this market has enormously expanded.

Some of the main influential set of actors in the academic publishing industry are university publishing houses, including Oxford University Press (OUP) and Cambridge University Press (CUP). Thompson (2005 cited in Gray, 2012) explains that these publishing houses have been successful due to two main reasons: first, the ELT programmes and textbooks, and the larger role of English in the delivery of higher education globally. Second, young scholars who go to the UK and the USA for higher education get accustomed to British or American curricula and in turn embrace them when they return to their home countries. Therefore, even if certain curricula have not initially been designed for an international market, the business brought by Higher Education has made the dissemination of publications much more profitable. With reference to CUP and OUP, Thompson (ibid) explains that unlike most university publishing houses that are subsidised by their institutions, OUP and CUP transfer revenues to their host institutions. This means that academic publishing is not only profitable on its own, but is also crucial for supporting other parts of the industry (Gray, 2012).

In addition to Gray's (2012) three areas of commercialising English, the Higher Education sector in the UK (and in many other countries) is another major player in this market. By seeking to expand their intake of foreign students (EU and international), universities in the UK and the UK government see in Higher Education a valuable market opportunity. Section 2.3 above has addressed some of the economic benefits of this sector along with some of its major challenges.

### 3.2 English language teaching and testing in an era of globalisation

Globalisation 'has destabilised the codes, norms, and conventions that FL [foreign language] educators relied upon to help learners be successful users of the language once they had left their classrooms', says Kramsch (2014, p.296). This is because the superdiversity that characterises many parts of the world today (Vertovec, 2006) has opened the door for endless possibilities and encounters. That is to say, it has grown difficult to prepare language learners for the diverse situations and the circumstances thereof, and therefore, the gap between what is taught in classrooms or measured in examination halls and what is used in real life situations has become much bigger. Still, language teaching and testing practices do not seem to cope with these changing demands.

It is important to notice that the 'monolithic' views of languages, which believe that language can be pinned down to a single 'valued', 'correct', or 'standard' variety, predominate in linguistics, applied linguistics, and in everyday discourse (Hall, 2012). The monolithic understandings of what English is are too powerful in the discourse of English teaching and testing practices. Moreover, mainstream enterprise attests to the power of 'Standard English', leading to the reproduction of monolithic language ideologies, through mechanisms of institutional hegemony (Holborow, 2015 on Gramsci 1971), thereby contributing to perpetuating the commodification of 'Standard English' as the variety that should be taught, and tested. Reinforcing and promoting this conceptualisation justifies the ontological existence of English language testing services (e.g. IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC, etc. and their associate assessment standards), ELT textbooks, and international corporate organisations for ELT (e.g. British Council, Amideast<sup>1</sup>). Together, this ideological machinery equates a particular way of 'Englising' (Hall, 2014; Pennycook, 2007) with the language itself and eventually builds the industry of English language education on a premise which is not exhaustive enough to

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<sup>1</sup> American Middle East: a US non-profit organisation which aims at strengthening mutual understanding between the US and the people of the Middle East. Some of its activities involve language teaching and testing.

represent the dynamic, ever-changing linguistic landscapes beyond the spaces of language classrooms and examination halls.

Monolithic conceptualisations of English are dangerous because they misleadingly make learners assume that what they learn inside the classroom is what they will use and be exposed to outside the classroom. While studying English as a second or foreign language, learners use textbooks with glossy designs whose content is deterritorialised and is often designed with sets of guidelines with regard to inclusivity i.e. a non-sexist approach to how men and women are represented, and inappropriacy, i.e. topics that may offend potential consumers (Grey, 2002). As a result of what Gray (2002) calls 'the global coursebooks', language learners in many parts of the world study a narrow range of 'bland' topics which are mainly aspirational, apolitical, and carefree. This discourse was described by Kramsch (2015) as 'tourism discourse', which features 'playful, fleeting encounters without any desire to negotiate, let alone resolve, differences in meaning' (p. 409). Commenting on this, Gray (2012, p. 108) quotes one of his participants explaining that some themes in his ELT textbook represent a 'dishonest portrayal of life in the UK' since they 'create false dreams and aspirations in the minds of language learners'.

This inevitable use of the 'global coursebooks' is dangerous because language education inside the classroom is based on making learners interact with their 'imagined communities' (Kanno and Norton, 2003; Anderson, 1991). If real encounters in the outside world are fundamentally different, this can easily make learners lose voice in real life interactions. An example of this comes from Pellegrino Aveni (2007) who tells the story of an energetic young woman, Leila, who on arrival in a study abroad context, lost her voice figuratively and allowed others to speak for her. 'The person she believed herself to be in her everyday life was not the person she could present to others in her new language and new culture', observes Pellegrino Aveni (p.99). Although this example comes from second language identities literature to comment on the divide between learners' 'ideal selves' and 'real selves', it can be argued that the effects of learners' previous formal language education and hitherto conceptualisations of the second language are part and parcel of learner's imagined world and desired identity. In other words, the monolithic, rather simplistic representations of what



English is and how it is used in everyday interactions, as featured in ELT textbooks, can play a major role in silencing and intimidating language learners who want to go beyond the imagined community to face the real heterogeneous, messy real world in study abroad contexts. Studies on migrant education have also indicated the divide between what language learners are taught and what they encounter in the real world (Simpson, 2015; Roberts et al., 2007)

As discussed above, not only do ELT textbooks contribute to perpetuating what Hall (2012) and Pennycook (2007) call the 'monolithic myth', but language proficiency tests are key players in this task as well. Testing is 'an activity which perhaps more than any other dictates what is taught' (Hall, 2014, p. 379). What assigns more power to English language testing regimes is their powerful gatekeeping role. When language learners are told that they have to obtain a particular score in order to be offered a place at university and a visa to another country, these individuals would ultimately believe that once the required score is attained, all doors are open. Language proficiency tests measure one type of 'Englising' as the implicit objective (Hall, 2014) and Englising should not be equated with the entire, amorphous sociolinguistic system called 'English'.

Furthermore, using language tests as powerful gatekeepers poses several questions as to who has the right to decide on which language test to take and what the cut-score is. Who decides on which abilities to assess and how to do so? Who sets the 'correct' answer and against whose standards are answers evaluated? In response to these questions, Bachman and Purpura explain that:

*Ultimately, the issue of who decides is, in our view, one that involves societal, cultural, and community values that are beyond the control of the language test developer. Nevertheless, these values need to be carefully considered as we design, develop, and use language assessments.*

(2008, p. 466)

Language tests have gradually and discursively developed an authority for assessment and started to impose their own standards and ideologies on the societal values that are not to be thought of as static, stable, and never changing. With the rise of globalisation, the fabrics of societies are in continual changes. These changes are not met by changes in language tests. Language tests are still designed according to group A (monolingual speakers) standards even though it has become apparent that learners of English will never belong to this

group (Cook, 2009). Societies do not have a pure fabric of either group A, group B or C<sup>2</sup> (Cook, 2009) and it seems evident that decisions related to language tests need to change. This change cannot occur overnight because existing language tests have shaped societal perceptions of what 'correct' English is, leading to a chicken-and-egg situation. It is also worth mentioning that maintaining the status quo serves the political, economic and national interests of the dominant group. Commenting on this Heller and Duchêne maintain that:

*If you have [learned the language of the nation], you still need to constantly prove yourself against the measures developed by the dominant group, who use the agencies of the state (schools, bureaucracies, language academies, the media) to describe what counts as linguistic competence and the means to identify it.*

(2010, p.5)

This system, they assert, constitutes and perpetuates 'mechanisms of social selection' legitimised by dominant hegemonic discourses in language testing.

Nonetheless, the alternative approach, which accepts the ontological existence of multiple 'Englishes', has been present in the literature of applied linguistics for a decade or so. Still, it has not been granted sufficient legitimacy in language teaching and testing practices despite numerous calls for changing such practices. Some of those came from Pennycook (2007, p. 112) who asserts that language teachers need to reassess how they teach English in light of the plurilithic nature of English. In addition, Jenkins (2006) indicates that testing regimes in the ELT industry need to change to capture the new realities brought by globalisation and phenomena such as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). In light of this approach, 'English resembles a galaxy of millions of discrete objects ... bound together by the gravitational pull of effective communication' (Hall, 2014, p. 379). Despite the beauty of this metaphor, it is necessary to be reminded that the 'gravitational pull of effective communication' is also defined according to predefined norms, centres, and expectations. In other words, the boundaries between what is effective communication and what is not are blurred, amorphous,

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<sup>2</sup> According to Cook (2009), group B refers to people using an L2 within a larger community e.g. Bengali L1 speakers using English L2 in London. Group C refers to people using an L2 internationally for specific functions e.g. Chinese L1 speakers using English L2 for business, study, tourism, etc.

relational, and will always depend on a set of other factors (as discussed in **Chapter 6**).

Indeed, the way English is introduced to language learners through ELT textbooks and language tests places language learners in a bubble of a shiny, desired, and homogenous imagined community. Once the bubble goes out of the classroom, it explodes as it touches the harsh, rough realities of life outside the classroom. Addressing this transition, some researchers introduced different paradigms for teaching foreign languages. These include focusing on the ability to ‘operate between languages’ (MLA report 2007, p. 35), learning a variety of linguistic repertoires (Cenoz and Gorter, 2011), or developing ‘disposable linguistic resources’ activated according to momentary needs (Kramersch, 2015, p. 408). Since this repertoire-focused pedagogy might involve the risk of producing ‘truncated repertoires’ (Blommaert, 2010, p.23), Canagarajah renounces this agenda by asserting that:

*How many varieties of English should one master in order to deal with the diverse people one meets in one’s interactions, not to mention the genres of texts, video, or music in diverse Englishes? Beyond English, one has to also know the diverse languages that could be mixed in all these interactions. Such an agenda for learning and knowing languages is unsustainable.*

(2014, p. 771)

Canagarajah’s (2014) alternative approach, or what he calls a ‘new paradigm for teaching English as an international language’, encompasses three components: language awareness (how grammars work in languages), rhetorical sensitivity (awareness of communication genres), and negotiation strategies (practices for intelligibility).

Another attempt comes from Santipolo (2015) who introduces the notion of Bespoke Language Teaching (BLT) which is based on two principles borrowed from computer science: utility and usability. BLT is based on identifying learners’ needs and meeting them i.e. sociolinguistic usability. It aims at teaching what is useful before what is not useful; teaching what is more widespread e.g. ‘gonna’ instead of ‘going to’; and attending to learners motivation, by reminding them that English varieties exist for certain purposes, for instance.

In a similar quest, Holmes and Riddiford (2011) propose ‘conscious learning’ as a way to develop sociopragmatic skills in the context of negotiating workplace requests. They define sociopragmatic competence as the ‘ability to accurately interpret and appropriately express social meaning in interaction’ (p. 377). They investigate negotiating requests because refusals can be unexpected and because there is a mismatch between how native speakers and non-native speakers perceive refusals. The ‘conscious learning’ approach is based on the premise that instead of teaching a range of appropriate utterances to be used in different social contexts, teaching should ‘empower the students to undertake the analysis of relevant social dimensions for themselves’ (ibid, p. 382). However, their approach was restricted to analysing speech acts related to requests in the context of workplace in New Zealand.

Thus far, it has become evident that despite numerous attempts to bridge the gap between learning and using the language, or in Saïd’s (2004) words: ‘living in’ and ‘knowing’ English, this problem persists. Evidently, individuals who move across time and space are more vulnerable to the consequences of shifting between being learners of English in their countries and users of English in another country. In other words, this mobility gives rise to the idea of ‘negotiating rates of exchange’, as it not only involves grappling with language but also with power structures, as will be discussed in the following sub-section.

### **3.2.1 Negotiating rates of exchange**

As articulated above, the ELT industry wittingly or unwittingly targets the monolithic, standard, native English (Cook, 2009), and represents English as a one-size-fits-all variety, with the same exchange rate everywhere. Therefore, learners can easily assume that English is one variety whose grammar, phonology, structure, and vocabulary can be learned through some textbooks, and can be measured by proficiency tests.

Moreover, in language classrooms, Norton (2013, p.323) explains, the imagined community is ‘a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future’. However, moving from the classroom community to the ‘target language community’ (Norton, 2013) gives rise to social inequality and power issues. Norton Peirce (1995, p.12) cautions that theories about the

good language learner assume that 'learners can choose under what conditions they interact with members of the target language community', and that access to such communities is triggered by motivation. If this is the case, then why it is that:

*In one place there may be social distance between a specific group of language learners and the target language community, whereas in another place the social distance may be minimal; why a learner can sometimes speak and other times remains silent [?]*

(Norton Peirce, 1995 p. 11)

In classroom discourse, teachers are the actors of power and learners are positioned equally (or relatively). However, discursive practices outside the classroom take a different shape. Wright (2007, p.168) states that language learners ensure their individual advantage, or 'investment', yet they are aware of their disadvantage as a collective: 'non-native speakers will always be disadvantaged in linguistic settings where native speakers dominate'. In these complex settings, learners can choose to speak, to remain silent, or to respond with 'resistance to inequitable social forces' (Norton, 1995, p.20). Following Bourdieu (1977, p.649), the legitimate speaker/transmitter has the 'power to impose reception' because 'the power of words is never anything other than the power to mobilise the authority accumulated within a field'. In target language communities, language learners are positioned differently by their different interlocutors, and for that reason the social distance is not the same (following Norton, 1995). Going back to the metaphor I introduced in 1.3, If a learner's English is similar to investing in a dollar, this dollar is expected to have a higher value in interactions with other non-native speakers, and/or in contexts where English is not the language of the country. In such discourses, learners can value their investment highly.

Nevertheless, moving to target language communities and interacting with native speakers of English can lower this dollar's exchange rate. In such cases, learners might believe that their investment has not brought adequate, and/or appropriate linguistic assets. Following Bourdieu (1977), the value of linguistic products is determined by their relationship to the market. As a result, moving across different markets places different values on linguistic products. He referred to this as 'linguistic devaluations' (p. 651). Simpson and Cooke (2010, p.66) portray this as 'the downward mobility experienced by many during the migration process, which

might also be described as a loss of capital (economic, social, and cultural)'. This process accounts for the 'downward vertical trajectory' (ibid) that migrants or sojourners might experience upon moving to the target language community.

Inevitably, mobility in the globalised world still confronts individuals with an array of challenges that destabilise their views of themselves, their language, their culture, and other long-held beliefs. Amid all of that, the world continues to be a stratified place as it is neatly described in the following quote from Canagarajah:

*That identities are fluid does not mean that society and nations don't fix certain negative identities on minority students and discriminate against them accordingly. That cultures are mixed doesn't mean that certain values and practices aren't defined as the cultural capital required for success in mainstream institutions, including schools. That languages are hybrid doesn't mean that certain codes don't function as the linguistic capital (with a clear hierarchy of valued registers, dialects, and discourses) to obtain social and educational rewards. The global village is still stratified unequally according to differences in power and material resources (Luke 2000).*

(2002, p. 135)

In spite of these persisting challenges, many individuals are willing to 'go mobile' to study in different countries such as the UK. The next section delves into this by trying to investigate what motivates individuals to study abroad, what intercultural encounters they are expected to come to grips with and how these encounters continue to affect individuals' perceptions of their 'identity'.

### **3.3 Study abroad: motives and encounters**

Study abroad confronts its investigators with a bewildering array of variable features (Kinginger, 2015, 2009) such as identities, motives, desires, encounters, struggles, strategies, etc. In order to unpack this statement, this section starts by attempting to define 'study abroad' then it looks at issues pertinent to why students choose or intend to study abroad. After that, it discusses aspects of intercultural communication and socialisation, and finally addresses identity work in study abroad contexts.

Study abroad, cross-border education, is named differently in the literature. Coleman (2006) identifies different terms to refer to this activity including: study abroad, student sojourn, student mobility, residence abroad, overseas education, and academic migration. He explains that these different names indicate that

study abroad is not only organised differently, but also the concepts underlying its organisation vary from context to context. What adds more complexity to the study abroad literature is that it retains the attention of not just linguists or applied linguists, but equally of academics in economics, psychology, gender studies, higher education policy, and human geography, among many more (Coleman, 2013). Even though Kinginger (2009, p. 29) regards study abroad as a 'sub-field of applied linguistics', Coleman (2013) responds by asking 'which sub-field?', and indicates that study abroad continues to be an interdisciplinary area of inquiry.

Although Kinginger's (2009, 2015) definition of study abroad, 'a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes' (2015, p.11), is commonly cited, this study does not draw on it because of two reasons. First, the 'pre-defined duration' of study abroad excludes the trajectories of many students who take immigration-related routes after the end of their course. With political unrest in many parts of the world today, many study abroad students seek employment and immigration routes, and this should not be used as a reason to exclude them. Second, because this study embraces a holistic approach, I believe that study abroad cannot be restricted to 'educational purposes' because there are other purposes including the personal, and the intercultural. Consequently, this study draws on Benson's et al. (2013, p. 3) understanding of study abroad as 'any period spent overseas, for which study is part of the purpose'.

### **3.3.1 Reasons for studying abroad**

In order to explore the reasons why individuals decide to study abroad, an interdisciplinary investigation is required. That is to say, beyond the applied linguistic research on linguistic gains, second language identities and communicating across cultures using a foreign or second language, international student motivation overlaps with other areas of inquiry such as migration research, sociology, and psychology. Chirkov et al. (2007) identify a potential gap in the literature asserting that the motivation of international students remains understudied. In their study, they rely on 'Self-Determination Theory' (SDT), a theory of personality, motivation and optimal functioning (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2002), to explore the motivation of international students to study abroad. According to SDT, two aspects of motivation need to be addressed: the level of

self-determination and the content of the goals people strive for (Deci and Ryan, 2000). According to Deci and Ryan (2002), a more self-determined motivation leads to many advantages, affecting the quality of one's performance.

Within SDT, self-determination is measured according to the degree to which a person's experience is an autonomous choice, as opposed to controlled or coerced experiences. Autonomous motivation, Chirkov et al. (2007) argue, has two types: intrinsic and internalised extrinsic. The former refers to people's engagement with an activity because it is interesting e.g. when an individual decides to study abroad because it is an exciting experience. The latter refers to an identified regulation activity i.e. an activity with which individuals engage to achieve outcomes external to the activity itself but they have internalised these outcomes and made them personal goals. An example of this is when individuals study abroad because it is relevant to their personally important professional and personal goals (ibid, 2007). When individuals fail to internalise the regulation of their intended behaviour, two types of regulations emerge: external and introjected. The external regulation is a case of when individuals perform a certain activity to avoid punishment or to obtain rewards such as when individuals study abroad under the influence of their parents. Reay et al. (2005) refer to parental involvement in higher education choices as 'familial habitus', which they define as 'values, attitudes and knowledge base that families possess in relation to the field of higher education' (p. 62). If parental pressure remains an external regulation, individual's behaviour can be seen as coerced. On the other hand, when individuals try to meet the expectations of others while *partially* internalising the activity, it can be said that they have an introjected regulation of this activity (Chirkov et al., 2007). An example of this is when individuals do not experience direct pressure to study abroad but they have a feeling that they ought to do this because this is what is expected of them (ibid, 2007).

With reference to the content of motivation, Chirkov et al. (2007) explain that goals' content is context-specific. They developed a questionnaire guided by Tartakovsky and Schwartz's (2001) emigration motives. The questionnaire focused on two factors: preservation and self-development. Whereas the former refers to avoiding unfavourable conditions in individual's home countries, the later relates to desires to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.



What was puzzling in Chirkov's et al. (2007) study is that they identify a lack of association between self-development and adjustment outcomes and they call for future studies to justify this. On the other hand, their main finding that self-determined people will work harder, be more proactive and attain better cultural adjustment was already predicated. Finally, they conclude that both the content of motivation and the level of self-determination of the decision to study abroad were two independent sources of motivation 'because they independently accounted for variance in the outcome variables, with the level of autonomy always being the stronger predictor than the content of this motivation' (p. 214).

Besides motivation and levels of self-determination, various forms of capital influence individuals' intent to study abroad. According to the student-choice theory, students make post-secondary educational decisions in 'situated contexts' based on their socioeconomic status (St. John and Asker, 2001; McDonough, 1997). That is, these decisions are influenced by the financial, social, and cultural capital available to them (Perna, 2006). For example, Carlson et al. (1990) explain that students who have previously travelled before (cultural capital), have been successful academically (cultural capital), and come from educated families (social capital) tend to study abroad. In addition, Dufon and Churchill (2006) find that students' proficiency in a second language (linguistic capital) affects their intent to study abroad. In their study on understanding why some students choose to study abroad, Salisbury et al. (2009) maintain that students' accumulation of social and cultural capital prior to attending college is positively related to their willingness to study abroad. They also observe that low or average social and cultural capital backgrounds are more likely to prevent individuals from valuing the educational benefits of study abroad even if they were provided full financial assistance to study abroad.

What is more, the push and pull model of international migration (Martin, 1993; Richmond, 1993) has also been one of the commonly used tools to explain international student motivation and decisions (Chen, 2007; Chirkov et al., 2007; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Among the commonly mentioned push factors are lower educational quality in students' home countries, employer preference for overseas education, political problems, and unavailability of subjects (Wilkins et al., 2011). On the other hand, common pull factors include reputation of country's education, academic ranking of institutions, better employment prospects, better

English skills, a way to experience a different culture, and a safer environment (ibid, 2011).

Still, push and pull factors do not always account for individual preferences and aspirations. This is a focus which has been thoroughly addressed in the literature on learner motivation, mainly with reference to foreign language learning. Therefore, the current focus will shift to language learner motivation with the understanding that academic sojourners in the UK are also learners and users of English and thereby addressing the literature on language learner motivation is a crucial reference point to understanding the motives and goals of these individuals.

Since the rise of a 'motivational renaissance' almost two decades ago (Gardner and Tremblay, 1994, p. 526), there have been new and emerging understandings of language learner motivation. To start with, Gardner (1985) presents the notion of 'integrative-ness' which refers to learners' desires to learn a language to become closer to the target language community (Gardner, 2001). On the one hand, it can be argued that integrative motivation is relevant in the trajectories of language learners who also intend to study abroad, usually in a country where their target language is spoken. On the other, integrative motivation, as a term, has been reexamined in the literature. Lamb (2004) argues that with the current forces of globalisation, English starts to lose its connection with a particular Anglophone culture and this means that learners may aspire to have a bicultural identity that includes the global language, English, as well as their first language(s). In his study of the motivation of junior high school pupils in the Indonesian island of Sumatra, Lamb (2004) concludes that integrative and instrumental (i.e. career-related) orientations to language learning are difficult to define as separate concepts. Similarly, Dörnyei (2010, 2009, 2005) introduces the move from the integrative/instrumental dichotomy to a more recent conceptualisation of motivation which regards motivation as being part of learners' self-systems, closely associated with learners' ideal L2 self. The 'L2 Motivational Self System' encompasses three components: the 'ideal L2 self' (a person's idealised L2 self), 'ought-to L2 self' (attributes one should have to meet expectation and avoid negative consequences), and 'L2 learning experience' (situated motives in the learning environment) (Dörnyei, 2010, 2005). Commenting on this system, Dörnyei asserts that:

*We must realise that the actual L2 speakers are the closest parallels to a person's idealised L2-speaking self, which suggests that the more positive our disposition towards these L2 speakers, the more attractive our idealised L2 self... it is difficult to imagine that we can have a vivid Ideal L2 Self if the L2 is spoken by a community that we despise.*

(2010, p. 79)

Here Dörnyei's expects learners to admire the L2 community and assumes that learners' idealised L2 is always associated with the native speaker of L2. After all, learners make choices about the languages they want to speak, the extent to which they identify with the host culture, and whether or not they *want* to be viewed as members of a particular culture or class. All these political and ideological decisions are part of becoming someone in a particular context (Ball and Freedman, 2004). Following that, how individuals want to 'become' in the world is the outcome of their ever-changing social interactions and their dialogues with the voices of different individuals. These dialogues are beneficial to a person's growth, 'our ideological development is . . . an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346). Put in simpler terms, 'the role of the other is critical to our development' (Ball and Freedman, 2004, p.6). In her study of dialogic approaches to learner motivation, Harvey (2014) draws on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to define language learner motivation as 'ideological becoming, a process of learning to be in the world' (p. 291). The study emphasises the importance of allowing learners to 'speak as themselves' (Ushioda, 2011, p. 21) so that their identities and motivation are engaged and allowed to develop. Evidently, part of learners' engagement with the other involves direct and indirect confrontations with power relations and structural inequalities, and the way learners interact with and respond to these issues varies. Some will continue to aspire towards the L2 community and others can take a range of different stands that may resist assimilation to the target community without giving up on the aspiration of learning English, or studying abroad to obtain a skill or a degree that may help them climb the socioeconomic ladder. Lamb (2013) refers to these aspirations as 'a fantasy of future happiness' (p. 20) which are seen by Kubota (2011) and Kariya (2010) as imagined mobility. We are reminded by Ferrari's (2013) 'Fiume (River) Model' that adult motivation has various motivational sources and/or tributaries, and there will be times when

the motivational flow is interrupted by rocks, driftwoods, and other obstacles. In essence, these challenges do affect how learners engage with and perceive the target language and its community. This gives rise to understanding learner motivation as socially-constructed through dialogue and interaction with the outside world (Harvey 2014; Ushioda, 2011, 2009). Fundamentally, 'we only learn who we are through the mirror of others, and, in turn, we only understand others by understanding ourselves as Other' (Kramersch, 2009, p. 18).

In addition to learner motivation, desire is a core drive towards what individuals want to achieve in their lives. Underlying learning and travel experiences are desires for self-fulfilment. Motha and Lin (2014) indicate that desire has attracted research attention in the areas of cultural studies, postcolonial studies, feminist studies, philosophy and psychoanalysis, but has been largely undertheorised in TESOL. An earlier attempt at conceptualising desire in the context of language learning comes from Kramersch (2009, p. 14-16) who discusses various possibilities of how desire stimulates learning:

- Learning a language can be attributed to the desire to escape from the constraints of one's current social environment.
- It can be linked with the desire to obtain freedom and economic opportunity.
- It can also be due to the desire to rebel against the hierarchies of family or society.
- Paradoxically, language learning can also occur due to the desire to preserve what learners have, (e.g. accent, grammar) by attempting to give new labels to the things around them while reserving what is theirs. Put in other words, the desire to survive and cling to the familiar.
- Another aspect of desire is the ambition to explore oneself in new encounters with others: real or imagined.
- Seduced by the 'coolness' of the native speaker language, learners can have the desire to enter new worlds, pretend to be someone who is 'cool', 'modern', 'powerful'..

As seen above, desire accommodates a wide spectrum of motivators that include the desire to assimilate to or resist the target language community. What is usually overlooked in the literature is that there will always be individuals who try

to preserve what is theirs by trying not to conform to the norms of the native speaker. Thus, for them, the 'Ideal L2 Self' could be the self that can give new labels to the things around them (Kramsch, 2009) without 'betraying' the traditions of their community.

Parallel to some approaches to learner motivation, Motha and Lin (2014) maintain that desire is co-constructed as a 'constellation of relationships among individuals, institutions, and states' (p. 344). Applying this to the desire to learn English, we need to be conscious of how learners' desires interact with the desires of their communities (including parents), the desire of their institutions (schools, universities, workplaces, etc.), and the desire of the state (Motha and Lin, 2014 on *Desire as Multi-layered*). In other words, individual desires are reflections of their familial and institutional habits (Reay et al., 2005). Therefore, Motha and Lin (2014) conclude by asserting that ethical, responsible education should allow learners to understand the origins of their desires, be they colonial, racist, sexist, etc. in order 'to choose how and what to desire, to make decisions about whether to resist, to be critical in their own ways' (p. 354).

To conclude, there are as many reasons to study abroad as there are individuals who decide to embark on an academic sojourn. Since the current study engages with Arab students in UK HE, it has been necessary to address the wider literature on international student motivation as well as language learner motivation, considering that Arab academic sojourners in the UK are English language learners/users and are also part of the international cohort of students in study abroad contexts. The next section looks at possible interpretations for why many academic sojourners are attracted to study in the UK.

### **3.3.2 Why UK HE**

According to UNESCO statistics, the UK is the second top country for attracting international students after the USA (the Guardian, 2014). The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2014) reported that the number of non-UK domicile students (including EU students) in the UK HE in 2012-13 was 425,265, which is a fall from 435,235 the year before. The highest numbers of these students came from China and India.

There are many reasons to attract academic sojourners to study in UK HE such as speaking English, achieving highly recognised qualifications, receiving high-quality education, and studying at well-known universities (McNamara and Harris, 1997). In addition, most university websites promote their campuses as modern places, equipped with high technology. The word 'diversity' is celebrated on many websites to indicate the presence of students from all over the world. Also for many students, the point that most of UK undergraduate and postgraduate courses are shorter than those in other competitive educational markets is a major advantage.

Despite the enormous market share that the UK HE has, whether or not the UK HE sector will continue to attract international students largely depends on ensuring that student recruitment and migration policies are mutually supportive (Pattern and Trends in the UK HE, 2012). Advising UK universities, Home Secretary Theresa May, asks universities to 'develop sustainable funding models that are not so dependent on international students' (the Guardian, 2015). As seen in 1.3, UK universities and the current UK government do not seem to share the same vision for international student recruitment. The current political discourse focuses on attracting 'genuine' international students who are 'the brightest and the best', yet this seems to be a rather vague discourse that does not explain what makes an international student 'genuine'. See 1.3 above on the migration debate and its effects on how international students are perceived and positioned in the UK.

### **3.3.3 Intercultural communication and socialisation patterns**

Since 'students with an advanced level of proficiency in English according to TOEFL or IELTS measures did not necessarily have well-developed intercultural competence' (Jackson, 2013, p. 183), it is crucial to point out that besides language skills, sojourners need other skills to enable them to communicate effectively. That said, languages in intercultural communication 'are never just neutral' (Phipps and Guilherme, 2004, p.1) because languages are semiotic means of representing and creating cultures (Halliday, 1979; Geertz, 1973). Fay and Spinthourakis-Katsillis (2000, p. 46) explain that when people from different backgrounds communicate, they draw on different 'reservoirs of schemata' while making subconscious and quick interpretations of the meaning of words and

behaviours. These schemata are cultural maps of meanings and are influenced by individuals' languages and cultures. That is to say, the linguacultures of these communicators significantly influence their interaction (Baker, 2011).

'[T]here is not much point in trying to say what culture is... What can be done, however, is to say what culture does', argues Street (1993, p. 25), who maintains that individuals live their lives according to the terms, names, definitions and categories created by their cultures. This can also be extended to include rules, systems and material artefacts, which are part of how people live and make meaning of their lives. Drawing on Street's (1993) understanding of culture as a verb, Byram et al. (2001) emphasise the dynamic nature of culture in an endeavour to challenge the static connotations of given nouns such as 'a culture', 'culture', and 'cultures'. Accordingly, language and culture can be approached as emergent and dynamic and thus English, as a global language, is in constant tension between various contexts: individual, local, regional, and global (Baker, 2011).

Evidently, effective communication with people coming from what we perceive as different cultures is a vital skill in increasingly diversified societies. Many terms were used in the literature to refer to this skill or ability. Byram (1997b) makes a distinction between 'intercultural competence' and 'intercultural communicative competence' by explaining that the latter refers to the ability to communicate with people from different cultures using a second language. He maintains that 'intercultural competence' means that an individual becomes an 'intercultural speaker' who 'crosses frontiers, and who is to some extent a specialist in the transit of cultural property' (Byram and Zarate, 1997, p. 11). On the other hand, Baker (2011) argues that because 'there is no clear "target culture" to which English can be assigned' (p.200) and because English is no longer associated with a particular community, there should be a move from 'intercultural competence' to 'intercultural awareness'. He defines 'intercultural awareness' as: 'a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication' (p. 202). Still, it is unclear how this intercultural awareness model can be utilised in different settings. Another term relevant to

communicating across cultures is 'sociopragmatic competence' defined as 'the ability to use a second language to solve everyday problems and the ability to negotiate sociolinguistic norms of politeness and intimacy' (Benson et al., 2013, p.44).

Irrespective of the terminology, it is apparent that the ability to communicate across cultures becomes more challenging if it also involves using a second language to represent oneself as a capable individual in intercultural encounters. Kramsch's (1998, 1993) distinction between the big C culture of formal, written, or academic situations and the little c culture of native speakers' conversation habits in everyday life is particularly important because learning a foreign language requires engagement with both. Failure to do so has acute implications on individuals' sense of self. Pellegrino Aveni (2005) frames constructs of anxiety and self-esteem around the use of a second language and indicates that when the second language represents a threat to individuals' self-perception and security, feelings of anxiety and reduced senses of one's self are produced. She explains that when individuals' self-presentation is under threat because of one's inability to communicate in the second language, they make decisions as to whether speak or remain silent:

*[L]earners may reduce the amount of L2 they produce in order to protect self-esteem; when self-esteem is not threatened in L2 use, learners may feel at ease to produce more L2 without fear of damaging their sense of status. A conflict arises between learners' intention to communicate in the L2 at any given moment and their desire to maintain their sense of status*

(Pellegrino Aveni, 2005, p. 24)

To avoid embarrassment, individuals employ 'preventive practices' (Goffman, 1959, p. 13) which help them safeguard the impression they want to make or sustain. One manifestation of individuals' preventive practices can be seen through the prism of their socialisation preferences and practices. Fay and Spinthourakis-Katsillis (2000) explain that people have two interactional heads: one reflects the willingness to identify with a group 'involvement face' or 'relational ego' and the other relates to the desire to feel separate from the group 'independence face' or 'separational ego'. Therefore, in study abroad contexts, academic sojourners can have the willingness to be involved with their co-



national group whose expectations they know and possibly share, thereby leading to sense of security. In this case, individuals observe life in the new country with a 'ghetto mentality' (ibid, p. 29). On the other hand, some academic sojourners may choose to isolate themselves from their co-nationals. Commenting on this, Fay and Spinthourakis-Katsillis (2000) indicate that '[a]ll of us are constantly trying to balance our involvement and independence needs: neither is right or wrong but they can pull us in different directions' (p. 31).

With reference to sojourners' socialisation practices, some models were put forward to explain their social networks and friendship patterns. To start with, Bochner's et al. (1977) 'functional model' for friendship patterns suggests that sojourners belong to three social networks: a primary, monocultural network (e.g. co-nationals); a secondary, bicultural network (e.g. host nationals such as academics, fellow students, advisors, etc.); and a third, multicultural network (e.g. companionship for recreational gatherings). The function of the first group is to affirm the culture of origin, the second is usually instrumental for academic and professional aspirations, and the third is recreational. They conclude that co-national bonds are important, and therefore should not be obstructed or regulated against because they could lead to shaping more open social circles. They suggest that universities should identify individuals who can function as links between different cultural networks and this could be a step towards establishing formal social support units. Furnham and Alibhai (1985) replicated and extended Bochner's (1977) study and invited more participants from different countries. Their friendship network data showed a strong preference for co-national friends first. The second preference was for other nationals, and the last was for host nationals. Their 'preferred companion' data revealed that co-nationals came first, then host nationals, and finally other nationals. They maintain that their study matches Bochner's et al. (1977) and supports their 'functional model'.

Furthermore, Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune (2010) studied the relationship between international students' friendship networks and levels of social connectedness, homesickness and satisfaction. Their study indicates that having more individuals from the host country in their friendship networks made their participants more satisfied, more socially connected, and less homesick. Their study reports the following practical implications: (1). international students need

to undergo intercultural and social support training, (2). international students should be placed in integrated housing conditions where they can form intercultural friendship to transcend contact dilemmas and to remove negative stereotypes, and (3) classrooms should be venues for evoking cultural curiosity.

More recently, Coleman (2013) proposes a concentric circles representation of study abroad socialisation patterns. He argues that his model is different from Bochner's et al. (1977) in that he accounts for possible longitudinal changes and is concerned with the dynamic nature of friendship. The inner circle refers to co-nationals, the middle circle refers to other outsiders and the outer circle refers to locals, with an arrow pointing outward. Unlike Bochner's et al. recommendations, he explains that institutional responsibility towards student mobility means taking deliberate actions to 'mix and mingle' to counter student 'ghettoisation' (following Wilkinson, 2012, p. 20). Similar to Coleman's view, the deputy vice-chancellor of University of Sheffield, Paul White, proposes a three-step action plan to prevent the separation between UK students and international students, in response to claims that the university experience of UK students will be weakened if they study with international students who have poor English (The Guardian, 2015). His action plan includes: increasing student intake from other countries, introducing mixed tutorials and seminar groups, and taking all students on campus out of their comfort zones to create opportunities for intercultural friendship. He concludes the article asserting that:

*The "brightest and best" from abroad do not travel thousands of miles to immerse themselves in their home cultures, but instead they are seeking international environments which will make them highly employable in future. The greater task may be to convince some home students that they could also benefit in such environments*

(The Guardian, 2015)

It may be true that academic sojourners aspire to be part of the host community. However, it is equally important to point out that individuals' decisions to be part of or isolated from their co-national group depend on various external factors. In her study of the second language socialisation of Korean students in Canada, Duff (2007) asserts that 'the Korean students' perceptions, goals, and behaviours vis-à-vis their language socialisation were also contingent on how they positioned themselves or were positioned by their interlocutors in their courses and in other

social contexts' (p. 316). Duff's study brings to the fore the role of 'positioning', as a key theoretical construct in human interaction.

Davies and Harré (1990) differentiate between the 'role' and the 'position' of a person by illustrating that while the former carries a rather static, self-contained image of the self, the latter better reflects the dynamic, socially constructed nature of the person's identity. To understand positioning in interaction, Harré and Langenhove demonstrate that:

*Within a conversation each of the participants always positions the other while simultaneously positioning him or herself.... And similarly, when somebody positions somebody else, that always implies a positioning of the person him/herself. In any discursive practice, positioning constitutes the Self and the others in certain ways and at the same time it is a resource through which all persons involved can negotiate new positions.*

(1991, p. 398)

Accordingly, when an interlocutor assumes a certain position for him/herself, s/he is also assigning a position to the other party. This initial position is referred to as 'first order position' and is argued that it is generally of a 'tacit nature'. Harré and Langenhove (1991) assert that interlocutors can conform, negotiate or resist their imposed position, which essentially leads to the formation of a 'second order position'. However, they caution that 'if one tries to impose a second order positioning in a ritual, then the person trying to do so will be said to "break" the ritual' (p. 396). Harré and Langenhove (1991) posit that positioning occurs so that participants build issues of power and parity, and if this aim or any other aim is deliberately put forward in the process of positioning, then it is known as 'strategic positioning' (p.401).

In intercultural communication, there are a number of factors at play. First, Jackson (2008) indicates that language proficiency issues in intercultural settings create issues of power and inequality. In addition to language, the wider political spectrum affects how 'international students' are perceived and thus positioned. For instance, following the discussion from 2.3, it can be argued that international students in the UK are positioned as migrants whose numbers have to be controlled. This reproduces increasingly xenophobic discourses and nurtures practices of othering. An example of this comes from Rich and Troudi's (2006) study of racialisation and othering experienced by Arab, Saudi learners in the UK.

Their study reveals how Islamophobic, xenophobic discourses impose alienation from the British society in order to avoid marginalised and inferiorised positions, and at the same time, they result in a higher level of identity, race, religion, and ethnicity assertion. Another example comes from Smith and Khawaja (2011) who demonstrate that international students from Africa, the Middle East, India and Latin America tend to experience discrimination more than their European counterparts. This can indicate that host communities have different attitudes in relation to sojourners' nationalities or places of origin (Ward, 2001).

Taking these interwoven factors together, international students are vulnerable to aggressive discourses that position them as foreigners and migrants, with poor English. Ultimately, this considerably affects their socialisation practices and preferences in the host community. It goes beyond doubt that individuals seek to look for safer interactions that do not threaten their image or conception of who they are. In other words, individuals are usually engaged with 'facework' which Fay and Spinthourakis-Katsillis (2000) define as 'communication which subtly and often unconsciously seeks to minimise the threats to your own face and the other person's face' (p.90). And part of this involves clinging to the familiar.

Still, the act of 'clinging' to co-nationals is counterproductive despite its importance in offering safe spaces to academic sojourners. It can lead to difficulties in adjusting to the new culture and this can further entrench negative stereotypes of the host country (Kinging, 2009; Jackson, 2008). More, sojourners may return to their countries with a strengthened sense of national identity (Byram, 2008a; Block, 2007). We are also reminded by studies on acculturation and adaptation that sojourners' social ties are contributory factors to their adjustment and adaptation (Young et al., 2013; Russell, Rosenthal and Thomson, 2010; Ward, 2001). Ultimately, sojourners' ghettoisation challenges the idea of cosmopolitan, intercultural citizenship (Jackson, 2011).

### **3.3.4 Identity work in study abroad contexts**

Poststructuralist approaches to identity have gained momentum in different disciplines. In poststructuralist terms, individuals 'perform a repertoire of identities' (Joseph, 2010, p. 14) triggered by multiple social interactions. To clarify this mind-set, Hobsbawm explains that:

*The concept of a single, exclusive, and unchanging ethnic or cultural or other identity is a dangerous piece of brainwashing. Human mental identities are not like shoes of which we can only wear one pair at a time. We are all multi-dimensional beings. Whether a Mr. Patel in London will think of himself primarily as an Indian, a British citizen, a Hindu, a Gujarati-speaker, an ex-colonist from Kenya, a member of a specific caste or kin-group, or in some other capacity depends on whether he faces an immigration officer, a Pakistani, a Sikh, or Moslem [sic]... There is no single platonic essence of Patel. He is all these and more at the same time.*

(1996, p. 87)

In addition, poststructuralist views of identity tend to be 'performative' (following Butler, 1990). Butler differentiates between 'performed' and 'performative' in that the former denotes that an individual is acting a 'role', whereas the latter describes how an individual interacts with multiple settings in a performative manner. Although the term 'performativity' comes from gender discourse, it still has valid overarching connotations to poststructuralist views of identity. Henceforth, poststructuralist approaches to identity can also be described as 'performative'.

On the other hand, humanist conceptions of identity perceive the individual as a fixed-end product (Norton and Toohey, 2002). That is to say, individuals have their own continuous attributes or traits that stay the same despite taking part in different interactions. Some have established a middle ground between humanist and poststructuralist approaches to identity such as Davies and Harré (1990) who posit that 'human beings are characterised both by continuous personal identity and by discontinuous personal diversity'. To these different views of identity Baynham (2015) responds by asking: 'how do we explain or account for those more or less stable aspects of identity that are brought along in interaction, attempting as it were to historicise the nature of identity work, while continuing to treat it as interactively contingent?' (p. 67). Baynham (2015) addresses the question of whether identity is 'brought about' or 'brought along' by using intercultural, migration narratives as a privileged site for identity research. He concludes by asserting that 'I argue that "identity brought along", those relatively stable identity positions, often thought of as essentialised, are in fact sedimented and built up over time through many repeated encounters in which identity is "brought about" performatively' (p.84). Thus, it can be seen that Baynham's argument does not deal with the two views of identity as dichotomous. Rather, he

argues that the repetition of the 'brought about' leads to the formulation of the 'brought along'. Drawing on Baynham's (2015) understanding, it can be argued for example that individuals' religious identities, which are often thought of as 'brought along', are the outcome of being continuously exposed to the rituals and traditions of a given religion, through interactions with the parents and surrounding community.

In their research on second language identity, which is informed by poststructuralist views of identity, Benson et al. (2013) adopt a multifaceted conception of identity that incorporates six different identity facets:

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>Facet 1</b> | Embodied identity: the self as a mobile point of perception located in a particular body.  |
| <b>Facet 2</b> | Reflexive identity: the self's view of the self, incorporating self- concept and attributes and capacities.                                    |
| <b>Facet 3</b> | Projected identity: the self as it is semiotically represented to others in interaction.   |
| <b>Facet 4</b> | Recognised identity: the self as it is preconceived and recognised by others in the course of interaction.                                     |
| <b>Facet 5</b> | Imagined identity: the self's view of its future possibilities.  |
| <b>Facet 6</b> | Identity categories and sources: the self as it is represented (by self or others) using established social categories and semiotic resources. |

**Table 3.2 Benson's et al. (2013, p.19) 'Facets of Identity'**

Although this representation captures various aspects of identity that can feature the dynamic construction and deconstruction of the multiple selves we all have, using this representation in the context of study abroad is rather challenging. Benson et al. (2013) explain that the reflexive identity refers to 'the self's view of the self' (p.20) and this includes individuals' perception of their 2<sup>nd</sup> language ability. They argue that this self is subject to destabilisation by virtue of study abroad because individuals' relocation tests their language capacities in unfamiliar situations and destabilises their views of their capacity. Still, they maintain that individuals' view of their 2<sup>nd</sup> language capacity before, during and after the sojourn falls within a single identity facet. However, I argue that when individuals talk about their 2<sup>nd</sup> language capacity before and during the sojourn, they essentially talk about two different issues i.e. the difference between what is imagined and what is actually lived and experienced. Therefore, both Benson et al.'s 'reflexive' and 'imagined' identity facets need to be modified to cater for the

impact of mobility and relocation on sojourners' identities. Therefore, I propose the following modifications to represent the different facets of sojourners' second language identities in study abroad contexts (e.g. in the UK), while embracing the same understanding of the 'embodied identity' and 'identity categories and sources' facets depicted by Benson et al. (2013):

|  |
|--|
| <p><b>Imagined Identity:</b> sojourners' expectations of themselves before the start of the sojourn, including their initial assessment of their 2<sup>nd</sup> language capacity.</p> <p><b>Reflexive Identity:</b> sojourners' view of themselves and their 2<sup>nd</sup> language capacity in the UK.</p> <p><b>Projected Identity:</b> the impression sojourners try to make when they speak English in the UK.</p> <p><b>Recognised Identity:</b> how sojourners are positioned/received/perceived when they speak English in the UK.</p> <p><b>Ideal Identity:</b> who sojourners want to be by the end of their sojourn and beyond that.</p> |
|--|

**Table 3.3 Proposed modifications to Benson's et al. (2013) 'Facets of Identity'**

My understanding of the term 'imagined' comes from Kanno and Norton's (2003) description of 'imagined communities', whereby language learners imagine being involved with target language distant communities. Part of their imagined identity is their views or assessments of their 2<sup>nd</sup> language capacity. In the modified representation, the 'projected' and 'recognised' facets are used following Benson's et al. (2013) understanding of the terms while foregrounding the impact of L2 use on speaker's identity. I introduced the term 'ideal identity' to refer to what sojourners want to be by the end of their sojourn and beyond that stage, with the understanding that individuals will continue to aspire to better identity options in the future. The term 'ideal' draws on Dörnyei's (2009, 2005) 'L2 Motivational Self System', keeping in mind that the 'ideal self' does not necessarily mean being like a native speaker of English. Therefore, the proposed understanding of the 'imagined' and 'ideal' identity facets refers to two different future points: whereas the 'imagined' identity refers to sojourners' future selves before the actual start of the sojourn, the 'ideal' identity refers to the future selves of sojourners during and after the sojourn. Finally, this proposed modification will be further elaborated in **Finding 3** (section 5.3.2).

To conclude, '[a]ll international students cross the border to become different, whether through learning, through graduating with a degree, through immersion in the linguistic setting, or simply through growing up' (Marginson, 2014, p. 7). While this journey is undertaken for change, it is also a process of change, which affects the core of individuals' being, their identities. The next section will further problematise mobility by looking at current attempts to theorise the sociolinguistics of globalisation in order to answer the question of what happens to individual's linguistic repertoires (mobile resources) when they move across time and space.

### **3.4 Sociolinguistics of globalisation, mobility and mobile resources**

Globalisation, with its unprecedented movement of people, ideas, capital, and cultures across national and international borders, has ushered in new configurations that call for new paradigms for understanding sociolinguistics. As people move across localities, histories, and positions, they encounter dynamic changes of identity, belonging, affiliation, self-perception, and above all else value. By dwelling on the 'human capital' metaphor, individuals' knowledge, skills, linguistic repertoires, social and cultural awareness are all assets that play an integral part in the success of individuals. Movement is a pivotal reference point that renders these assets emergent, reshaped, and revalued via the dynamics of interaction. This understanding appears as the mutual point of departure for both Blommaert (2010) and Canagarajah (2013) who have contributed to theorising a sociolinguistics of globalisation and mobility. Nonetheless, they moved in different directions as they attempt to depict dynamics of interaction: whereas the former perceives interaction as governed by power and inequality regulated by means of sociolinguistic scales and orders of indexicality; the latter identifies interaction as a site of negotiation where communication strategies speak louder than shared norms. This discussion comes with a mediational approach that tries to bridge the gap between the two views in order to emphasise that the sociolinguistics of globalisation is too complex to be perceived in light of singular models.



### **3.4.1 Critical discussion of Blommaert's (2010) theoretical framework**

'And this world- alas! - is messy, complex and rather unpredictable' (p. 27) is the way Blommaert refers to the world we currently live in. He commences by asserting that globalisation, as a notion, is not new, yet its intensity and ongoing spread is what counts as a feature of the world today. He does not draw on the widely used metaphor of 'the global village' because he sees the world as a 'web of villages' whose ties are changeable. It is within this framework that he proposes the need for rethinking of sociolinguistics as a sociolinguistics of 'mobile resources', which encompass local variations, language contact, and the distribution of variations in wider spaces. Such distribution gives rise to intricate issues as to whether local variations have or lack 'semiotic mobility' and whether their speakers have voice across contexts. To this Blommaert responds by maintaining that 'this is a problem not just of difference, but of inequality' (p. 3), and argues that the traditional 'sociolinguistics of distribution', that perceives the movement of language resources as moving across stable spaces in chronological time, does not capture all that is necessary to decipher language in motion. Consequently, he justifies the need for establishing a 'sociolinguistics of mobility' that studies language in motion whereby language patterns are seen as vertically layered 'scales'. We are reminded by Collins, Slembrouck and Baynham (2009) that scales are not just spatial but are also 'a strategy and an outcome of political and social processes' (p. 5) which draw attention to the play of power.

The sociolinguistics of mobility is about actual uses of language resources in real geopolitical, sociocultural, and historical contexts (Hymes, 1996). Such contexts are described by Blommaert as 'a messy new marketplace' (p. 28) in which people 'attribute different values and degree of usefulness' to their investment in language resources. He goes on to criticise Bourdieu's (1991) notion of 'marketplace', which is stratified by temporal or enduring inequality, as being 'local and relatively closed' (p. 28). He argues that unlike Bourdieu's France with provinces speaking 'inferior' varieties, the marketplace of contemporary globalisation has mobile boundaries, mobile resources, and mobile speakers, which, overall, contribute to the messiness of the new marketplace.

An important feature of Blommaert's sociolinguistics is the usage of 'sociolinguistic scales', which are stratified by power and inequality. Blommaert sees people move across spaces filled with norms, expectations, and codes. Therefore, his scale metaphor means that individuals move from local scales to global scales and to other intermediary scales in between. To understand his scales, it is necessary to bear in mind his conception of 'placed resources', how some people's repertoires 'will allow mobility while others will not' (p.23). That is to say, when individuals move from one scale to another (e.g. local to trans-local), the relationship between these scales is indexical as it relies on meaningful communication, which can be captured by maintaining the norms and the expectations of the higher scale (the trans-local). As a result, successful jumping from a scale to another entails 'the capacity to lift momentary instances of interaction to the level of common meanings' (p.33). In this way, Blommaert's scales offer a vertical image of power differentiation and hierarchical ranking. However, it is not to be understood that these scales are mainly spatial. In fact, he asserts that they are much more intricate as they involve bringing time and space together (following Wallerstein's 1998 TimeSpace) within a social context that has its semiotic practices and images of its society.

The act of 'scale jumping' (Uitermark, 2002, p.750), either by virtue of movement from one context to another or during discursive practices, is a power move that indexes social order thereby determining the positioning of the interlocutors. Such a process requires access to discursive resources that invoke higher scale levels. Another similar act is 'up-scaling' whereby the interlocutor lifts the interaction to a higher scale inaccessible to the other. Both acts indicate that scaling is about power and inequality that distribute discursive resources in a way that privileges some and leaves others underprivileged. To this Kell (2011) responds by indicating that 'up-scaling is much more nuanced, and that even those that do not have access to elite linguistic resources can project their meanings horizontally by entextualising and recontextualising them' (p. 610). She illustrates that individuals can go beyond verbal performance and can use writing as a means of scale-jumping, so if oral communication is not effective, writing a text can be a means of regaining voice.

Another feature of Blommaert's sociolinguistics of mobility is 'orders of indexicality', a 'sensitizing concept' (p.38) in the field of semiotics. Following Agha (2003) and Rampton (2003), linguistic and semiotic structures are predictable and structured. Blommaert uses 'register' as an example to feature the 'normativity' of language forms to index certain social roles in discursive practices. Such indexical orders spring from histories of being, e.g. the notion of 'Standard language'. When speakers come from different orders of indexicality, orders from high social structures become valid at any time. That is to say, some forms of semiosis are seen as valuable, others as less valuable, and overall, this is governed by issues of authority and power leading to 'an economy of exchange' (p.38).

Where authority and power come from is constantly evolving. This relates to what Blommaert calls 'polycentricity'. People speak under the influence of a centre, or what Bakhtin (1986) calls a 'super-addressee' and behave with reference to this centre that has an 'evaluative authority'. Such an authority controls how speakers use their language to talk about different themes, and to display different roles in different places. Goffman's (1981) 'shifts of footing', the different positioning of a speaker and the shifting linguistic modes thereof, relates to polycentricity as a key feature of interaction. Once again, this feature is at heart of issues of authority and hierarchical ranking: 'both concepts, "orders of indexicality" and "polycentricity" thus suggest a less innocent world of linguistic, social and cultural variation and diversity, one in which difference is quickly turned into inequality' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 41). Hence, when people move across space, they also move across sociolinguistic scales, orders of indexicality, and new centres, which render their communication less predictable where one's language use can be subject to unexpected inequalities (among other various possibilities).

### **3.4.2 Critical discussion of Canagarajah's (2013) theoretical framework**

Canagarajah (2013) starts by indicating that interaction transcends individual languages to include diverse semiotic resources. Moreover, he argues that the linguistic diversity that characterises the repertoires of most contemporary speakers implies that meaning springs from negotiation practices, not from shared norms. He interprets 'placed resources' as people's ability to appropriate

their repertoires and gain new index meanings as part of their social practice. He further asserts that we are all 'translinguals', as we do not speak a single language in homogeneous contexts. Instead, our semiotic resources are integrated resources that mesh languages and generate new norms. He points at the history of English as a product that comes as a result of meshing 'the mobile resources of the three tribes who migrated to the British Isles' (p. 24).

Canagarajah speaks about postmodern globalisation as the era of mobility and diversity whose social conditions are unprecedented. He makes use of Vertovec's (2007) 'superdiversity' to indicate the overlap between communities in current urban spaces. He sees these spaces as 'contact zones' (following Pratt, 1991) where people shift from focusing on communities to focusing on the interaction of diverse social groups. It is against this background that he counter-argues Blommaert's (2010) 'orders of indexicality', which render the resources of less powerful communities unsuitable for mobility, powerless, and deficient. That is to say, he indicates that Blommaert's treatment overlooks the power of the negotiability of hierarchy, and he depicts interaction between diverse people who are positioned differently in power as generative, with voice and resistance for the less powerful.

Canagarajah describes translingual communication as unpredictable. Unlike Blommaert who focuses on the mobility of high scale semiotic resources, Canagarajah asserts that translinguals defy stability, construct meanings, and reach agreements through negotiation, not norms. They use strategies like the 'let-it pass' strategy (Firth, 1996) to allow the flow of the conversation and the possibility to get more clues to resolve any unintelligibility. They can violate grammatical norms, rely on other ecological resources, and negotiate power to satisfy all parties. Thus, he sees diversity as the norm and sharedness as an exception which is not always guaranteed.

To elaborate on his idea of negotiation strategies, he offers four macro-level strategies, which contain other specific strategies. The four strategies are *envoicing*, *recontextualisation*, *interactional strategies*, and *entextualisation*. They correspond to the personal, contextual, social, and textual dimensions. *Envoicing* is related to identity representation that highlights one's identity and voice. Canagarajah argues that in many 'negotiation of meaning' studies,

scholars have overlooked this dimension by foregrounding meaning and information transfer. *Recontextualisation* is related to how interlocutors frame their talk in a way that brings suitable footing for negotiation. However, he explains that in translingual practices, it is difficult to decide on whose frames and which footing apply, but he seems optimistic that these are negotiable to achieve intelligibility. Still, it is worth remembering that being intelligible does not necessarily make one's linguistic repertoires more valuable. *Interactional strategies* signal the social dimension which is based on reciprocity, not sharedness. Although this dimension is studied in the 'negotiation for meaning' studies, he adopts a rather holistic approach that looks at rhetorical and social meanings together. Interlocutors might not employ the same strategies, still they bring to the table strategies that complement or resist the existing strategies in order to negotiate meaning or to achieve rhetorical and social objectives. *Entextualisation* looks at how codes are used in the spatial and temporal dimensions of language production, be it written or spoken. It depicts how writers/speakers monitor their linguistic products to satisfy their purposes and intentions. This is a performative task that helps translinguals accomplish many functions.

Canagarajah complicates the notion of 'geopolitical contexts' within the framework of moving linguistic resources across translocal spaces. He argues that most scholars perceive context as bounded, static, and homogenous, where a particular English variety is spoken. Thus, he starts discussing 'translocal spaces' by indicating that geopolitical contexts are dynamic and that English travels across changing contexts with competing norms. Even though he appreciates Blommaert's use of sociolinguistic scales to reflect the inextricable relationship between time, space, and society, he states that 'Blommaert's notion of scales doesn't leave room for agency and maneuver' (p156). Thus, he calls for more appreciation for people's ability to negotiate and reconstruct language norms. In addition, he refers to Blommaert's scales as 'static and rigid' because they imply that when non-native speakers of English move across geopolitical contexts, their roles and statuses are predetermined, unlike those who speak more prestigious varieties which enable them to jump scales.

Furthermore, he insists that Blommaert's scales have two main problems: (a) they are normative and are not subject to renegotiation or resistance, and (b) they are impersonal because scales are predefined: '[r]ather than scales shaping people, we have to consider how people invoke scales for their communicative and social objectives' (p.158). Canagarajah is not alone in his dynamic perception of scales. In fact, he quotes both Uitermark (2002) and Swyngedouw (1997) who perceive scales as a process rather than an ontological entity. Eventually, he calls for *rescaling* to renegotiate codes and uses examples from his participants to show how they creatively managed to redefine norms: 'we have to be open to the possibility of policy changes in the context of ongoing rescaling in everyday talk and texts in globalisation and migration' (p.159).

### **3.4.3 A call for less certainty**

So is it Blommaert's (2010) emphasis on inequality or Canagarajah's (2013) emphasis on negotiation and agency that best describes the sociolinguistics of mobility in the globalised world? Or is it even possible to propose a one-size-fits-all approach? In a recent publication, Blommaert (2014, p. 4) introduces the move from 'mobility to complexity', which he describes as 'a move still very much in its initial stages'. In order to develop complexity in sociolinguistic theory and method, he proposes that new metaphors and images need to be used to capture the complexity of what is observed. Therefore, he dwells on chaos or complexity theory as a source of such metaphors. It is by means of embracing complexity that a clearer, more dynamic understanding of what happens to the value of individuals' linguistic capital by virtue of mobility can be captured. Still, it is important to acknowledge the inevitable momentary nature of such an understanding because 'by the time we have finished our description, the system will have changed' (Blommaert, 2014, p. 10).

Therefore, there is no doubt that speaking about sociolinguistics of mobility means speaking about idiosyncratic individual trajectories, which vary depending on many factors including: social contexts, linguistic repertoires, language proficiency, and interlocutors' sociolinguistic awareness. The same individual can be placed in different situations: 1. a situation when negotiation strategies are sufficient to achieve a successful interaction and 2. a situation when the other party is not willing to negotiate either meaning or positioning, leading to a possible

communication breakdown or to unfavourable positionings provoking issues of social inequality and institutional power. However, there are also many messy and complex situations in between. Such an understanding leaves us with less certainty and fewer generalisations which are common in our contemporary world. A more detailed discussion is presented in 6.3.

### **3.5 Internationalisation in UK Higher Education**

Internationalisation has become a key strategic goal for many universities in different parts of the world (Taylor, 2010). In fact, it is rare to find a university website that does not include words such as international or global integration (Rhoads and Szelenyi, 2011). In the UK, internationalisation is firmly placed on the education agenda (De Vita and Case, 2003). However, internationalisation is still hard to define, and it has various interpretations such as: internationalising curricula, recruiting international staff and students, competing for a higher international ranking, promoting global citizenship and diversity, using American educational models (Piller and Cho, 2013), and using English as medium of instruction.

One of the most powerful discourses of internationalisation is the marketisation of universities, whereby certificates are packaged and sold by universities acting as enterprises. Whereas universities traditionally were the 'pinnacle of learning' (Osman, 2008) where scholars were produced, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a tremendous shift in the role of universities which moved from managing society to serving the industry and producing employable individuals (Jarvis, 2001). Two main factors contributed to this shift: the rise of knowledge economy and human capital (Keeley, 2007) and decreased government funding for universities (Osman, 2008). In response to these dramatic changes, universities compete to offer outreach activities to enhance their brand in the educational marketplace (Moore, 2004). And the ultimate goal for universities in the UK (like many American and Australian universities before them) is to use international students as a revenue source in climates of budgetary strains (De Vita and Case, 2003).

The marketisation discourse in higher education has produced various manifestations including: disembodied student narratives, a commercial model of

student-teacher relationship, misleading expectations, and an increasing divide between ethical and commercial education. To start with, Sidhu and Dall'Alba (2012) argue that positioning international students as rational, choice-exercising customers frees institutions from their responsibilities to foster knowledge and ethics of care, views international education as 'a series of disembodied flows' (p. 414), and ignores the body and embodiment which leads to overlooking individuals' situated experiences for the sake of imposing 'one-size-fits-all educational prescriptions' (p. 415). In order to attract what Sidhu and Dall'Alba (2012) call 'disembodied flows', marketing activities emphasise the international, intercultural flavours of the offered courses as a major selling point (Fallon and Brown, 1999). Commenting on this, De Vita and Case argue that:

*Intercultural learning is not just a topic to be talked about (thinking and knowing), it is also about caring, acting and connecting... It entails the discovery and transcendence of difference through authentic experiences of cross-cultural interaction that involve real tasks, and emotional as well as intellectual participation.*

(2003, p. 388)

Furthermore, the student-as-customer paradigm has resulted in a new model of student-teacher relationship. This consumerist orientation, embedded in student satisfaction surveys and other module surveys, places students at the centre because they see their degrees as a purchased product (Bailey, 2000). Ultimately, this leads to a new student-teacher relationship which significantly deviates from traditional models of student-teacher relationship, where teachers are assigned moral and spiritual roles. The commercial model of student-teacher relationship can be uncomfortable for both teachers and students, and is incommensurate with various religious and cultural learning paradigms. For instance, educators in Islam are perceived as the 'inheritors of the prophets' (Hadeeth).

What is more, branding is based on particular promises of particular experiences (Moore, 2004). Harris (1997) explains that with increasing economic pressures on some universities, tensions arise between 'promoting themselves attractively and giving honest information to prospective students' (p.38). He gives an example from university brochures where the sun always shines and thus it becomes hard to ask potential students to bring thick coats and umbrellas, let alone preventing feelings of disappointment which may affect students upon



arrival in the UK. Another common example is using the word 'diversity' which can be used to attract students who are keen to learn in intercultural environments, just to find themselves surrounded by a large group of co-nationals taking the same course. We are reminded by Furnham (1997) that accurate sojourner expectations lead to more successful adaptation journeys.

'[U]niversities are not intended to be profit-driven commercial enterprises and should not be allowed to turn into certificate factories with financial self-sufficiency as a condition for existence', assert De Vita and Case (2003, p. 387). However, contemporary global conditions and financial pressures push higher education institutions towards unethical interpretations of internationalisation (Khoo, 2011). These interpretations revolve around international student recruitment and assume that the mere presence of international students and staff will evidently create an international flavour (Kelly, 2000). To this end, De Vita and Case (2003) call for a flexible, culturally inclusive education and provide an example of how assessment in UK universities needs to employ different techniques other than examinations, which usually disadvantage international students. In addition, they suggest the need for innovatory and culturally inclusive pedagogy in UK HE, while acknowledging the bureaucratic control mechanisms and the staff profile problem which lies in the fact that most academic staff in the UK are mainly white, middle class, UK born lecturers.

Finally, if the numbers of international students in UK HE are controlled by government anti-immigration policies and if conditions of recruiting international staff are becoming tougher every day, how does UK HE define its internationalisation agenda? This discussion has highlighted the debate around internationalisation in higher education and has shown that the term is currently used with no clear definition or vision, which is a key prerequisite before a realistic, detailed agenda can be put in place.

### **3.6 Summary**

This chapter has engaged with a plethora of theoretical constructs and discussions at play when exploring the sociolinguistic trajectories of academic sojourners in the UK. It has shown how English, as a (post)colonial legacy which has also become a valued commodity, continues to be part of the aspirations and

desires of many individuals. The discussion extended to address the role of ELT textbooks and language proficiency tests in perpetuating certain conceptualisations and perceptions of what English is and how it is used in English-speaking countries. These simplistic, unrealistic representations contribute to creating a divide between learning and using English. Essentially, this divide becomes more substantial if individuals move from EFL/ESL contexts to study in an ENL context such as the UK. The third section has addressed the motives and encounters of study abroad and raised issues in sojourners' socialisation practices as well as aspects of identity work in study abroad contexts. The fourth section has offered a detailed critical discussion of two major approaches to language use in a globalised world, and argued for the need for less certainty when trying to propose a descriptive model of the sociolinguistics of globalisation. The last section problematises the notion of internationalisation in UK HE within the discourse of marketisation and ethical education.

### **3.7 Introducing the research questions**

As articulated above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the sociolinguistic trajectories of Arab academic sojourners in the UK. Informed by the guiding literature presented in **Chapter 3** and within the understanding of the study's context as addressed in **Chapter 2**, the following main research question is proposed:

***Does Arab academic sojourners' relationship with English change after moving from their Arabic contexts to study in the UK HE? And if so, how?***

In order to address this question, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

1. How do Arab academic sojourners value their investment in English on arrival in the UK and over a period of eight months?
2. What is the impact of mobility and sociocultural heterogeneity on sojourners' conceptualisation of English?
3. How do sojourners' sociolinguistic encounters affect their social and friendship networks in the UK?
4. To what extent are sojourners' journeys to the UK driven by instrumental purposes?

The next chapter presents the methodological decisions and procedures, in the quest for answering the above questions.

## Chapter 4: Methodology and research design

### Introduction

Having introduced the genesis of the study and placed its focus in relation to the existing guiding literature as presented in **Chapters 1, 2 and 3**, this chapter traces the development of the research design and discusses the methodological considerations and justifications that have led to the formulation of the empirical part of this study. As articulated in **Chapter 1**, the main aim of the study is to investigate the sociolinguistic trajectories of Arab academic sojourners in the UK through attending to their voices, experiences and reflections. It is hoped that this inquiry can develop deeper understandings of the impact of mobility on language learners' conceptualisations of themselves, their aspirations, their English and their sociocultural encounters. These understandings entail but are not restricted to:

- Academic sojourners' reflections on their 'English on the go' and how different situations and thereby repertoires trigger different conceptualisations of what language is and how one can be perceived/received.
- The implications of academic sojourners' reflections on their sociocultural encounters, and on how they perceive themselves in relation to others.
- Insights into how academic sojourners can be prepared for the nuances of interacting in a different language and a new culture, and how their sociolinguistic trajectories in the UK can be theoretically interpreted.

In order not to reduce my doctoral thesis to a choice about methods, which is what Morgan and Smircich (1980) caution against, this chapter first identifies my meta-theoretical assumptions and problematises some practical consequences associated with such assumptions. Next, I discuss the choice of using a qualitative, longitudinal approach conducted through initial pair interviews followed by five waves of in-depth individual interviews while problematising the task of situating my study in a research tradition. The following section looks at my role as a researcher who is also a 'passionate participant' (Guba and Lincoln, 2000, p. 166). After that, I briefly report on the pilot study and how it informed subsequent methodological decisions. The rest of the chapter provides details of

how the study was operationalised: participant recruitment, introducing the participants, notes on my relationship with the research participants, fieldwork plans and rearrangements, data analysis process, and ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter concludes with notes on trustworthiness issues. Together, this detailed chapter aims to provide an 'audit trail' (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 319) to chronicle the evolution of the research design and to document methodological choices and decisions, as a way of providing 'transparency of method' (Merriam and Associates, 2002, p. 21).

Where possible, the sections open with a theoretical discussion followed by a procedural description of how the study was operationalised in light of the justifications offered by the preceding discussion(s). This strategy goes in line with Stelma, Fay and Zhou's (2013) notion of 'intentionality'. That is to say, where possible I purposefully attempt to foreground the theoretical underpinnings of my procedural decisions and I try to be explicit about my intentional actions. In line with Stelma and colleagues' (2013) views of intentionality, the level of overtly articulated intentionality fluctuates throughout this chapter and this mainly depends on whether or not I tried to tread off the beaten tracks. For instance, I exhibit overt intentionality practices when I talk about deciding to conduct the study multilingually: 'when a research text grapples with comparatively novel research events or practices, such as are involved when researching multilingually, there may be more of a "necessity" to overtly articulate intentionality' (ibid, p. 311). In addition, this academic inquiry can be seen in light of an extended 'casual history of reasons' explanation (Malle, 2001 cited in Stelma et al., 2013) in that it initially sprung from my own personal, professional and academic interest in academic sojourners' trajectories in the UK, as articulated in 1.4. Taking these factors into consideration, this chapter exhibits constant shifts in voice and style as it incorporates the theoretical, the procedural, and the intentional of how the study was operationalised.

#### **4.1 Meta-theoretical assumptions: Epistemological beliefs and practical challenges**

Based on Morgan and Smircich's (1980) argument, researchers need to identify their assumptions about social reality, what it means to exist in the world (ontology) and what the nature and purpose of knowledge are (epistemology),

before determining the appropriate methods for their inquiry. According to Cunliffe (2011), there are three knowledge problematics in social research: objectivism, subjectivism, and intersubjectivism. While the objectivism problematic views reality as an independent entity or phenomenon, the subjectivism and intersubjectivism problematics challenge absolutism in favour of pluralism and perceive knowledge and meaning as embedded in particular contexts. However, what differentiates the intersubjectivism problematic is the 'we-ness, our complexly interwoven, actively responsive relationships which are neither fully within nor outside our control as researcher' (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 658). In other words, in the intersubjectivism problematic, the researcher tends to be an active participant who, like the rest of the participants, shares opinions, narratives and views that contribute to the co-construction of meaning. Therefore, the role of the researcher in the interactional event determines the blurry boundaries between the two knowledge problematics: subjectivism and intersubjectivism.

The current study comes from a subjectivism problematic where the emphasis is on truths and meanings relative to factors such as the time, the place, the situation, and the circumstances in which they were constructed. Therefore, my role was to ask the research participants about their experiences of time, place, and progress in various discourses: 'recursive, ruptured, or hegemonic' (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 656). This implies that knowledge is not durable, nor generalisable or predictive. Instead, it offers contextualised understandings. Nevertheless, it is necessary to differentiate between some orientations to social constructivism research which subsume a subjectivism problematic. Cunliffe (2011, 2008) clarifies that towards the right of the subjectivism problematic come discourse-based researchers who view social reality as socially constructed, still 'objectified' in situated linguistic practices. Thus, they embrace an 'ontologically subjective and epistemologically objective' position (Cunliffe, 2011 following Searle, 1995). On the other hand, towards the left of the subjectivism problematic come interpretive approaches to social constructionism where the focus is on multiple realities and interpretations. Therefore, she (2011, 2008) draws a distinction between social constructivism and social constructionism: the former refers to discourse-based research whereas the latter incorporates various orientations, one of which is the subjective approach to reality.

The current study aligns with Cunliffe's (2008, p. 127) description of the subjective orientation to social constructionism where 'reality is negotiated by individuals within social settings, each of whom has their own perception, meanings and ways of making sense within a broader social context'. In other words, my inquiry attempts to investigate how the research participants make sense of their life in the UK, the languages they use, and how they talk about their experiences in order to negotiate 'some sort of collective meaning' (ibid).

Having identified the guiding meta-theoretical assumptions of the study, I have been faced with some practical challenges that arose as a result of trying to deal with research data as interactional, co-constructed events. In other words, it has proven difficult to look at plentiful verbatim transcripts and 'thick description' (Denzin, 2001) while strictly abiding by the manifestations of the subjectivism problematic. One of the main challenging issues was how to thematically analyse interview scripts while keeping the context in mind and without coding and categorising interview transcripts, which fundamentally entails decontextualizing utterances and the risk of objectifying participant experiences. As will be explained in 4.6.1, the number and length of research interviews as well as the time and word count restrictions call for the use of analytical tools to help the process of data analysis. To this end, Nvivo10 was used to categorise the data into codes, which, at a later stage, developed into main themes (see 4.8 on Data Analysis). That said, it is crucial to acknowledge that coding interviews through Nvivo10 involves elements of temporarily decontextualising the utterances and objectifying responses by grouping similar meanings under a particular code heading without paying a close attention to the circumstances under which they were produced. Such a practical challenge has temporarily inhibited the ability to 'walk the talk' during data analysis, i.e. the ability stick to the principles of my meta-theoretical assumptions throughout the study (Cunliffe, 2011; Morgan and Smircich, 1980). As a compromise, the analysis process (as featured in 4.8) has continued to be an ongoing iterative cycle that did not end once the coding was completed. Instead, the coding was just the beginning of a long process of immersing myself in the data by (re)listening to the interviews, re-reading the transcripts, and re-visiting the translated transcripts. Therefore, it can be said that while the early stages of the data analysis involved aspects of segmenting data in order to gain deeper insights into individual and group perspectives, the later

stages involved going back to the data and *reuniting* utterances with their contexts. A detailed account of the data analysis procedures is presented in 4.8. This practical concern has been foregrounded here in order to problematise the practicalities associated with my meta-theoretical assumptions and epistemological beliefs.

## **4.2 Situating the study in a research paradigm**

### **4.2.1 Rationale of qualitative approach**

Because ‘the one-shot commando raid as a way to get the data and get out no longer seems attractive’ (Eisner, 2001, p.137), a longitudinal qualitative approach was chosen for this inquiry as a means of getting a first-hand sense of how academic sojourners talk about their sociolinguistic experiences of life in the UK. This is not an easy route as it entails ‘a person-centred enterprise’ (Richards, 2003, p. 9) which is truly complex and it also has the potential to transform the researcher as will be noted in 4.3.

Nevertheless, conducting a qualitative inquiry does not mean avoiding quantifications while describing research findings. Hammersley (1992, p. 163) explains that decisions pertinent to levels of precision should be made based on what is being described and ‘not on ideological commitment to one methodological paradigm or another’. Based on this view, the analysis and discussion chapters, **Chapters 5 and 6**, feature the usage of words such as ‘many’, ‘all but one’, ‘only one’, ‘four participants’, etc. in contexts where a precise description is necessary. That said, the boundaries between when a precise description is required and when is not are blurred. Accordingly, it is crucial to explain that qualitative social research is a rigorous and amorphous inquiry that cannot adequately be situated in a particular research paradigm.

### **4.2.2 Locating the study in a research tradition**

More than two decades ago, Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to the complexity of defining different qualitative strands by saying, ‘the mind boggles in trying to get from one to another’ (p. 5). Yet, the situation has not changed since then. In fact, the increasing complexity of social research in contemporary communities contributed to making the task of working within a singular, bounded

research tradition rather challenging. In addition, different researchers and practitioners develop different meanings and practices of different qualitative strands. As a result, in trying to choose a particular research tradition for the current inquiry, I was faced with the dilemma of choosing between three possible research traditions: ethnography, narrative inquiry, and case study.

First, whereas the current study involves a longitudinal dimension of eight months that yielded rich, in-depth interviews which explored sociolinguistic vignettes in the lives of the research participants who had come from a particular, though diverse and pluralistic, linguistic, cultural and religious background, it does not entail detailed field notes nor participant observations. Therefore, it does not meet the orthodox definition of ethnography as a 'detailed, first-hand, long-term, participant observation fieldwork written up as a monograph about a particular people' (Macdonald, 2001, p. 60 following Malinowski, 1922). Nor does it meet the requirements of 'linguistic ethnography' in that the study does not look closely at language use and mechanisms of social productions (Rampton et al., 2004). This means that whilst the study was informed by ethnographic approaches such as longitudinal, in-depth interviews, it cannot be labelled as 'ethnography' or 'linguistic ethnography'.

Second, using the 'narrative' label has also been problematic because the term has been used differently. Labov's (1972) classic narrative structure perceives narratives as detached, self-contained units whose context was overlooked. This model was challenged by Schegloff's (1997) approach that deals with narrative as 'talk-in-interaction'. Although this view embraces the social context of narratives, Georgakopoulou (2007) calls for a middle ground that exceeds Labov's objectivism and Schegloff's intersubjectivity. As a result, she embraces the conception of narrative as social practice that captures the evolving responses in social discourse which essentially means including stories that considerably deviate from the Labovian model. She refers to these stories as 'small stories' (following Bamberg 2004). This marks a departure from dealing with narratives as a fixed structural genre in order to emphasise the dynamic and evolving nature of narrative structures. This approach caters for the incompleteness or smallness of narratives and takes these into consideration



during the process of analysis, allowing researchers to tap into contextualisation processes.

Georgakopoulou (2007) concludes her *Small Stories, Interaction, and Identities* by pinpointing that small stories enrich research data in two ways. First, they allow researchers to delve into what would be normally ignored because it is not seen as a story thus is perceived as 'an analytic nuisance'. Second, including small stories forces the analyst to stay alert and to deal with transcribed interviews as 'interactional data'. She asserts that failing to attend to short stories could mean that what researchers present as 'big stories' can actually be a series of small stories which are heavily co-constructed but are presented in a way that does not capture the interactional co-construction of narratives. Finally, she calls for further research in this new turn that better describes 'the messier business of living and telling' (p.154).

Moreover, Baynham (2011) contributes to the development of this narrative turn by introducing different types of 'non-canonical' research interview narratives. He indicates that interviews are dynamically co-constructed genres of speech. He further identifies five types of narratives: personal narratives, generic/iterative narratives (depicting what happens repeatedly), hypothetical or future narrative, narrative-as-exemplum (featuring an example to illustrate a point) and negated narratives (the story of what did not happen).

Thus far, it seems apparent that there is no unanimous agreement on what counts as narrative and what does not. Researchers who follow Labov's conventional narrative structure can argue that Hymes' (1996) commonly quoted 'fleeting moments of narrative orientations' are not fully-fledged stories and therefore can be reluctant to label them as 'narratives'. On the other hand, researchers who recognise and embrace the notion of 'small stories' are willing to use the 'narrative' label with confidence, despite the fact that there is no compelling model of structure that can be used to analyse elements of all small stories. Another challenge is that there is no clear-cut borderline between small stories and expositions that refer to biographical experiences, and this makes the label 'narrative' more problematic, as different researchers/readers can view data extracts differently. With this challenge in mind, viewing my interview transcripts through the different narrative lenses has shown that the dataset features various

forms of responses that range from biographical expositions, small stories, wider co-constructed narrative frames across a number of interviews, as well as other grey areas of expositions mixed with fleeting moments of narrativity (following Hymes, 1996).

The following two extracts offer a closer look at the type of data that was generated during one of the individual interviews. The participant is Amjad, a 23-year-old Palestinian student on an MA Human Resource Management Programme. Extracts are taken from the first individual interview with Amjad and are all translated from Arabic, the language of the interview, into English:

**Extract 1:**

1. K: Ok. Let's start with the first topic 'Your English in the UK', to what
2. extent are you satisfied with your current level of English?
3. AM: During the first two weeks of my arrival, I was scared. I was not
4. satisfied with my level. I came here with the idea that I trust my language
5. but during the first two weeks, when I went to supermarkets, I started to
6. feel that I am not at the level I expected. After these two weeks, I
7. improved and 'entered the mood'<sup>3</sup>.
8. K: How? What changed?
9. AM: My listening improved. Practically my speaking didn't change but I
10. became more courageous and confident, and my listening improved for
11. sure.

Lines 3,4,5,6, 7 tell a small story of a past event. The sentences describe how Amjad's feelings had changed during the first two weeks of his stay in the UK and the period following that. The first few sentences can be seen as a personal narrative '*during the first two weeks of my arrival, I was scared. I was not satisfied with my level. I came here with the idea that I trust my language*'. The following sentences reveal a generic narrative that describes the repeated feeling Amjad had every time he went shopping during *that* period: '*but during the first two weeks, when I went to supermarkets, I started to feel that I am not at the level I expected for myself*'. Then Amjad goes back to a personal narrative of a plotline of a single event '*after these two weeks, I improved*' and evaluation '*and entered the mood*' (following Georgakopoulou, 2007).

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<sup>3</sup> This is a literal translation of 'دخلت في المود' which means I started to cope and feel better.

His next response, however, can be seen as an exposition rather than a small story. Still both responses constitute a larger co-constructed narrative frame that can be traced in this interview and in subsequent interviews:

First two weeks → after these two weeks → the interview day

I was scared → I 'entered the mood' → my listening improved for sure

**Extract 2**

1. K: Have you had any embarrassing situations because of English?
2. AM: Little things in our group. In the discussion seminar I don't understand
3. everything and they agree on certain things. There are lots of things that I
4. didn't understand but at the end I feel that every day makes a difference for
5. me in terms of improving my English.
6. K: Do you feel frustrated when you don't understand everything or do you
7. consider this as normal?
8. AM: No. Of course I remain worried and I feel weak and that I lack something
9. but what is reassuring is that I feel that I am improving day by day.

Lines 2 to 5 display a generic narrative of a repeated action that Amjad encountered during his seminars, and lines 8, 9 offer an evaluation of this generic situation. As seen from the extract, this evaluation is triggered by my question in lines 6, 7.

These extracts have been presented here to feature types of small stories and expositions in my data. As explained earlier, many of these expositions lie in a grey area between narratives and expositions, and my role as an interviewer was prominent in eliciting and co-constructing these accounts. What is noteworthy here is the importance of looking beyond statements and structures to see the wider narrative frame that stretches over a longer period. This does not mean overlooking small stories because I do not want to fall in the trap of neglecting the interactional co-construction of small narratives. However, what I would like to emphasise is that even if individual statements are not rich in narrativity, they still contribute to building up a narrative timeline (through small stories and expositions) that traces the biographical accounts of every participant involved in this study. Since the dataset is analysed thematically (see 4.8) to allow the emergence of group and individual perspectives, exploring types of narratives in the dataset has been restricted to this discussion.

After grappling with the labels 'ethnography' and 'narrative inquiry', the decision through this process of identifying a research tradition was to embrace the case study tradition for several reasons. First and for most, while the current qualitative inquiry features some ethnographic and narrative elements, it does not meet all the requirements that can make it eligible for either terms. Second, the contradictions among the case study practitioners and on whether it is a method (Yin, 2014), a research tradition (Creswell, 2007; Richards, 2003), a strategy of inquiry (Flyvbjerg, 2011) a methodology (Merriam, 1988), or an object of study (Stake, 1995) leave some room for flexibility. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), a case study researcher 'explores the bounded system (or bounded systems) over time through in-depth data collection methods' (p. 31) and the thematic analysis of the case or cases seeks to provide a rich description of what is studied. Although the current study meets these criteria, it deviates from the 'typical' analytic strategy which involves a detailed description of each case (within-case analysis) followed by a thematic analysis across the cases (cross-case analysis), as will be further explained and justified in 4.8.

Having identified my research tradition as a 'case study', I now need to acknowledge two points that need further clarification. First, there are issues of apparent overlap between an ethnography, a case study, and a narrative inquiry. To this end, Creswell (1998, p. 66) clarifies that an ethnography focuses on an entire cultural or social system whereas a case study explores a wider range of topics, one of which might touch upon cultural or social behaviour. Similarly, narratives can emerge in participants' responses regardless of whether the study comes from an ethnography or a case study tradition. Second, the issue of 'how many' cases in a multiple case study should be used needs to be further discussed. While there is no clear-cut answer to this question, Creswell (1998) cautions against using more than four cases and asserts that 'the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case' (p. 63). However, this multiple case study has invited eight participants (see 4.5.2) in order to offer more compelling evidence (Yin, 2014). Essentially, this choice influenced other subsequent decisions during the data analysis process as explained in 4.8 below.

Finally, the case study tradition carries many advantages to this research. Duff (2008, p.21) characterises it as the 'most widely used approach to qualitative research in education'. One of the most commonly discussed advantages of case studies is the level of depth, richness, and completeness gained through exploring a 'bounded system' or 'multiple cases' (Yin, 2014; Duff, 2008; Dörnyei, 2007). In addition, Yin's (2004, p.205) observation that a 'case study is often the unfolding of events over time' offers a justified option for using case studies in longitudinal studies.

### **4.2.3 Longitudinal perspective**

Using a longitudinal perspective in qualitative research offers a dynamic approach to social research through which time is rethought and is regarded as a method which provides a lynchpin for understanding lived experiences (Neale, 2015). It features the move from snap-shots to moving pictures and movies of different genres, and reinforces the lesson learned from *The Odyssey* that the journey (why it is undertaken and what its nature is) is as important as the final destination (Neale, 2015). In addition, the nature and focus of this study favoured the use of a longitudinal perspective. Blommaert's (2014) emphasis on complexity in sociolinguistic research included a call for a methodology that focuses on change in order to gain deeper insights into sociolinguistic environments. That said, when I had planned to conduct this longitudinal study, my focus was not necessarily on change because it might not happen. What is more, Kinginger (2013) and Coleman (2013) note that more longitudinal studies need to be added to study abroad literature if more holistic understandings are sought. In addition, Zhou and Todman (2009) identify two strands of longitudinal investigations of student sojourners: predictive and monitoring studies. Whereas the former focuses on pre-departure variables and how they impact post-arrival adaptation, the latter focuses on changing patterns. It can be said this study encompasses elements of both longitudinal strands in order to develop a holistic understanding of the sociolinguistic trajectories of academic sojourners in the UK.

It is within these lines that the study was conducted longitudinally through in-depth interviews to trace the unfolding of participants' experiences and reflections over a period of eight months. Since four of the research participants are Master's students, it was difficult to extend the study over a longer period. As presented in

4.6, the study period ended by the end of the academic year of 2014 and all participants were either busy working on their final assignments or getting ready to go back to their countries to spend the holiday with their families, which in practical terms meant the end of the fieldwork.

### **4.3 Notes on the role of the ‘passionate participant’**

Because ‘the human factor is both the greatest strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis’ (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p. 178), it is important to acknowledge the subjective nature of the processes of data generation and data analysis as well as the influence of the researcher in making the study value-bound and thereby leading to positioned statements. In a similar vein, Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 166) refer to the social constructionist researcher as a ‘passionate participant’ who facilitates the ‘multivoice reconstruction’. This ultimately leads to the emergence of emic/insider (the views of the participants) and etic/outsider (the researchers’ views which are shaped by their educational, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds) perspectives (Madden, 2010). Although these terms are borrowed from ethnographic approaches to understanding human behaviour, they are still relevant to this study, which comes from a subjectivism problematic, as articulated in 4.1.

Another important point to address here is that qualitative inquiry has a ‘transformative potential for the researcher’ (Richards, 2003, p. 9). This personal dimension of being engaged with the lived world and the research participants has had a profound effect upon me as a researcher, or I shall say as ‘a passionate participant’ (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p. 166). This inquiry has offered me the ability to interpret my own academic sojourn in the UK theoretically. As a result, I am now more conscious of mechanisms of being othered on the basis on my gender, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or all of them together. I am more aware of the various labels that are attached to me such as female, Palestinian, Arab, non-native speaker of English, international student, foreigner, and Muslim. And at several points I had to attest to this power that made me feel helpless. Such a theoretical interpretation of my own trajectories in the UK is not necessarily a skill that can be comfortably acquired, as it entails a painful confrontation with the stratified world in which we live (Canagarajah, 2002).

However, the same labels that have rendered me a 'foreigner' in the UK are the ones that allowed me access to my research participants. This could be seen as an extension to the 'negotiating rates of exchange' metaphor which also applies to my social capital as a researcher. First and for most, sharing the 'generic' Arabic and Islamic culture with the participants created a sense of mutual trust, cooperation, and understanding. As a result, the participants did not feel that they were talking to a 'foreign' researcher who was 'spying on' their UK experiences.

Second, being a Palestinian was another factor that brought me closer to my participants. Since all participants were sympathetic to the Palestinian cause (two of them were actually Palestinians), they were willing to help me. When I introduced myself as a Palestinian researcher during the early participant recruitment stage, the first reaction, rather ice-breaker, was 'how is your family coping in Gaza?' This contributed to a sense of commitment that was sustained during the entire study period.

Moreover, my gender, age, and marital status played an important role in recruiting male and female Arab participants. As a female, married, Arab researcher, I was aware of the value of my social capital that made me access other female Arab participants, who can be seen as difficult-to-recruit participants. On the other hand, recruiting male Arab participants was trickier, as I had to foreground my age, academic and marital status to give them a sense of 'trust'. Being a doctoral researcher who is also older than my participants provided some sort of credibility and trust which I tactfully tried to foreground during the participant recruitment stage.

Further, my ability to speak different Arabic dialects, by virtue of being a Palestinian who lived in Saudi Arabia for 11 years and in Palestine for 14 years, made the participants feel comfortable when shifting between their colloquial Arabic, Pan-Arabic, Standard Arabic and English during interviews. Although this is an advantage (section 4.7.5), this is also a potential challenge as will be further investigated in section 4.7.6.

#### **4.3.1 Considerations for 'native anthropologists'**

Johnstone (2000) warns that researchers in sociolinguistics can be at risk of 'going native'. This means that researchers can lose the ability to critically analyse local behaviour. Going native is a valid concern in my study. However, it is

imperative to understand the connotations of the word 'native'. Narayan (1993, p. 671) raises the question: 'how "native" is a native anthropologist' by asserting that the conceptual underpinnings of terms like 'native', 'insider', 'indigenous' allude that a true, authentic insider's perspective is possible. This understanding assumes that all natives are the same generic native. Such an assumption overlooks the fact that people are made different and distant by factors like: class, education, immigration, etc. Therefore, even the most experienced 'native' anthropologists can never know everything about their society (Aguilar, 1981 cited in Narayan, 1993).

To this end, while I acknowledge my multiple identities, the similarities and discrepancies between me and my research participants, it is crucial to accentuate that my research participants and myself had been made different by our different life choices. In addition, the question of how researchers who share the 'same' background with their participants can deal with their data has been long addressed in the literature on ethnography. For example, Conteh and Toyoshima (2005) suggest alternating between the 'familiar' and the 'strange' to construct meaning of interviews. This 'playful element' (Duranti, 1997, p. 86) requires balance to provide a successful analysis inclusive of different voices- 'including those of the people studied, of the ethnographer, and of his disciplinary and theoretical preferences' (Duranti, 1997, p. 87).

#### **4.4 Reporting on the pilot study**

The purpose of the pilot was to try the use of focus group interviews as a data collection instrument. It has been foregrounded here to highlight how this pilot study experience informed the actual study and its design. The focus group was piloted on 7 June 2013 when 4 participants (2 men and 2 women) were invited via convenience sampling. The focus group interview took place in a group study room in Hartley library: University of Southampton<sup>4</sup> and lasted for 90 minutes. The interview was recorded after obtaining an oral consent. A scheme of work was prepared (**Appendix 1**) and was used as an interview guide. The four participants were Arab academic sojourners from Palestine and Jordan and had

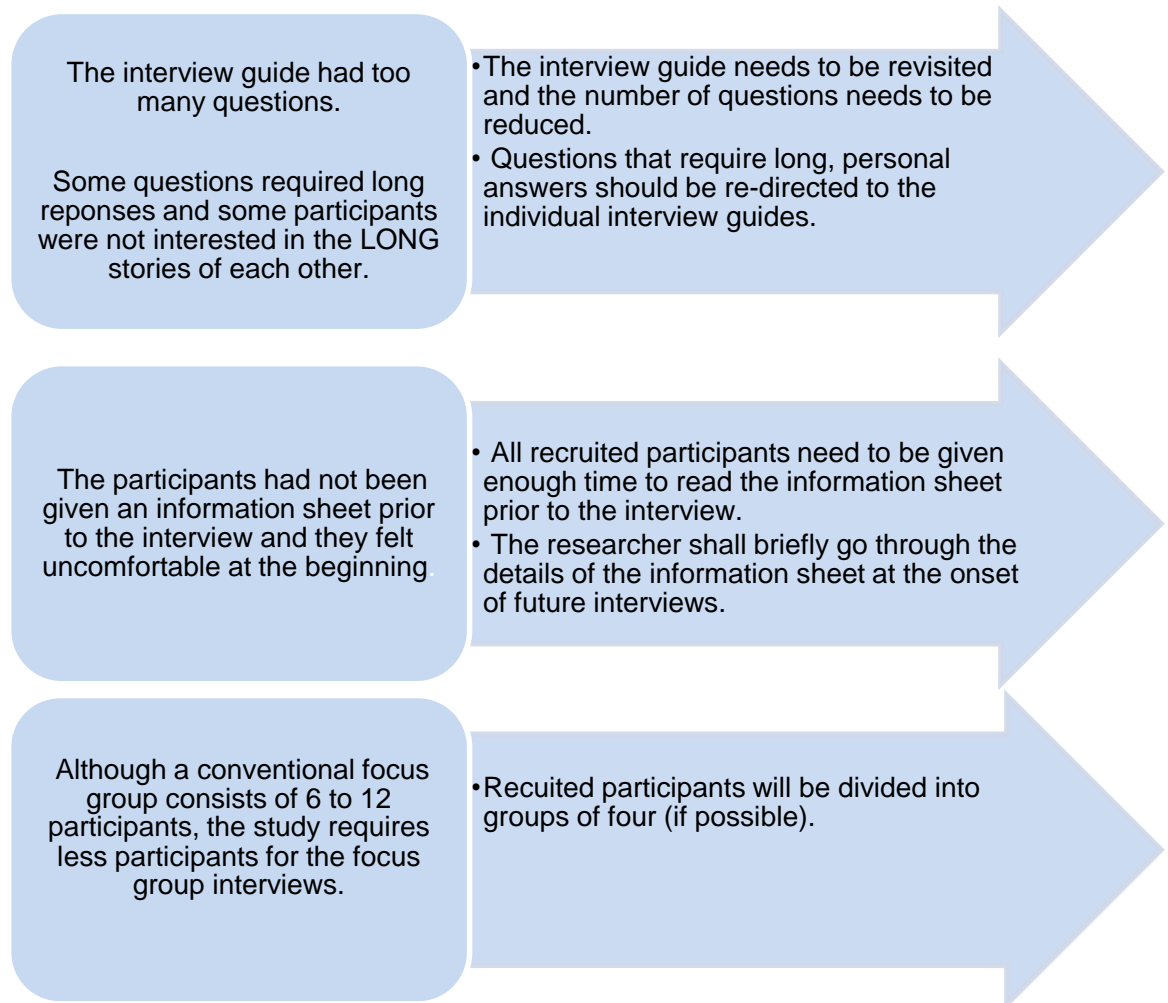
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<sup>4</sup> Due to personal circumstances, I lived in Southampton during the first year of my PhD.



arrived in the UK in September 2012 to start their Master's degrees. All participants were scholarship winners which means that they had already met the admission criteria for the language proficiency and had competitive applications.

Figure (4.1) briefly comments on some aspects of the focus group pilot, and the wide arrows feature the decisions that were made accordingly:



**Figure 4.1 Comments on the pilot study**

## **4.5 Research setting**

### **4.5.1 Participant recruitment**

Research participants were recruited keeping in mind Creswell's (1994, p. 148) note: 'the idea of qualitative research is to purposefully select informants (or documents or visual material) that will best answer the research question'. Therefore *purposive sampling* was the strategy adopted during the participant

recruitment stage. However, I am inclined not to use the 'sampling logic' as it implies that the sample comes from a larger population of like-cases (Yin, 2014, p. 44), which is not the case in a study that underlines the idiosyncratic nature of Arab academic sojourners' trajectories in the UK.

It was deemed essential that all participants are Arab academic sojourners who are, at the time of the study, studying at a higher education institution in the UK. In addition to that, other selection criteria emerged given the diverse academic trajectories of Arab students in the UK. The selection criteria were:

- An Arab student on an academic degree (Bachelor's, Master's, or Phd)
- An Arab student who was not placed in pre-sessional or in-sessional courses for 'language support'
- An Arab student who had arrived in the UK during September 2013 and is available in Yorkshire region during the time of the study.

The three criteria were carefully chosen. The first criterion excludes students on short courses because the study requires prolonged engagement. The second criterion excludes students who are required to attend pre-sessional and/or in-sessional classes for language support. It is expected that these students are aware of their linguistic disadvantage and are positioned as learners who need more linguistic capital because they do not possess sufficient linguistic assets. Involving such students might change or affect the focus of the study, as they can be wholly preoccupied with discussing their linguistic and academic challenges. Being in this position, they are still in the process of 'investing' in English with the aim of being admitted to an academic programme. However, recruiting participants who had already met the language proficiency conditions required for unconditional admission invites participants whose 'investment' in language learning has already been somehow 'fruitful', which was the starting point for this academic enquiry. The third criterion invites students from any university in the UK. Even though Arab students outside Yorkshire region were still seen as potential participants, the prolonged engagement required favoured students who are in Yorkshire region during the time of the study.

The participant recruitment task started during the last week of September 2013, which was the Welcome Week at the University of Leeds. During this week, new

students were invited to attend different student-led activities, induction sessions, and registration and admission appointments. Considering that one of the selection criteria was to invite only newcomers to UK HE, choosing the welcome week period was the best strategy to meet new students.

In order to approach potential research participants, three techniques were used:

1. Posting a participant recruitment invitation on the electronic portal of the University of Leeds with brief information about the study and the researcher's contact details. See **Appendix 2** for a copy of the online invitation.
2. Posting the same invitation on some Facebook pages such as New Students at Leeds, Arabs at Leeds, Leeds Islamic Society, Leeds Palestinian Solidarity Group, and Leeds University Union.
3. Walking around campus during the Welcome Week, handing out information sheets, providing brief oral descriptions of the study and what it entails and requesting email addresses from those who expressed an interest in my study. See **Appendix 4** for the information sheet.

Among these strategies, the most effective one was the third strategy. In fact, the eight participants were recruited through meeting them on campus and talking them through my research and the type of participation they are expected to take part in. The personal aspect of introducing myself and talking to the participants face-to-face was what differentiates the third technique from the other less personal and therefore less effective techniques.

During the planning stage and prior to the actual recruitment process, the aim was to invite 12 participants and to give them the chance to either take part in the initial focus group interview only or to continue to the prolonged engagement phase, which requires monthly individual interviews. At that stage, the plan was to have 6 participants for the prolonged engagement process, keeping in mind equal gender representation if possible. However, given the possibility that all the recruited participants might choose to take part in the initial group interview only, I decided not to offer them the option of choosing between the two types of participation. Therefore, all recruited participants were invited to partake in the prolonged engagement phase.

As the participant recruitment stage commenced, I decided to cast the net as wide as possible by inviting as many interested participants as possible. As a result, 8 participants were recruited and all of them were ready to be interviewed on a monthly basis during the academic year of 2013-2014. Email correspondence was the sole method of communication through which mutually convenient interview times were negotiated.

The next challenge was to divide the participants into two groups of 4 for the initial group interviews. This plan was deemed difficult because the participants did not agree on a mutually convenient time. Therefore, the contingency plan was to conduct initial pair interviews instead. It is worth mentioning that when the eight participants were recruited, they were invited in pairs because they were together when I approached them. That was the basis for participant distribution for the initial pair interviews, and that meant that when the participants took part in the initial pair interviews, they had already met each other.

Indeed, there were many question marks regarding participant recruitment during the planning stage. First, it was unclear how many participants would be willing to be interviewed on a monthly basis and whether any would drop out. Second, it was difficult to predict how many female and male participants would be involved and whether gender distribution would be even. Therefore, a contingency plan had to be put in place: (a). the recruitment stage was given a flexible timespan to guarantee enough participants and (b). I attempted to seek equal gender representation in the recruited group by not approaching more men or more women.

#### **4.5.2 Introducing the research participants**

Table 4.1 below lists participants' pseudonyms, their age at the start of the study, nationality, course of study, the length of their course, their gender, and whether they were sponsored or not.

|   | <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Nationality</b> | <b>Course Enrolled on</b>                                 | <b>Length of course</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Sponsored</b> |
|---|------------------|------------|--------------------|---|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1 | Ameen            | 18         | Omani              | Foundation <sup>5</sup> leading to Mechanical Engineering | One year +3             | Male          | Yes              |
| 2 | Amjad            | 24         | Palestinian        | MA Human Resource Management                              | One year                | Male          | Yes              |
| 3 | Asma             | 26         | Palestinian        | MA Educational Management                                 | One year                | Female        | Yes              |
| 4 | Dalal            | 27         | Saudi              | MA English/Arabic Translation                             | One year                | Female        | Yes              |
| 5 | Hassan           | 18         | Qatari             | Foundation leading to Mechanical Engineering              | One year +3             | Male          | Yes              |
| 6 | Kholoud          | 17         | Omani              | Foundation leading to Chemical Engineering                | One year +3             | Female        | Yes              |
| 7 | Mahmoud          | 18         | Emirati            | Foundation leading to Mechanical Engineering              | One year +3             | Male          | Yes              |
| 8 | Reem             | 28         | Saudi              | MA English/Arabic Translation                             | One year                | Female        | No               |

**Table 4.1 Research participants' demographic and background data**

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<sup>5</sup> The foundation year is a requirement for those who did not take the English A- level or those whose A-Level result does not meet the admission criteria. Students coming from other countries are required to study the foundation year before they are admitted to an undergraduate degree in certain disciplines. In this year, students study Academic English, Science, and Mathematics. All my Foundation participants should have a minimum of three B's in the three subjects in order to be admitted to the undergraduate degree.

**Ameen:** he went to private schools where he was taught science and maths by non-Arabic speaking teachers. As a result, he learned English through science and math classes as well as English classes. He also learned English through songs and films. His sister did an undergraduate degree in a university in Scotland and because she spoke 'Scottish English', she was a source of inspiration for him. Ameen was living with his cousin and was studying with a large Omani group who were doing the same foundation course. He once referred to his life in the UK by saying 'we have our little Oman in the UK'.

**Amjad:** when he was a child, his parents taught him that English is better than Arabic because it means being modern and it offers opportunities for work and travel. He won an American scholarship programme to study 12 levels/courses of general English for two years in an American language centre (Amideast) in Palestine. His ambition was to be distinguished and that is why he chose to do his business undergraduate degree through English as medium of instruction at a time when most of the business students took the Arabic route. After his graduation, he was the only student who was appointed at his university because of his command of English. When he worked as a university lecturer, his students looked up to him and used to refer to him for advice on how to improve their English. Amjad felt that he was a successful person and was satisfied with his work, study, and English skills. This self-satisfaction was not maintained when he came to study in the UK as will be seen in **Chapter 5**.

**Asma:** she started learning English at the age of 7 in a private school where the curriculum was different from the national curriculum taught in government schools. In secondary school, she started to improve her English through films, and English started to be more meaningful in her life. Like Amjad, she studied accounting in English because she believed that graduates with good English skills can easily find a job in Palestine. Her parents encouraged her to study something different so she could find a job. She volunteered in many NGOs in Palestine where she worked with international staff and the language of communication was English. When she graduated, she was appointed as a technical instructor at a college run by the UNRWA and she taught through the medium of English. She noted that, 'if it were not for my English, I would not have done any of the things which I did and enjoyed before coming to the UK'.

**Dalal:** She started learning English at the age of 7 and she stayed in private schools until she joined university. Besides learning English at schools, she took 4 language courses in language institutions and she took an English course in the USA for two months. She explained that because her father did his Master's in the USA, he was keen to send his children to private schools to learn English. Her brothers studied in the USA and she used to speak to them in English. When she graduated, she had an administrative role in a university in Saudi Arabia. She complained that because her role did not involve teaching, she 'lost' a lot of her English. Most of the English input she had was American and that made her worry about understanding different accents in the UK. She was admitted to a Master's course at the University of Edinburgh which she turned down because she was told that the accent there is very difficult. She commented, 'I am here in Leeds and I am struggling. Imagine if I went to Edinburgh'.

**Hassan:** he joined an 'independent school' in Qatar and later a sports academy that focuses on sports and other school subjects. Non-Arabic speaking teachers taught him; some of them were British. He also studied with other international students in the sports academy and that made him realise that different speakers of English have different accents. He explained that his family wanted him to speak English and they introduced English stories to him since he was young. Two of his sisters graduated from the University of Leeds. He pointed out that in Qatar everyone should focus on English because it is the language of jobs. Therefore, many students work hard to get the required IELTS or TOEFL score in order to be admitted to a university in the UK or the USA. When he was at his sports academy, he took part in opening ceremonies, cultural celebrations, inductions days, and promotion trips. These activities made him feel that he was valued as a student who had 'good' English skills and sports abilities. He travelled to Saudi Arabia and UAE to represent the academy. Although these activities targeted potential Arabic students, English was the language of communication, and the tool for promoting the brand of the academy where he studied.

**Kholoud:** she was brought up in a family that spoke English most of the time. Her father was born in the UK where he stayed until the age of 18. After that, he moved to live in Oman. Her mother was born in South Africa where she lived until the age of 18. Kholoud learned Arabic through formal education at school. Commenting on this, she complained that her school classmates used to make

fun of her Arabic and they accused her of not being ‘Omani’. Besides communicating with her parents in English, she learned slang American expressions through watching films. When she came to the UK, she received comments on her ‘American’ English and she did not know what to say in response.

**Mahmoud:** he attended a model school, which was for Emirati citizens only, until Grade 9. He complained that during that time he only knew how to say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ in English. In Grade 10, his parents sent him to a private secondary school where he was offered 15 hours of English classes per week. He was taught by British tutors. He learned grammar, spelling, and IELTS strategies. He went to Canada for a month to take a language course and he did not think that he learned a lot from that experience. He was the only person in his family to speak English and to go to Higher Education. He demonstrated that his siblings could not access Higher Education because they could not speak English and therefore could not meet the IELTS requirement of some local universities. Aware of his situation, he worked hard to get IELTS 5.5. Mahmoud kept on referring to his English pronunciation and accent as ‘wrong’ and that made him feel nervous when he spoke to others in English.

**Reem:** she started learning English at home at a very young age because her mother was a language teacher in Saudi Arabia. She went to private schools because English was introduced at Grade 6 in government schools (at that time) whereas private schools taught English starting from Grade 1. She studied a mixture of English literature and linguistics at a university in Saudi Arabia. After her graduation, she worked at an international bank where communication with her colleagues was through English. Her role was to translate financial documents from English to Arabic and vice versa. She explained that her English was her key to enter the private sector in Saudi Arabia which requires a high level of English proficiency.

#### **4.5.3 Researcher/participants’ relationship**

As seen in 4.3, the researcher’s social capital contributed to building rapport with the research participants. In addition, there are four factors to consider when addressing the researcher/participant relationship:

- Reciprocity



- The longitudinal dimension of the study
- Interview venue
- Participants' comments on participating in this research

First, because 'the principle of reciprocity must guide research' (Ruttan, 2004, p. 17), it was important to have a two-way exchange through which the participants could feel that they also could benefit from participating in the study. When three of the Master's students asked me about the PhD process and how to write a research proposal, I did not hesitate to give them detailed advice, and in one case, I connected one of the participants with a doctoral student in her discipline. Another aspect of reciprocity was when I shared parts of my UK experience with some participants at the end of some individual interviews. There were times when I was asked about my experience and how I coped with certain challenges and reciprocity was important so that the participants do not feel exploited. A third example of reciprocity was when one of the participants asked me to give him feedback on his academic writing skills. That was a tricky situation as it entailed commenting on his language skills and language was one of the themes of the study. In spite of that, I tried to give him some positive feedback and some general suggestions for improving his work. A last example came from Mahmoud whose interviews featured his struggle to be 'someone'. His unconscious mix of English and Arabic in his interview transcripts reflected his internal struggle for better recognition. While he thought that he was using Arabic to hide his mistakes and to be able to help me by giving more elaborate responses, he was always mixing English and Arabic. At one point, he was disappointed that his grammar was 'bad' and that he could not say any grammatical sentence. At the end of the interview, I showed him samples of the sentences he had used in earlier interviews and told him that his sentences were actually grammatical. That gave him a sense of reassurance. Additionally, that made him aware of the extent to which he was meshing Arabic and English during his interviews.

Besides reciprocity, the longitudinal dimension contributed to building a friendly relationship and a sense of commitment. All participants were committed to this research. In fact, during the last wave of individual interviews, some participants explained that they were used to being interviewed on a monthly basis and that participating in the study had made them more aware of what happened with them so that they could give me examples in subsequent interviews. This

overwhelming commitment to my research meant that my relationship with the participants should not end when the fieldwork ends. Subsequently, I have developed the habit of sending emails to all participants asking them about their progress, sending good wishes on occasions such as Ramadan, and Eid, and thanking them for their invaluable contribution to my study.

Furthermore, choosing the venue of the interview was important for building trust and credibility between me and the participants. In Islamic and Arabic traditions, men and women do not usually sit together in closed, confined places and most communication takes place in open spaces. Therefore, I did not book rooms on campus to interview the male participants who might feel uncomfortable and therefore might drop out. Based on that, all participants were interviewed in a quiet reception area in one of the main buildings on campus. Being sensitive to such religious and cultural aspects meant that the participants and I were comfortably communicating in an open space on campus. Although that meant that the quality of the recording was not very good, building trust and respect was my priority.

The last element to address here is describing how the participants commented on participating in this study. Apart from Dalal who said ‘it was good’ without elaborating further, the rest of the participants gave some detailed descriptions of what they gained from partaking in this research:

**Counselling**<sup>6</sup>. When I am annoyed because of language-related issues, I feel there is someone to talk to about my problems. Second, it made me **reflect** on myself. I mean between interviews I analysed the situations I went through. I asked myself if these are related to language or not. I tried to answer your questions with myself even after I had spoken to you. I started to see how I use my English and my Arabic and this made me know my problems. When you know your problems, you know how and where to look to solve them. For example, when I told you about my **writing** problem you asked me what I did to solve this problem. I realised that I did nothing. Your study made me feel that I have to improve myself, and deal with my problems. I started to think of the value of the languages I speak and how my husband and I need English at different levels [Asma 5<sup>th</sup>].

The topics we discussed about language made me pay attention to things I would not normally notice. I now think about the

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<sup>6</sup> Words in bold were spoken in English whereas the rest are translated from Arabic.

**society** that I created around me. If I did not participate, I wouldn't have noticed that I am surrounded by Arabs. Through your questions, I started to ask myself about my decisions, about my Arabic circle, about how I interact with others. Your questions made me think of my experience and I am happy that I participated [Amjad 5<sup>th</sup>].

You see I benefited from the study. I liked the subject. There were questions like what did you do? why did you do that? etc and I did not ask myself these things. Your questions made me think of and reflect on my behaviour and I find this experience of being interviewed to talk about my UK journey really interesting. It is interesting to share your story with someone else. I also think that if I help you with your PhD study, I will find people who are willing to help me when I do my PhD. A day for you and a day against you. My friends asked me why I took part in the study and why I was interviewed every month. They thought I did too much. I used to tell them I benefitted a lot because I speak about my worries, struggles, and experiences and I vent my feelings so that I end up with less pressure. I hope my interviews were helpful [Mahmoud 5<sup>th</sup>].

As seen in the previous quotes, the participants found a personal meaning in their participation. The responses of the other four participants were in line with the ones presented above. The study promoted reflection, reflexivity, and awareness, as will be further discussed in **Chapter 5**. In addition, it had a therapeutic effect for the participants who enjoyed talking about their experiences to someone who was willing to listen to them while they were shielding their worries and struggles from their parents.

#### **4.6 Data generation procedures: Plans and rearrangements**

As explained in 4.5.1, the initial plan was to divide the eight recruited participants into 2 groups and to give them the option to choose if they want to be in a mixed gender group or to have a group for the four female participants and another for the four male participants. However, rearrangements were made because it was difficult for four participants to agree on a mutually convenient time. Further, considering that the participants were already recruited in pairs, it was easier for each pair to agree on a mutually convenient time for a pair interview. The revised plan, then, was to start with 4 pair interviews, followed by monthly individual interviews over a period of 6 months. This plan had to be amended because I

could not interview the participants on a monthly basis during Christmas and Easter breaks (5 left the UK during these periods) and during exams periods. As a result, the longitudinal engagement with the participants lasted for approximately 8 months. Details of interview dates, language(s) and durations are presented in the next section.

#### 4.6.1 Fieldwork timeline (actual)

This section shows the fieldwork timeline, which includes references to the main language of the interviews (see 4.7.7 on translanguaging) as well as the dates and durations of pair and individual interviews with the eight participants as seen in the tables below:

| Ameen's Interviews          |                                   |                |                        |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Interview Type              | Language                          | Interview Date | Interview Duration     |
| Pair interview with Kholoud | Ameen: Arabic<br>Kholoud: English | 08/10/2013     | 22:00 min <sup>7</sup> |
| First individual            | Arabic                            | 24/10/2013     | 27:22 min              |
| Second individual           | Arabic                            | 03/12/2013     | 25:50 min              |
| Third individual            | Arabic                            | 03/02/2014     | 31:20 min              |
| Fourth individual           | Arabic                            | 17/03/2014     | 23:00 min              |
| Fifth individual            | Arabic                            | 07/05/2014     | 29:30 min              |
|                             |                                   |                | 158:22 min             |

**Table 4.2 Ameen's interviews**

| Amjad's Interviews       |          |                |                    |
|--------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Interview Type           | Language | Interview Date | Interview Duration |
| Pair interview with Asma | Arabic   | 23/10/2013     | 41:20 min          |
| First individual         | Arabic   | 5/11/2013      | 38:30 min          |
| Second individual        | Arabic   | 4/12/2013      | 37:11 min          |
| Third individual         | Arabic   | 6/2/2014       | 46:03 min          |
| Fourth individual        | Arabic   | 13/3/2014      | 34:30 min          |
| Fifth individual         | Arabic   | 16/6/2014      | 53:22 min          |
|                          |          |                | 250:16 min         |

**Table 4.3 Amjad's interviews**

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<sup>7</sup> This is the full pair interview time shared by the two participants. Same applies to the rest of pair interview durations.

| Asma's Interviews         |          |                |                    |
|---------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Interview Type            | Language | Interview Date | Interview Duration |
| Pair interview with Amjad | Arabic   | 23/10/2013     | 41:20 min          |
| First individual          | Arabic   | 05/11/2013     | 33:53 min          |
| Second individual         | Arabic   | 02/12/2013     | 32:50 min          |
| Third individual          | Arabic   | 11/02/2014     | 38:24 min          |
| Fourth individual         | Arabic   | 13/03/2014     | 36:00 min          |
| Fifth individual          | Arabic   | 19/06/2014     | 48:50 min          |
|                           |          |                | 230:09 min         |

**Table 4.4 Asma's interviews**

| Dalal's Interviews       |          |                |                    |
|--------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Interview Type           | Language | Interview Date | Interview Duration |
| Pair interview with Reem | Arabic   | 10/10/2013     | 24:11 min          |
| First individual         | Arabic   | 28/10/2013     | 27:56 min          |
| Second individual        | Arabic   | 12/12/2013     | 31:36 min          |
| Third individual         | Arabic   | 10/02/2014     | 22:56 min          |
| Fourth individual        | Arabic   | 17/03/2014     | 29:15 min          |
| Fifth individual         | Arabic   | 11/06/2014     | 37:00 min          |
|                          |          |                | 171:45 min         |

**Table 4.5 Dalal's interviews**

| Hassan's Interviews         |                                    |                |                        |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Interview Type              | Language                           | Interview Date | Interview Duration     |
| Pair interview with Mahmoud | Hassan: English<br>Mahmoud: Arabic | 04/10/2013     | 37:17 min              |
| First individual            | English                            | 05/11/2013     | 28:06 min              |
| Second individual           | English                            | 06/12/2013     | 12:00 min <sup>8</sup> |
| Third individual            | English                            | 14/02/2014     | 32:13 min              |
| Fourth individual           | Arabic                             | 24/03/2014     | 37:23 min              |
| Fifth individual            | Arabic                             | 01/06/2014     | 50:30 min              |
|                             |                                    |                | 197:29 min             |

**Table 4.6 Hassan's interviews**

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<sup>8</sup> He ended the interview abruptly to attend Friday prayer.

| Kholoud's Interviews      |                                   |                |                    |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Interview Type            | Language                          | Interview Date | Interview Duration |
| Pair interview with Ameen | Kholoud: English<br>Ameen: Arabic | 08/10/2013     | 22:00 min          |
| First individual          | English                           | 28/10/2013     | 24:15 min          |
| Second individual         | English                           | 02/12/2013     | 29:47 min          |
| Third individual          | English                           | 12/02/2014     | 16:35 min          |
| Fourth individual         | English                           | 20/03/2014     | 27:58 min          |
| Fifth individual          | English                           | 16/06/2014     | 24:19 min          |
|                           |                                   |                | 144:14 min         |

**Table 4.7 Kholoud's interviews**

| Mahmoud's Interviews       |                                    |                |                    |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Interview Type             | Language                           | Interview Date | Interview Duration |
| Pair interview with Hassan | Mahmoud: Arabic<br>Hassan: English | 04/10/2013     | 37:17 min          |
| First individual           | Arabic                             | 23/10/2013     | 41:48 min          |
| Second individual          | Arabic                             | 04/12/2013     | 40:20 min          |
| Third individual           | Arabic                             | 14/02/2014     | 35:09 min          |
| Fourth individual          | Arabic                             | 10/03/2014     | 33:20 min          |
| Fifth individual           | Arabic                             | 01/06/2014     | 45:31 min          |
|                            |                                    |                | 232.45 min         |

**Table 4.8 Mahmoud's interviews**

| Reem's Interviews         |          |                |                    |
|---------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Interview Type            | Language | Interview Date | Interview Duration |
| Pair interview with Dalal | Arabic   | 10/10/2013     | 24:11 min          |
| First individual          | Arabic   | 01/11/2013     | 32:59 min          |
| Second individual         | Arabic   | 10/12/2013     | 18:18 min          |
| Third individual          | Arabic   | 17/02/2014     | 42:00 min          |
| Fourth individual         | Arabic   | 26/03/2014     | 36:44 min          |
| Fifth individual          | Arabic   | 11/06/2014     | 57:32 min          |
|                           |          |                | 211:04 min         |

**Table 4.9 Reem's interviews**

The overall recording duration is 1595.34 minutes, which is approximately 27 hours. It is important to note that recordings included greetings, informal chats (weather, study, food, etc.), closing remarks and arrangements for future interviews. These minutes were not transcribed but were taken into consideration

as a way of contextualising the interviews and inferring information about participants' moods and wellbeing. These notes were included as 'memos' on Nvivo 10 and were regularly referred to during the data analysis stage.

## **4.7 Data generation methods**

This section comments on and justifies the use of pair interviews and in-depth individual interviews as the data generation instruments. It also discusses how interview guides were prepared, and the role of theory in this process. It moves on to shed some light on the linguistic 'leakage' (following Jenkins, 2015) which was clearly present while participants' languages and repertoires leaked into one another during interviews, resulting in translanguaging practices which considerably affected subsequent tasks i.e. interview transcriptions, translations, analysis, and reporting. Finally, the section closes with remarks on how quotes/references to participants' views were indexed and referred to in **Chapters 5** and **6**, respectively.

### **4.7.1 Pair-interviews to break the ice**

The initial pair interviews invited participants who already got to know one another. They were planned as an ice-breaker to encourage the participants to talk about their language history, what English had offered them in their countries, what English meant to them, their views of 'best' English, and their social circles in the UK. See **Appendix 6.1** for the initial pair interview guide.

Similar to group interviews, pair interviews encourage the participants to interact and share more experiential information. Creswell (2013) explains that if the interviewees are similar and cooperative, this can produce the best information, whereas they can be hesitant to provide this information if they are interviewed on a one-to-one basis. In addition, Kleiber (2004, p.89) indicates that group interviews is a profound process with the potential to uncover 'socially constructed meanings and underlying attitudes'. She further explains that participants inform one another, which creates a thoughtful discussion. She quotes Morgan (1988) asserting that without the interaction of group interviews, individuals are often unaware of their perspectives, and via group dynamics individuals are required to justify their opinions and reflect on their choices. Accordingly, pair interviews were used to stimulate individuals to talk about their

language history and their attitudes towards English vis-à-vis Arabic, and the subsequent interviews were used to generate more personalised responses and experiences, which may or may not be shared at the presence of a friend.

Despite the advantages of using pair interviews to break the ice, pair interviews were not trouble-free. One of the main issues that arose was the choice of language. In two pair interviews, the pair did not agree on the language they wanted to use. This led to at least three main consequences: (1) I asked the same question in English and in Arabic depending on who was addressed and the same applied to follow-up questions or comments, (2) the participant who wanted to use Arabic was also using many English words which could be due to the pressure of trying to show the other participant that s/he could also speak English and (3) the participant who used Arabic was less dominant, gave shorter responses, and sounded uncomfortable and intimidated.

Another issue was when some participants gave more positive responses at the presence of their friends. This emerged in the responses of one participant whose first individual interview contradicted the impression he tried to make in the pair interview. Considering the one-month gap between the pair interview and the first individual interview, it is difficult to decide whether the changes in the participant's responses were due to the presence of a friend or due to different experiences that made him view his relationship with English differently. When asked this question in the last interview, the participant opted for the second option.

By considering the advantages and disadvantage of initial pair interviews, it became evident that individual longitudinal engagement was necessary to gain deeper insights into the experiences and views of the research participants. These subsequent interviews were used to achieve two goals: deeper, personalised insights and probing into earlier responses to sum up.

#### **4.7.2 Individual interviews for deeper insights**

Because interviews are common situations in contemporary social life (Dörnyei, 2007), using subsequent individual interviews is justified by the multiple advantages of interviews and the complex nature of the study. Unlike other tools that are done without the presence of the researcher, interviews can be enriched by 'probing into emerging new issues' (Dörnyei, 2007, p.143).



Following the initial pair interviews, in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews with pre-prepared guides were used. In order to facilitate the task of making comparisons and summarising results, all research participants were asked the same main questions most of the time, with the exception of the last interview. In spite of that, the interviews differed in depth and length and the circumstances under which interviews were conducted were inevitably different. That is to say, the interactive nature of interviewing differed depending on participants' willingness to elaborate their responses by giving examples. It also depended on the language of the interview for some participants. For instance, by looking at the overall duration of interviews per participant, it was obvious that the shortest overall duration (144:14 min) came from Kholoud's interviews, which were all conducted in English. That said, the second shortest overall duration (171:45 min) came from Dalal's interviews, which were conducted in Arabic.

#### **4.7.3 Probing interviews to sum up**

The last wave of individual interviews (May-June 2014) used a different interview guide strategy. Unlike earlier interview guides, which were the same for all participants, the guides for the last round of individual interviews were divided into two parts:

1. The first part had a list of questions which probed into participants' earlier interviews. Every participant had a different set of questions,
2. The second part had a list of questions which were the same for all participants.

In order to prepare the first part, I listened to previous interviews and read interview transcripts to identify areas to probe into. It is worth mentioning that I had already raised follow-up questions during the previous individual interviews. However, this time I focused on areas (beliefs, attitudes, reactions, etc.) that could have changed over time. As indicated before, I did not assume that things would change over time. In addition, the last interview was an opportunity to confirm or clarify my interpretations of previous comments, events, or incidents. It can be argued that the longitudinal dimension of the study and the ability to probe into earlier interviews to confirm my understanding of the participants' encounters are measures to provide evidence, which is one of the most fundamental trustworthiness issues in this inquiry.

The second part of the interview guides was the same for all the participants. Some questions triggered responses that evaluated participants' overall UK experience. In addition, the participants were asked to comment on issues such as participating in this research, their English at the beginning and the end of that academic year, their relationship with Arabic, and things that they would do differently if they were to start over (see **Appendix 6.6** for all interview guides).

#### **4.7.4 Interview questions and the role of theory**

Yin (2014, p. 31) emphasises the importance of defining the case or the system in case study research because it helps the researcher identify what needs to be explored. Otherwise, there might be a temptation to address everything about every case, which is impossible. This is why interview questions needed to be guided by theory to a certain extent. In fact, the guiding literature can serve as 'a [hypothetical] story about why acts, events, structures, and thoughts occur' (Sutton and Staw 1995, p. 378 cited in Yin. 2014, p. 38). This theory development prior to the fieldwork, Yin (2014) maintains, offers guidance on what to address and how to interpret what is addressed.

Based on this understanding, I invited a plethora of theoretical constructs while trying to identify many themes revolving around my research questions and around the umbrella of 'participants' relationship with English in the UK'. Once themes were identified, subsidiary topics and questions were proposed. While doing so, I was reminded that 'the big questions for you, the researcher, are not questions that will have meaning for the interviewee' (Richards, 2003, p. 69). This meant that 'big' questions needed to be put in simpler terms, addressed through many sub-questions, and introduced at different intervals for consistency and evidence (see 4.10).

The following table (4.10) shows the themes featured throughout the study period (September 2013- June 2014). It is important to mention that these themes developed through an iterative cycle of going back to the literature and to previous responses in order to determine what to address in subsequent interviews. More, the interviewing process entailed prospective and retrospective designs that involved going backwards and forwards in time (Neale, 2015). **Appendix 6** lists the interview questions for the initial pair interviews and the five subsequent waves of individual interviews.

| Initial Pair Interviews  | 1 <sup>st</sup> Round of Individual Interviews   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Round of Individual Interviews  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Round of Individual Interviews  | 4 <sup>th</sup> Round of Individual Interviews   | 5 <sup>th</sup> Round of Individual Interviews  |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|
| 1. Language History<br>2. Opportunities offered by English<br>3. Participants' perception of themselves as Arabic speakers of English<br>4. Expectations of language problems before arriving in the UK<br>5. Making friends | 1. Participants' assessment of their English in the UK.<br>2. Reflecting on language and identity<br>3. The relationship between language and the job market.<br>4. Upon Arrival and Now | 1. Obstacles<br>2. The role of language in friendship-making.<br>3. The role of governments in preparing you for life abroad.<br>4. Reflecting on their linguistic repertoires in different UK settings<br>5. English and success in the UK<br>6. Attitudes towards 'excuse me? Can you say that again? | 1. Human capital<br>2. Linguistic goals after finishing their current degrees.<br>3. Family and friends expectations<br>4. For Participants who went home during Christmas. | 1. What motivates the participants to study and work hard?<br>2. The value of this academic sojourn in their lives<br>3. Future plans<br>4. Imagined vs. lived Britain<br>5. The sojourn as an escape?<br>6. Language and identity | 1. Probing into previous responses (different questions for each participant)<br>2. Comments on participating in this research<br>3. Starting over?<br>4. Reflecting on their previous language education<br>5. Language and identity<br>6. Interacting with native and non-native speakers |

**Table 4.10 Thematic representation of the topics addressed in pair and individual interviews**

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the interviews were regarded as venues for discussions where the relevant themes and topics came up, rather than opportunities to ask a series of tightly pre-formulated questions. That is why even when all interviews were structured around the same interview guides, each interview was different because the circumstances (including participants' moods and the preferred language) under which the interviews were conducted could not be identical. This has a considerable influence on how interviews can progress (Richards, 2003).

#### **4.7.5 The language of interviews**

Previous research on the relationship between language, cognition and emotions (see Luna et al., 2008) has indicated that the same question can be answered differently depending on whether it was asked in the participants' first or second language. In addition, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2015) argues that emotions are expressed differently in different languages and across different cultures. Moreover, I agree with Nusrat, one of the participants in Holmes, Fay, Andrews and Attia (2013), when she said that working monolingually in multilingual contexts would only reveal 'a half-truth', and hence the need for multilingual research to enrich the generated insights. These factors were present when I decided to give the participants the freedom to choose the language of the interview. The main priority for me was to allow the participants to talk about their experiences without having to worry about translating their feelings and stories into a language they may not be comfortable with. The following quote from Mahmoud provides a critical insight into why he preferred to use Arabic:

M: I avoid speaking in English because I try to hide any problems and mistakes I have.... I speak Arabic to be able to help you with your study. Arabic enables me to tell you everything so that you can get detailed responses which I would not be able to give if I were to speak English [5<sup>th</sup>].

As seen in section (4.7.1), Ameen, Amjad, Asma, Dalal, Mahmoud, and Reem, preferred to be interviewed in Arabic; Kholoud preferred to be interviewed in English; and Hassan used English in the first four interviews (including the pair interview) whereas his last two interviews were in Arabic. Still, it is crucial to remember that an Arabic or English interview does not mean that it was purely

conducted in that language as translanguaging practices were very frequent and this will be addressed in some detail in the next section.

Allowing the participants to choose the language of the interview has had pros and cons in this research, as it constitutes both an opportunity and a challenge. Whereas the participants were able to elaborate their responses using their spoken repertoires, which included English, Standard Arabic, their local colloquial Arabic, or pan-Arabic varieties, this flexibility has posed a challenge which I grappled with during the transcription stage and later during the translation and analysis stages. Furthermore, the decisions taken during these stages influenced consequent decisions during the data analysis stage. A detailed account of this challenge is presented in sections 4.7.6, 4.7.7 and 4.7.8.

#### **4.7.6 Whose voice? Whose language?**

As stated in **Chapter 1**, part of my commitment to this research stemmed from the willingness to 'give voice' (Ragin, 1994) to individuals whose testimonies are often invisible in the study abroad literature. However, the task of voice giving is a rigorous task of representing voiceless participants using their own voices and languages in the writing up. In addition, the question of whose voice and whose language to be represented in academic research is also a question of who has the power and the legitimacy to be heard (Ganassin and Holmes, 2013), and this resonates with Bourdieu's (1977, p. 648) understanding of the 'legitimate speaker' as someone who imposes reception.

Although contemporary scholarship promotes the representation of multilingualism (Creese and Blackledge 2015; Blackledge and Creese, 2010; Pennycook, 2010) and considers translanguaging practices as the normal mode of communication that characterises communities today (Creese and Blackledge, 2015), the practicalities of representing multilingualism in academic research have not been thoroughly addressed. Duff and Abdi (*forthcoming*) maintains that the role and voice of researchers is usually more prominent. This, in fact, is an institutional requirement which expects researchers to be explicit about the process of conducting and interpreting research. This form of 'explicit subjectivity' has become almost mandatory (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland and Lofland, 2001). At the same time researchers are under the pressure of trying to meet the expectations of several parties such as institutions, funders, supervisors,

examiners and research participants, and this implies that the researcher's voice is more likely to be the loudest. Therefore, there is apparent tension between academic standards/expectations and the ethical duty of representing the participants and their languages.

Another tension appears between 'a monolingually conceived research design and multilingual practices among researchers and researched' (Ganassin and Holmes 2013, p. 343). Halai (2007) noted that the index list of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) does not contain any entries on translation. The same is true about the institutional policies of many UK universities where there are no clearly articulated guidelines on the inclusion of multilingual data in students' assignments and doctoral theses. For example, the study of Holmes, Fay, Andrews and Attia (2013) reveals that researching multilingually poses several challenges such as language choices, translation practices, and the language politics of representing and disseminating research. Students engaged with multilingual research practices are left without guidance on how to address these challenges.

These issues were present all the time during the writing-up of this doctoral thesis. In fact, I have been faced with a major challenge: when word count restrictions do not allow the inclusion of the original and translated quotes in the body of the thesis, which counts as more important for understanding the text and which is supplementary? In other words, which language can stay in the body and which can go to the appendix? In the University of Leeds appendices are part of the word count, so the inclusion of original data in appendices was not even possible. We know that intelligibility-wise, including the translated text accommodates for a wider readership and most importantly meets the institutional requirements of what a PhD thesis is expected to look like. On the other hand, this made me 'break' the promise of 'giving voice' which I set out this research with. I am not even sure if other dissemination and publication outlets will be more accommodating of multilingual data. This challenge could open up doors for creating new spaces for communicating multilingual research such as drama, videos, and even translated monographs.

#### 4.7.7 Translanguaging practices in participants' interviews

The linguistic repertoires of the research participants included at least four oral and five written varieties: their colloquial Arabic variety(-ies), Standard Arabic, Pan-Arabic (mixing Standard with colloquial), and English(es), written Standard Arabic, written colloquial Arabic, written Pan-Arabic, written English(es), Arabic written in English alphabets. These they deployed in a range of ways, often moving fluidly between their oral varieties during the interviews.

Overall, the research participants used the language(s) that best reflected who they were trying to be. The research interview, as a social act, was planned to be a safe space for the participants to deploy their agency and choose what made them feel comfortable. Even when unfamiliar colloquial Arabic expressions were used, asking for clarification was framed as a way of comparing the researcher's regional Arabic variety with the participant's. Here is an example from an interview with Mahmoud:

محمود: لما وقفت اتكلم جيت العيد

Mahmoud: When I stood up to speak, I brought 'El Eid'

خوله: شو يعني جيت العيد

Me: What is the meaning of 'brought El Eid'?

محمود: خربت كل شي.. ما سويت زين يعني

Mahmoud: I messed things up. It means I did not do well

خوله: ايوه. انا تعلمتها منك هادي

Me: I see you. I learned this from you.

محمود: انتو ما تقولونها؟ مشهوره في الخليج. شنو تحكون؟

Mahmoud: You don't say it? It is famous in the Gulf. What do you say? [2<sup>nd</sup>].

In addition, using English words was very frequent and some participants used more English than others even when they initially requested to be interviewed in Arabic. The English words or sentences were transcribed and marked as **bold** so they remain prominent when the quote is translated. Here is an example from Asma:

The biggest problem is with **writing skills** because we are talking about a particular way of writing which is **academic writing**. I have no **experience** or confidence. Before coming here I did not learn the basics of academic writing and I am using them here for the first time. This is my biggest problem. I write and I do not know if what I write is correct or not. I do not have confidence in what I write because I am writing **academic English** for the first time. The second problem is with **grammar** and **punctuation**. I do not know where to put the comma or the semicolon. These issues matter and when the marker sees these problems, I will be embarrassed and this gives a bad impression [2<sup>nd</sup>].

#### 4.7.8 A note on translation

As articulated above, the multilingual/translingual abilities of the researcher and the participants were both a research opportunity and a reporting obstacle because research data needed to be translated to accommodate a wider readership. In addition, the use of translation in the academic Anglo-centric research culture in UK HE might be seen as a 'politicised tool of linguistic representation' (Greer, 2003) because it favours English as the language of research and overlooks the languages through which participants' voices can be heard.

The process of translation entails cultural decoding (Torop, 2002) and a lot of ad hoc decisions (Halai, 2007). The translation procedures adopted were a mixture of literal translation and communicative translation. According to Newmark (1988), the literal translation converts the grammatical constructions into their nearest target language equivalents and translates lexical words singly and out of context. On the other hand, communicative translation attempts to send the exact contextual meaning of the original while attempting to produce content and language acceptable and comprehensible to the readership (1988, pp. 45-47). Whereas literal translation attempts to produce a translated text which is very close to the original text, there is a risk of producing what might not be comprehensible and this requires the interference of communicative translation. For instance, Amjad talked about his early experience in the UK saying, 'و بعد أسبوعين ، وتحسنت ودخلت في المود' and this literally translates into 'after two weeks, I improved and entered the mood'. Because the literal translation has not produced a comprehensible content, communicative translation becomes a necessity.



Therefore, when translating the expression communicatively, it means ‘after two weeks, I improved and started to cope and feel better’.

Not only was this line problematic because of the expression that Amjad used, but also because it borrows the word ‘mood’ from English. Therefore, I was faced with the challenge of deciding whether to write the word ‘mood’ in English (i.e. ال+mood) or to use the Arabic ‘phonological cognate’<sup>9</sup> ‘المود’ (Hall, 2002). This is an example of the ad hoc decisions which took place during the translation process. Although I was aware that the participants’ languages ‘leaked’ into one another all the time, I decided to write the word in Arabic because the interview was mainly in Arabic and because the participant added the Arabic definite article ‘ال’ to the word which could mean that he internalised it as an Arabic word borrowed from English.

This note on translation concludes by raising the same questions that were raised by Rossman and Rallis in 1998:

*If you have translated from another language into English, what constitutes direct quotes? Can you use translated words as a direct quote? How do you signal that a translation is accurate and captures the subtle meanings of the original language?*

(1998, p. 162).

With response to the first two questions, it may be possible to refer to a translated quote as a ‘reference’ to what a participant has said and this reference cannot be equated with the direct quote because the subtle meanings of the original language can indeed get lost in translation. This leaves the third question unanswered because (a) subtle meanings do get lost in translation, and (b) sometimes speakers, let alone researchers, might not be conscious of the subtle meanings of their words. Consequently, it is important to clarify that when the word ‘quote’ is used to refer to what a participant said, it means a translated ‘reference’ to the participant’s original quote. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that ‘translated’ texts can be ‘transmuted’ texts because ‘they reflect the original, but have been recreated’ (Halai, 2007, p.344).

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Cognates are words in two or more languages which share phonological and/or orthographic form, and normally (but not necessarily) are also related semantically’ (Hall 2002, p. 69).

In order to validate a sample of my translation, back-translation was used. As explained above, I translated the dataset from the source (different participants' repertoires) to the target (English). The back-translator translated the extracts back from the target (English) to the source. This, however, was not a straightforward process because the source, itself, is a complex example of translanguaging. Considering that the speakers came from five different Arabic countries: Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates and given the frequent use of English words, it is difficult, if not impossible, to produce an accurate representation of what the participants have actually said using their varied linguistic repertoires. The back-translator was given the extracts from **Finding 1** and some information about the nationality of the participant. The English words in the source were highlighted in bold. The back-translator is a Saudi doctoral researcher in language education at the University of Leeds. She worked as an English language teacher in Saudi Arabia for two years. She has taught Arabic in the UK and has experience in English/Arabic translation and interpretation.

Following the back-translation process, the back-translator and I discussed the extracts in an attempt to incorporate a rather collaborative, iterative approach to translation. These discussions were crucial because I was not aiming to objectify the words of the participants. Rather, I needed to engage with the back-translation process because I was part of the co-construction of the source and my presence provided some contextualisation which was necessary to clarify some words or expressions.

#### **4.7.9 Indexing references to interview transcripts**

When references are made to participant's comments, the number of the interview where the quote appears is included between square brackets at the end of the quote preceded by a pseudonym and a comma. For example, if a quote/reference comes from Amjad's third individual interview, it is indexed at the end of the quote as [Amjad, 3<sup>rd</sup>]. However, if the quote comes from Amjad's initial pair interview, it is indexed as [Amjad, Pair Interview]. If the name of the participant appears as part of the discussion and his/her words are used as an example, the quote is indexed without the name of the participant to avoid unnecessary repetition.

## 4.8 Data analysis

Adding time into the mix through conducting research longitudinally results in generating unwieldy datasets which require careful plans for analysis and archiving. Neale (2015) explains that longitudinal data offers the complexity of analysing in three dimensions: thematic data, case data, and temporal data. The first dimension refers to identifying themes across the sample through thematic analysis; the second involves building a case history through typical case study analysis; and the last engages with capturing the unfolding of lives throughout time through narrative analysis. While merging the three can offer a panoramic analysis with three different analysis strategies, it is difficult to do justice to all in a single research given the time and word count restrictions of academic research. Therefore, choosing one route based on what addresses the research questions best, is imperative. Fundamentally, this means ruling out other options, possibilities, opportunities, and interpretations which can be revisited in directions for future research (see **Chapter 7**).

While the typical reporting format in multiple case study design, presenting single cases followed by a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014), offers the ability to provide detailed case descriptions, it does not suit studies with more than 4 or 5 cases. Since I was committed to keeping all my research participants with the aim of representing more trajectories, writing eight case chapters followed by a cross-case analysis chapter was inhibited by word count restrictions. In addition, approaching the data through a narrative lens which looks at small stories (Barkhuizen, 2010; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Bamberg, 2004, 2006), issues of dislocation and relocation (Baynham & De Fina, 2005), positioning in interaction (Davies & Harré, 1990), footing and alignment (Goffman, 1981), identity in interaction (Simpson 2011) was restricted by two factors. First, the foci of the research questions require a broader analysis technique that goes beyond the micro level of discourse to uncover a wide range of sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects in the sojourner's lives. Second, conducting a narrative analysis through elements of Critical Discourse Analysis on translingual data poses a challenge because the type of data generated in this study requires different transcription, translation and transliteration protocols that attend to the different spoken repertoires of the research participants.

Consequently, thematic analysis was deemed the most suitable data analysis approach and this decision is further discussed in the following section.

#### 4.8.1 Notes on thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (p. 79). They maintain that the process of identifying themes does not happen because themes are emerging or being discovered. Rather, ‘if themes “reside” anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them (Ely et al., 1997)’ (ibid, p. 80). Therefore, thematic analysis is influenced by researchers’ theoretical and epistemological positions, and this implies that even when we, researchers, set out to ‘give voice’, we run the risk of ‘carving out unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our arguments’ (Fine, 2002, p. 218).

In this study, themes were identified based on their prevalence across the dataset and on their relevance to the research questions. In addition, the analysis was driven and informed by the research questions and the theoretical underpinnings of the study, thus it can be called ‘theoretical thematic analysis’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Kelle (1997 in Bazeley and Jackson, 2013) reminds us that:

*Qualitative researchers who investigate a different form of social life always bring with them their own lenses and conceptual networks. They cannot drop them, for in this case they would not be able to perceive, observe and describe meaningful events any longer-confronted with chaotic, meaningless and fragmented phenomena they would have to give up their scientific endeavour*

(1997, p. 25)

Moreover, since the thematic analysis presented in **Chapter 5** goes beyond the semantic content of the data to address underlying and underpinning ideologies and conceptualisations, it can be argued that the thematic analysis used in this study focuses on the ‘latent level’ as opposed to the ‘semantic level’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Finally, because the study springs from a constructionist framework (as articulated in 4.1), it engages with the sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts and the conditions surrounding and influencing participants’ accounts.

The use of thematic analysis has both advantages and disadvantages. With reference to its advantages, its flexibility goes in line with the study’s holistic

approach that embraces Coleman's (2013) 'whole people, whole lives' approach. That is to say, **Chapter 5** thoroughly addresses five key findings through which the research questions were approached in the discussion chapter (**Chapter 6**). On the other hand, the use of thematic analysis rules out temporality (i.e. the temporal data dimension which addresses the unfolding of lives through time). To address this caveat, summary information about each participant was presented in abbreviated vignettes, following Yin's (2014, p. 186) recommendations on how to write the entire report as a cross-case analysis with no separate chapters on individual cases. These abbreviated vignettes appeared in 4.5.2. In addition, more information about individual participants was incorporated in the analysis and discussion chapters.

#### 4.8.2 Stages of data analysis

My thematic analysis broadly followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide which consists of 6 phases as shown in Table 4.11 below. Although the guide was used to facilitate the process of moving from one data analysis phase to another, it is crucial to mention that the analysis was not a linear process of moving from one phase to another. Rather, it was a recursive, iterative process which involved moving back and forth and occasionally getting stuck.

| Phase                               | Description of the process  |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Familiarise yourself with your data | Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.   |
| Generating initial codes            | Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.   |
| Searching for themes                | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.   |
| Reviewing themes                    | Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis  |
| Defining and naming themes          | Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme   |
| Producing the report                | The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis |

**Table 4.11 Phases of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006)**

#### 4.8.2.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with my dataset

This phase involved transcribing, translating and multiple readings of the data (both the original and the translated transcripts). Since ‘every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness’ (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 236), I decided to transcribe and translate the full interviews (with the exception of greetings, ice breakers, and plans for subsequent meetings). In order to build intimate knowledge of the data, I transcribed and translated the interviews myself. All interviews were transcribed verbatim excluding non-verbal and emotional elements of the conversation e.g. pauses, laughter. Although I was aware that this means losing the emotional overtones as well as other nuances of the spoken interaction (see also Potter and Hepburn’s 2012 eight challenges for interview researchers), I had already decided to use thematic analysis which means focusing on the ‘what’ rather than the ‘how’, while understanding that the two are inextricably intertwined. In other words, I followed Allwright and Bailey’s advice:

*GENERAL PRINCIPLE: THE LAW OF LEAST EFFORT*

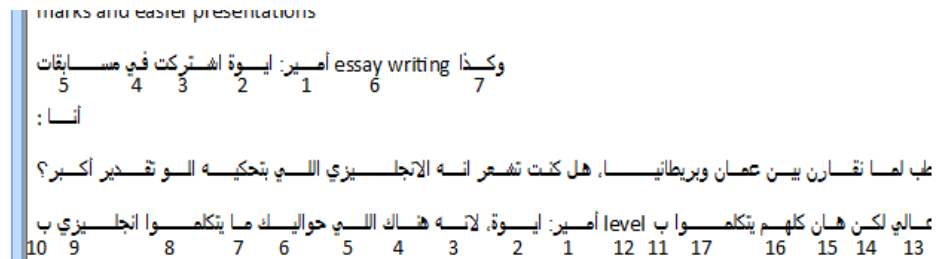
*AVOID REDUNDANCY. Use only the conventions that are necessary for your particular purposes, to record the information you are sure you will need.*

(1991, p. 223, original emphases)

I also referred to the recorded interviews at different intervals during the analysis stage to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts and to immerse myself in the spoken interactions. I was reminded by Richards’ (2003, p. 180) comment, ‘talk is designed to be heard, not read, so never move straight from recording to transcribing: always take time to listen carefully- and listen again’. Therefore, the analysis stage involved analysing bilingually and across different modalities.

This phase had three main steps: (1) transcribing interviews manually (see **Appendix 7** for an example), (2) translating and word-processing the transcribed interviews, and (3) importing the translated folders onto Nvivo10. Handwritten transcription was used because word-processing the interviews while listening to the recorded files was complicated by Arabic being a right to left language and English being left to right. This also implies constant language shifting on computer keyboards which can be time-consuming and sometimes confusing.

Once all data was transcribed manually, it was translated. There were two reasons why I opted for translating all my data. First, coding the equivalent of 27 hours of recorded material manually is cumbersome and troublesome. In order to seek a more efficient approach, I used Nvivo10 to facilitate the process of coding. The initial plan was to word-process all the handwritten transcripts without translating them and then importing them onto Nvivo10 to be coded. This plan would have enabled me to analyse the data in the original language(s) with the help of Nvivo10 software. However, because most participants used English and Arabic during the interviews, Nvivo10 changed the order of the words in the sentence, which made it difficult for me to read the coded lines. See the example below and note the numbers beneath the lines which indicate the order of the words in the sentence:

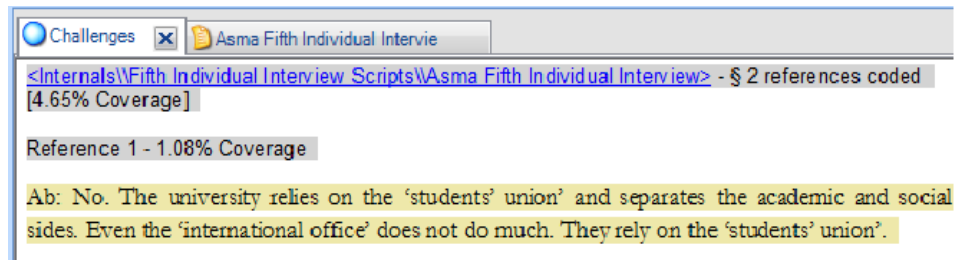


**Figure 4.2 Nvivo10 changing the order of words in sentences**

Therefore, using the original transcripts and using Nvivo10 for coding could not be compromised. Considering the efficiency of using Nvivo10 as an analytical tool, all transcripts were translated. The second reason for translating all transcripts was to enable me to share excerpts from my data with my supervisors, PhD colleagues, and other interested individuals and this provided invaluable discussions and feedback.

#### 4.8.2.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Coding was data-driven and theory-driven, keeping in mind the research questions as well as the theoretical underpinnings of the research. Because coding can be accused of decontextualising the data (Bryman, 2001), Nvivo10 offers the opportunity of locating the coded reference in the interview transcript, i.e. reuniting the code with its context, by clicking on the link above the coded reference as seen below:



**Figure 4.3 Link to interview transcripts on top of references**

All potential important patterns were coded. However, the coding process was not straightforward as it entailed coding some line(s) under more than one code. The lines which were coded many times were identified in a later phase and were incorporated in the discussion of the relevant theme. Figure 4.4 below shows the initial codes:

| Nodes |   | Initial Coding |            |
|-------|---|----------------|------------|
|       | Name  | Sources        | References |
|       | Attitudes towards English                                     | 25             | 80         |
|       | Bio-data  | 4              | 9          |
|       | Language education  | 30             | 92         |
|       | Challenges  | 22             | 61         |
|       | Changes over time   | 16             | 27         |
|       | Comments on the course  | 17             | 27         |
|       | Different Englishes   | 17             | 28         |
|       | Expectations of family and friends back home                  | 13             | 28         |
|       | Family Influence  | 8              | 8          |
|       | Ideological becoming  | 25             | 63         |
|       | Interactions with native vs non-native speakers               | 33             | 94         |
|       | Language and Identity   | 26             | 72         |
|       | Language value before and after arrival                       | 22             | 57         |
|       | Motivation or Goals (non-economic)                            | 13             | 17         |
|       | Opportunities Offered by English                              | 9              | 21         |
|       | Participant specific  | 15             | 25         |
|       | Participant's expectations of life in the UK                  | 28             | 46         |
|       | Participating in this study                                   | 7              | 8          |
|       | Reasons for studying in the UK                                | 0              | 0          |
|       | Economic reasons  | 23             | 63         |
|       | Non-economic  | 22             | 54         |
|       | Researcher Background   | 5              | 6          |
|       | Seeking distinction   | 15             | 22         |
|       | Social aspects  | 38             | 142        |
|       | Strategies for coping   | 15             | 22         |
|       | The Value of the UK degree in participant's local job markets | 19             | 35         |
|       | Using English in Home Country                                 | 16             | 26         |
|       | Using English on campus vs off campus in the UK               | 19             | 37         |
|       | Using English vs Arabic in the UK                             | 23             | 46         |

**Figure 4.4 My Nvivo10 codes**

The term '**Sources**' refers to the number of interviews in which references to a particular code were mentioned. For instance, references to the code 'attitudes towards English' were made in 25 interviews (out of 44).



The term '**References**' refers to the number of quotes which were coded under a particular code. For example, whereas 'attitudes towards English' appeared in 25 interviews (sources), there were 80 references made to this code. However, it is important to note that the number of references may not be accurate because some lines were initially coded under more than one code.

In addition to Nvivo 10 coding, individual codes and the references within them were printed. After that, I used manual colour coding to identify the main strands and sub-topics within these strands which later developed into themes. Although Nvivo10 was a helpful analytic tool, I could not colour code within the codes nor could I highlight the references which were used in the analysis chapter so that I do not use them again. Because of these limitations, I had to combine Nvivo10 coding and manual coding during this phase (see **Appendix 8** for an example). A last note to add here is that the same code was used in more than one finding in the analysis chapter. For example, the 'language education' code had references for **Finding 1** and **Finding 5** in **Chapter 5**.

#### **4.8.2.3 Phases 3, 4, 5: Deriving, reviewing and defining themes**

As a visual learner, I used mind mapping techniques to envisage the relationship between the different codes. This process involved producing several mind maps to visualise the relationships between the codes and to categorise them under possible themes, which later developed into the study's main five findings. Figure 4.5 below shows the final mind map which was used as the basis for writing the findings in **Chapter 5**.

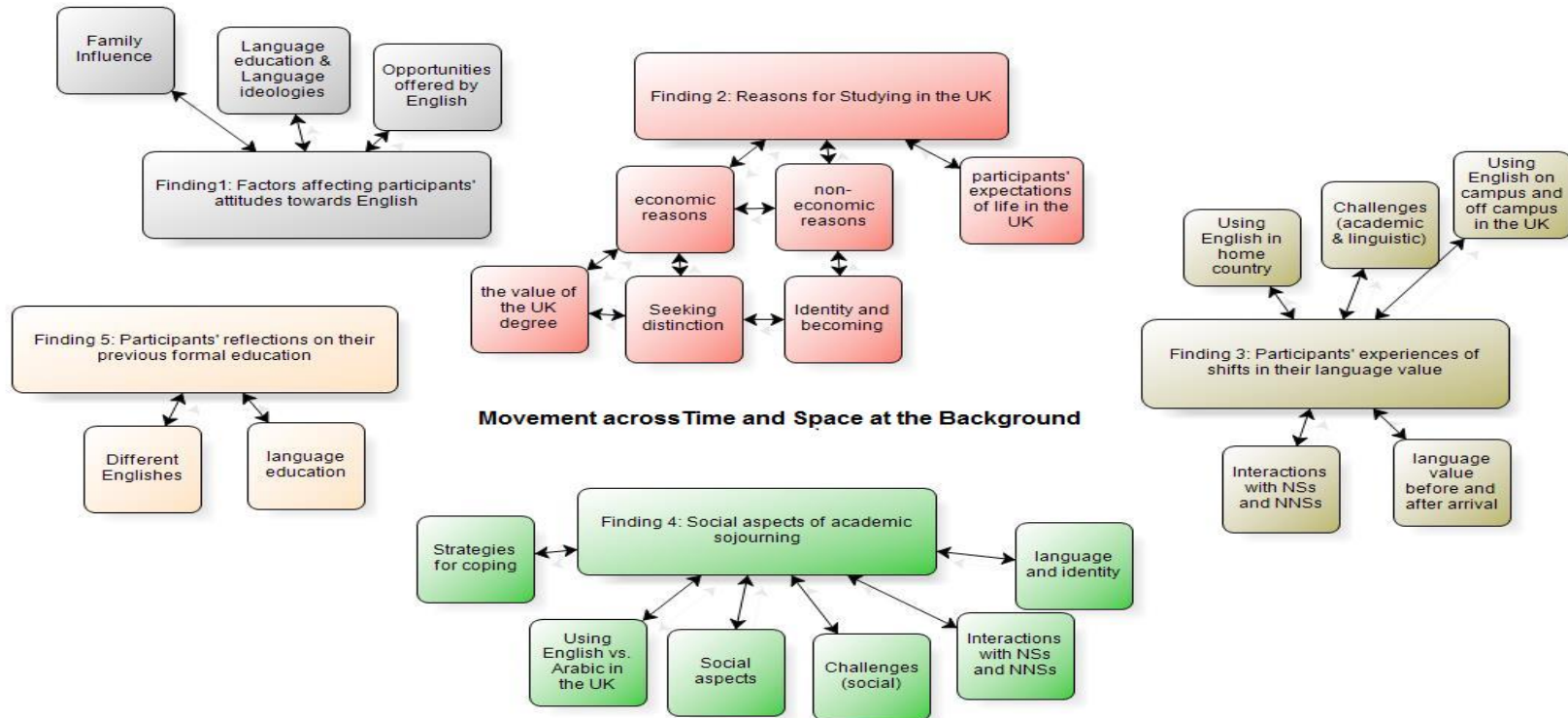


Figure 4.5 Mind map of findings

The mind map above was used as a tool to identify the study's five main findings. They are structured around a cycle to indicate the overlapping and the interconnectedness between them. The symmetrical arrows were used to enforce the idea that the codes led to the emergence of the themes and likewise the themes existed because of the codes.

#### **4.8.2.4 Phase 6: Producing the report**

Although it is tempting to produce a tidy, clear-cut analysis, I was inclined not to package the five findings too tightly in order not to smooth over interesting connections or insights. Also, where attempts were made to produce well-structured findings, there were some headings that did not fit, yet they were included in the spirit of 'celebrate anomalies. They are the windows to insight' (Miller and Crabtree, 1999, p. 142). For instance, **Finding 4**, which discusses social aspects of academic sojourning, concludes with a section on 'personal growth' (section 5.4.3). Although this section does not directly fit in the discussion of the finding, it is still an extension to understanding the influence of the participants' social life in the UK on their own personal growth.

During the process of producing the analysis chapter, I followed some of Holliday's (2010, p. 166) 'dialogic steps' such as asking exploratory questions to delve into the data and its possible interpretations, selecting extracts to support each theme/finding, looking for evidence for my interpretation by looking across and within the cases to identify patterns of similarity or differences. Furthermore, the chosen extracts were embedded within an analytic narrative which seeks to demonstrate the story I am telling about my data. To this end, attempts were made to go beyond the description of data in order to develop a readable argument pertinent to the foci of this research. Next, the discussion chapter takes the analysis further to a more theoretical discussion that engages with the data as well as a plethora of theoretical constructs, which were foregrounded in **Chapter 3**.

## **4.9 Ethical considerations**

Since the study invited human participants and made use of voice recording during pair interviews and individual interviews, it required an official ethical approval. To this end, a 'light touch' ethical application was submitted to the

University of Leeds Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, and the study was ethically approved: ethics reference **LTEDUC-042**. Copies of the ethical approval letter, the information sheet, and the consent form appear in **Appendices 3, 4, and 5**.

Beyond the institutional requirements of assuring anonymity, confidentiality, and the right of withdrawal for any or no reason lies a wide array of issues. As far as anonymity is concerned, the participants' real names were replaced by pseudonyms. This was not a straightforward task because on the one hand the participants signed a consent form which guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. On the other, during the research journey I developed awareness of the politics of naming and how 'confidentiality can be disempowering and silencing, and can contribute to the maintenance of structures of inequality' (Guenther, 2009, p. 414). Still, I decided to use pseudonyms in order not to breach the agreement with the research participants. Because confidentiality exceeds individual level and affects naming places and organisations, I was also faced with the dilemma of hiding or revealing the name of the institution where the study was conducted. Since the study addresses the sociolinguistic trajectories of academic sojourners in a UK HE context, it deemed essential to provide some information about the institution where the study was conducted because different UK universities have different representations of international students. Therefore, providing the name of the institution, i.e. University of Leeds, offers insights into the demographic fabric of the city where the participants lived and this can be an important reference to the study context. Therefore, I decided not to conceal the name of the institution where the study was conducted because:

*Concealing the names of the organisations I study would result in lost meanings as the names of these organisations represent specific histories, goals, and ideologies which even the cleverest pseudonyms would be unlikely to capture.*

(Guenther, 2009, pp. 418-419)

In addition, 4.5.3 above addresses some aspects of the relationship between the researcher and the participants. One of the main features that emerged was reciprocity and how the participants expected to benefit from my presence in their lives. There were also issues of 'researcher's effect' (Lamb, *forthcoming*). Considering that 'the presence and influence of the researcher are unavoidable,

and indeed a *resource*' (Holliday, 2007, p.137, original italics), it is crucial to reflect on my role and my effect on the participants. One of the most salient examples of how I affected some of my participants emerged clearly in the last round of individual interviews with two participants: Hassan and Ameen. Both explained that because I asked them about the value of their UK degree in their countries, the expectations of their families and friends, and their academic progress during the study period, they felt that they should work hard in order to meet the expectations of their parents and to get a good job upon their return. Unaware of how these questions were perceived by them, I had to ask them if I was, in any way, pressuring them by raising these questions. They both explained that these questions were 'good' because they perceived them as reminders of their main mission in the UK.

With reference to data management and storage, all research data were stored on the M-drive (which can only be accessed through my University account) and were accessed externally via 'Desktop anywhere'. The Nvivo10 folders were password protected and they were also stored on the University M-drive.

Finally, drawing on Neale and Hanna's (2012) notion of 'consent as an ongoing process', I used their suggested strategy of 'refresh and remind' to remind the participants of the research focus, what else is expected of them, and their right to withdraw. I also sought permission to record their interviews at the outset of every wave of data generation. In addition, some data came through emails, small talks, and off-recording moments and I was aware that the participants may not have been aware that these can still be research data. Therefore, I took note of these data as 'memos' on Nvivo10 and wrote to the concerned participant to check if it was possible to use this data. These consent practices emerged during the analysis stage and after I had lost face-to-face contact with the participants. This proves the difficulty of determining all ethical practices a priori (Neale and Hanna, 2012) and justifies the need to think of ethics as a process rather than an institutional requirement prior to fieldwork entry.

#### **4.10 Trustworthiness issues**

As articulated in 4.1, the study's meta-theoretical assumptions denote that it is not a call for generalisation, theorisation, or modelling. Rather, it seeks to offer

deep understandings of the impact of movement on sojourner's relationship with English in the UK through investigating vignettes in the participants' sociolinguistic trajectories in the UK. Indeed, qualitative research validation requires techniques that depart from positivist's approaches to knowledge, truth, and what counts as evidence. To this end, Creswell (2013) identifies some validation strategies, of which three techniques have been used in this study:

- Prolonged engagement, which involves building trust, identifying patterns, probing into earlier responses, and checking misinformation.
- Clarifying researcher bias, this shows the researcher's position, comments on past orientations, and implies alternating between insider/outsider positions.
- Relying on presenting rich descriptions, which allows readers to transfer information to other contexts to determine the transferability and resonance of the research findings.

Evidence has been sought through the longitudinal dimension which allowed the researcher to check initial interpretations by probing into earlier interviews and by comparing and contrasting in-case and between-cases data. The longitudinal engagement has also called on me to clarify my positions and to alternate between etic and emic perspectives during the interviews and the analysis stages. This involved being both reflexive and reflective during the writing-up process. In order to seek confirmability, member-checking was used at different intervals of the study. That is to say, the longitudinal dimension of the study allowed the possibility of confirming my interpretations of what was said during earlier interviews.

## **Summary**

This chapter has discussed and traced the evolution of the methodological design of this study. It presented the rationale behind my data generation and data analysis procedures and illustrated the stages that led to the emergence of the study's findings. It aimed to document a messy, iterative and complex process through a rigorous task of reporting on, justifying and clarifying decisions and procedures while engaging with the relevant literature on qualitative research. Taken together, this chapter is the result of striving for a transparent 'audit trail'

(Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 319), which, in itself, contributes to the trustworthiness of the study.

The following chapter reports on the study's five key findings, which will ultimately leak into one another in a cyclical process of meaning-making. This useful 'leakage' is an analytic extension to a theoretical quest for studying academic sojourners as whole people with whole lives (following Coleman, 2013).

## Chapter 5: Research findings

### Introduction

This chapter thematically presents the study's five main findings and engages with the research data to identify the similarities and differences between the participants in order to underline key features in the sociolinguistic trajectories of the research participants. The findings are presented sequentially and are ordered chronologically in line with a wider trajectory metaphor in order to provide a readable and engaging narrative. The study's five findings are:

**Finding 1:** Factors affecting academic sojourners' attitudes towards English.

**Finding 2:** Reasons for studying in UK HE.

**Finding 3:** Academic sojourners' experiences of shifts in their language values.

**Finding 4:** Social aspects of academic sojourning.

**Finding 5:** Academic sojourners' reflections on their previous formal education.

I will typically engage with the thematic description of the findings and provide quotes from the dataset to provide examples, illustrations, evidence, or clarification. Whereas I will leave most of the theoretical discussion to **Chapter 6**, some sections of this chapter will be more theorised for two reasons: (1). I will rely on aspects of theoretical threading to hold arguments together within and across the findings and the chapters. (2). Some sections of the analysis are more theorised due to the nature of the topic in question. For instance, in section 5.3.2 on the implications of value shifts on sojourners' identity and self-expression, I will address identity work in light of my proposed modification to Benson's et al. (2013) 'facets of identity' presented in 3.3.4. This theoretical discussion of identity work is presented here in order to avoid presenting many new extracts in the discussion chapter.

### 5.1 Finding 1: Factors affecting Academic Sojourners' attitudes towards English

#### Introduction

This section discusses the factors that contributed to shaping participants' attitudes towards English before and after their arrival in the UK by investigating



how the participants talked about their language history, the circumstances under which they were taught or encouraged to learn English, and the implications of their presence in the UK on their long-held views towards English. To this end, the thematic analysis of the dataset features the emergence of four factors that significantly contributed to shaping these attitudes. The four factors are:

- Family influence
- Language ideologies
- Past opportunities offered by English in home countries
- Moving across time and space

This section delves into these factors and how the participants talked about the influence of such factors on their English language learning trajectories.

### 5.1.1 Family influence

In response to questions about participants' language history, familial upbringing surfaced as a major factor contributing to participants' English language education and the attitudes towards being able to speak English. All participants explained that their parents have always associated English with more promising career prospects and study abroad opportunities. Because of such perceptions, the participants were made aware that they needed to speak English to obtain many future benefits. In order to be offered better English language education, all participants explained that they were sent to study in private schools at some point of their life. Linking better English language education with private schools is a pan-regional trend that was mentioned by all participants. The following quotes from Reem and Asma are representative of (a) the influence of family upbringing and (b) the importance of being educated in a private school:

My mother is a language teacher and her **focus** was to teach me English... she saw how important English is in our society and she wanted her children to speak English. That is why she sent us to private schools [Reem, Pair Interview].

For me, I started from grade one in a private school. English was important and attractive. We studied different curricula from those taught in government schools. I felt that I was distinguished and that I am better than others..... My family wanted me to study something different [Asma, Pair Interview].

Considering that all participants attended private schools at some point of their educational lives, they were asked to talk about the difference between private schools and government schools with reference to English language education. In the first quote below, Mahmoud spoke on the difference his private high school made in his life and how joining that particular school was a threshold to a better learning experience that subsequently allowed him to study in the UK:

M: But for me, from grade one to grade nine, I did not speak any English except for **yes** and **no**. Then I joined [a private] High school. They have intensive courses (15 hours/w). I started learning **grammar** and **spelling** to prepare for **IELTS** exams.

K: Um.. What happened in your early years of schooling? Why didn't you learn any English from grade one to nine?

M: I attended a model school which is only for UAE citizens. I am from a city .... which has a high Emirati population unlike Dubai or Abu Dhabi. We deal with Asians not Westerners. And all what I learned from Grade one to nine was in Arabic even English was taught in Arabic [Mahmoud, Pair Interview].

Like Mahmoud, Ameen commented on how privileged he felt he was in comparison with his Omani peers who were educated in mainstream schools. He also provided further insights into the differences between private schools and mainstream schools in Oman:

A: In private schools, everything is done and taught in English. You see the government should help those who study in governmental schools by offering them more courses in English. Our teachers in my private school were from India and South Africa which means that we had to speak with them in English. My Omani classmates have come from governmental schools and they feel that there is a big difference between my level and theirs [Ameen, 2<sup>nd</sup>]

In addition, family influence was a major reason for choosing to study in the UK. The participants expressed personal, instrumental, and non-instrumental reasons to undertake this journey (as will be addressed in 5.2); still at the heart of these reasons came the influence of family expectations. All participants pointed out that their families wanted them to come home with a UK degree and English proficiency that is both strong and of a high prestige variety. For instance, Hassan's family asked him to prove to them that his English improved in the UK by taking the IELTS at the end of his foundation year:

They want me to be better. They like to hear the word **IELTS** and they want me to get above the **required IELTS** score. I am now convinced that **IELTS** is not predictable and the result can be surprising or shocking. For my family, a higher **IELTS** score is the criterion to measure my improvement. They want me to take the **IELTS** now and I told them that I do not need to take it, but they want to make sure that my English has improved [5<sup>th</sup>].

Another example comes from Asma who upon arrival in the UK shared some of her language-related problems with her mother. In response, her mother was disappointed to hear Asma's challenges because she had assumed that sending her daughter to a private school would mean a smoother journey abroad.

In fact, all participants reported that their parents had very high expectations of them including commanding English skills and straight A's in their modules. These expectations added a lot of pressure on the participants who, in turn, shielded their struggles from their parents to avoid disappointing them. They were not only grappling with English but also with understanding the British marking system.

It seems clear that family influence has shaped participants' attitude towards the importance of English in their lives. They came to the UK with the understanding that English is crucial for their academic, professional, and personal success. When asked whether they agreed with their parents' efforts to offer them better English language education, all participants showed a deep sense of gratitude for what their parents did. They agreed with their parents that they needed English. The disagreement, however, occurred when they arrived in the UK only to realise that they still had a long way to go, and this made them understand that, unlike their parents' expectations, coming to the UK does not necessarily mean returning home speaking English as a native speaker. These new realisations and the implications thereof are discussed in 5.3 and 5.5.

### **5.1.2 Language ideologies**

As seen in **Chapter 3**, language ideologies link language with issues of power, identity and epistemology (Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity, 1998). Therefore, in order to better understand participants' attitudes towards English, it is worth investigating the references they made towards what they thought of English. To start with, there was an unsurprising sentiment across all profiles that English was associated with jobs and success. However, some participants expressed

their dissatisfaction with the role that English has in their lives. Mahmoud's comment below is a case in point:

I need English because it is an international language, a requirement for work, and when we go anywhere we can use it. It facilitates our daily tasks. Am I happy to speak it? No, I am obliged to use it [Pair Interview].

Similarly, Reem referred to her society as 'superficial' because it exaggerates the importance of English and overlooks other important factors such as academic qualifications and professional experience. She explained that the majority of employers prioritise commanding English skills, even if announced vacancies do not specifically require a high level of English proficiency, and how this places a lot of pressure on university graduates who may have excelled in their disciplines but remain disempowered if they lack English proficiency.

Consequently, the job market's focus on English makes families, graduates, and educators link English with positive and empowering functions: travel, communication, jobs, study abroad, better economic lives, wider intellectual and cultural horizons. For this reason, when a university degree is offered in English and in Arabic, many students prefer the English degree because they think it is more valuable, even when both of them offer the same modules and theoretical concepts. Amjad describes why he took the English degree route:

That [coming to the UK] was my ambition since year 1 of my undergraduate. I studied and enjoyed English. I planned to study in English then work in a job that requires English. I wanted to stand out and that is why I chose to study commerce in English even though it was also offered in Arabic. My friends struggled with English. I did not have problems and my main aim was to travel abroad and study in English [Pair Interview].

Hassan perceived things differently. He did not choose to study in English or to come to the UK; rather, he referred to this as the norm in his country:

**It's the language of jobs so we are more focused on English so when we finished high school we should focus on going to the US or Britain universities, so we need IELTS or TOEFL to apply there**<sup>10</sup> [Pair Interview].

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<sup>10</sup> The interview was in English.

Although Mahmoud was critical of the role of English in his life; he continued to perceive it as a means to become 'someone':

I told you that I want to be **someone** like a **manager**. I want to speak in conferences. The English I speak now is Arabic translated into English. It is an Arabic accent and I am not happy with it.....I wish one day I will be able to speak English as fast and fluent as I speak Arabic [5<sup>th</sup>].

Mahmoud is an example of how bilinguals could take their first language for granted and how they tend to look at the other side of the fence where the greener picture means speaking English like a native speaker. Because of such linguistic goals, Mahmoud's last interview reflected his frustration after a period of nine months in the UK:

Where is the English that I learned here? I still speak the English I learned at school. Where is the English that will make me **modern** in front of everyone? I don't know where the problem is [5<sup>th</sup>].

Once again, Mahmoud's attitudes towards the English he would like to speak is an exemplar of the kind of English that his society appreciates and perhaps expects him to return home with. In this way, Mahmoud perceived 'good' English as something he did not already have.

Mahmoud was not alone in aiming at speaking English as a native speaker. All participants agreed that NSE was the ideal level that an English learner can achieve. What simulated different responses, however, was when they talked about the kind of English they wanted to speak. Both Dalal and Reem explained that they preferred to speak American English because they got used to it by virtue of media exposure and the prominent political role that the USA has in the Middle East. In addition, Dalal explained that she did not want to go back to KSA speaking Yorkshire English because she would need to stay in the UK for years before she could understand it. She also explained that teaching local dialects to learners of English in KSA would make language education unnecessarily complex. Similarly, Kholoud mentioned that her American English was well-received in Oman and even though it was perceived as 'weird' in the UK, she was not willing to change it because 'America is a strong country after all' [5<sup>th</sup>].

On the other hand, Amjad and Ameen wanted to speak the 'London accent' because it is the 'Standard' accent. What is noteworthy here is that Amjad had not visited London before and Ameen visited London once. Therefore, their perceptions of the 'London accent' might have come from their previous language education. Amjad perceived the 'London accent' as 'the most **prestigious** accent' and because he wanted to speak a 'universal English':

AM: I want to speak a universal English not like the local English here and I want my English to be between the British and the American English.

K: Is there a universal English standing between the British and the American?

AM: I don't know [*Pair Interview*]

Asma, Mahmoud and Hassan changed their views at the end of the nine-month period. They started by preferring American English, which could be an initial reaction to their unfamiliarity with Yorkshire English. They were anxious that they did not understand what was said to them, and wished they had studied in the USA. Towards the end of the study, they explained that their idea of 'best' English changed and that they preferred any English which is easy to understand:

K: Is American English still better than British English for you?

HA: It depends on the person and how he can convey the message [5<sup>th</sup>].

Hassan's response reflects a deeper linguistic awareness. Like other participants, he used to believe that American English is just a single variety. Initially, the varieties of English spoken around him in Leeds made him feel that British English is difficult. However, towards the end of the study, Hassan understood that the intelligibility of an accent depends on its speaker and that language is a complex, heterogeneous system and therefore the intelligibility of a variety very much depends on its speaker and his or her strategies to 'convey the message'.

The last area to visit here is how the participants perceived their linguistic repertoires, namely the relationship between their English vis-à-vis Arabic. As discussed earlier, English was associated with benefits and was metaphorically

described by Amjad as ‘a weapon that one can use whenever it is needed’ [3<sup>rd</sup>]. On the other hand, Arabic was associated with emotions, self-expression, and self-defence. Mahmoud’s following quote expresses this point clearly:

I wish I can speak English in a way that represents me. I feel that I am acting the role of someone else when I speak English. English does not represent me and I cannot defend myself using English. It is not associated with my feelings. I use it only to get things done [5<sup>th</sup>].

In addition, all participants valued their diverse linguistic resources as an advantage to enable them to have wider horizons, and to have access to more people and sources of knowledge. Nevertheless, Asma, Amjad and Mahmoud referred to the politics of language and mentioned that Arabic has ceased to be an influential language:

Arabic is nothing. Most people in the world speak English. Arabic is not widespread in the world [Asma, Pair Interview]

To cut a long story short, language ideologies influence individual’s perceptions of the languages they speak. It seems apparent that the research participants have associated English and Arabic with particular functions and meanings, and coming to the UK did not seem to have changed these associations. Yet, it can be argued that coming to the UK might have cleared the foggy images they used to have about English and ‘imagined’ Britain and thus contributed to the emergence of new conceptualisations of English as will be addressed in 5.3 and 5.5.

### **5.1.3 Past opportunities offered by English in home countries**

The past opportunities English offered the participants in their home countries was another factor that contributed to their attitudes towards English. All research participants used their English in their home countries and they were aware of what their English offered them. This, in itself, was a personal testimony that they related to when they discussed their linguistic repertoires and how their English enriched their life choices prior to coming to the UK.

For all participants, English was the key to passing IELTS with the required score, skipping the condition of taking pre-sessional English courses, getting a UK visa,

and winning a scholarship to fund their studies (except for Reem, the only self-funded participant). Being able to avoid such powerful gate-keepers was achieved because they had 'enough' English, whose level was determined by institutional requirements. The first and most recurring response to 'what opportunities did English offer you?' was 'the fact that I am here now'.

Four participants had previous work experience before starting their Master's degree in the UK. They all reported that without their English, they would have not managed to get their jobs. So when they referred to English as 'the language of jobs', they were actually reflecting on a personal, lived experience; rather than repeating a cliché they had learned from their environments. The following quote from Reem explains that she would have been 'a different person' had she not spoken English:

If I did not speak English, I would struggle **in general**. I would not have managed to get on a Master's course without a foundation year. I would not have the secondary school certificate, I would have studied a different major at university, I could have studied anything that does not require English skills to avoid the language. Without English, I could not get the job in the bank, would not come here to study and in fact **I could have been a different person** [5<sup>th</sup>].

The other four participants did not have work experience in their home countries, still their English enabled them to participate in international events, communicate with English speakers online, pass exams with good marks, and take part in school projects. For example, Kholoud, Ameen, and Hassan talked about how privileged they felt at school because they were better at English than their peers:

**I spoke in assembly speeches and in English classes it was very easy to get high marks and easier presentations**<sup>11</sup>  
[Kholoud: pair Interview].

**Well, for me I joined a lot of projects. I was the school representative at my academy** <sup>12</sup>**so they made me join other, what they call it... [Arabic for exhibitions]... I was in opening exhibitions, including open days in our school every year. They all make us do speeches in UAE for marketing by just trying to tell about the academy and we also meet with foreigners and other people abroad** [Hassan: Pair Interview].

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<sup>11</sup> These interviews with Kholoud and Hassan were in English

<sup>12</sup> I removed the name of his private school



The last participant comes from a family whose members were unable to join higher education institutions because they did not speak English. His family wanted him to be different. Mahmoud talked about his journey and how he thrived to join a higher education institution:

Well, in my family, I am the only speaker of English. Some family members did not complete their university degrees because of English and the **IELTS**. My concern was to get 5.5 in **IELTS** to skip the foundation year. I got 5.5, and reached my goal. I studied hard in high school and my family wanted us to learn English because it is required for careers in the future [Pair Interview].

From what the participants said, it is clear that their attitudes towards English have been considerably affected by incidents from their personal trajectories. Such attitudes are not isolated from the impact of family or society influence. Instead, both personal experiences and societal influences back the ideology that English is a powerful gate-keeping device and hence one of the current 'mechanisms of social closure' (Reay et al., 2005) or what Heller and Duchêne (2012, p.4) refer to as 'mechanisms of social selection'. The next section investigates how participants' attitudes towards English were also affected by the act of moving across time and space to study in UK HE.

#### **5.1.4 Moving across time and space**

Moving across time and space incorporates moving from 'imagined' Britain to 'real' Britain. It offers individuals the opportunity to test their previously held attitudes towards their English and their linguistic goals and views. The participants were actively involved in reflecting on how they used to think of English and what English started to mean to them in the UK. At the beginning of the study, all participants spoke about how willing they were to improve their accents in order to sound like native speakers of English. Gradually, the focus shifted from 'accent-improvement' to trying to learn more vocabulary, better academic writing skills, and how to be fluent. This gradual, rather realistic, shift is noticed throughout all participants' profiles.

In his first individual interview, Mahmoud wished people would think he was British: 'they might think that I am from them which is wow'. However, after five

months of staying in the UK and in his fourth individual interview, he dramatically changed his opinion when he said:

I don't want to sound like a British person because they are not the best and their accent is difficult but I want to speak better English because it can offer me good opportunities [4<sup>th</sup>].

Mahmoud expected that coming to the UK was an opportunity to learn English from scratch. Later, he realised that the English input he received in the UK was rather limited and that he needed to make use of that input to improve his English and to get his degree. He referred to his English as a 'building' whose bases were established in UAE and whose decorations can be added in the UK:

I expected that when I come to the UK, I will learn English. But this is not true, I am here to complete my university education. This is the first point. Second, I learned that I cannot learn English from scratch here because I already have a building and I need to improve it and decorate it. I have the bases and I need to complete this building. This is what I learned from the UK. When I go back to UAE, I want to go home with a complete building... I imagined that I will learn English from scratch and will speak perfect English. I didn't imagine that I will have problems with the British people.. they will not understand me. I thought I will learn everything here [1<sup>st</sup>].

Mahmoud's expectations of 'establishing' a new linguistic 'building' in the UK were similar to other participants' expectations. However, confronted with their academic and social trajectories, they started to talk about 'realistic' expectations as opposed to their previous predictions of life and study in the UK about which they now felt disillusioned.

Another important reference to a change of attitudes towards English was made when Mahmoud started to feel that he was no longer forced to use English in his life. Rather, he could choose when to use it. He mentioned examples of how English started to perform different functions in the UK e.g. it becomes his language of confrontation that allows him to express his feelings in serious and embarrassing situations:

After a year in the UK, I can say **no** I am not obliged. I have the option and it is even more comfortable than Arabic sometimes. When I chat with my friends, I sometimes feel that using English is easier because there are things that I will not say in Arabic but I can say in English because English does not mean anything to

me as a language and it does not have **feelings** so I can use it in embarrassing situations without being embarrassed... When I am **serious** and I want to say things freely and honestly without being too diplomatic, I say them in English. They seem less harsh [5<sup>th</sup>].

In light of the previous quote, it is apparent that Mahmoud was consciously making decisions as to when and how to use his English. He expressed agency and ability to embrace his linguistic repertoires to make personal and ideological statements. He no longer viewed himself as a passive speaker who was forced to learn English because it happened to be the language of future academic and professional development.

In a similar vein, Asma's last individual interview reflected how using English in her life in the UK has made her think of English in a different way. She demonstrated that English was no longer a mere tool for communication; she could 'taste' the language now and she could differentiate between a strong and a weak style:

I started to feel the words. Before coming here language for me has no feelings. I just learn the word, its meaning, its usage and there was no relationship between me and the language. Now, there is a relationship. When I read, I taste the words and I can tell if this writing is beautiful and eloquent or not. I now can differentiate between the styles of different writers. This feeling came to me after I started to use the language more. This happened here [4<sup>th</sup>].

For Asma, using English in the UK enabled her to see the difference between using English in a non-English context and being immersed in an English environment. Her lived reality made her aware of how words are used, and put together to form spoken and written expressions that she did not use before. She was amazed at how people use the words she knew before in a different way and a different context. As a result, she concluded that English as a language cannot be separated from the culture of the people who speak it:

I mean I realised after coming here that some of the words we learned in my country are not even used here. People use different words and this is part of their culture.. Maybe if we learned the same way people use English here, things could have been better.... For example the word 'rent', people here use the word 'to let'. I saw the sign 'to let' on a lot of houses and I did not know what it meant. I knew the word 'let' before coming here,

of course, but I did not know that it is used here to mean 'rent' [5<sup>th</sup>].

Furthermore, Asma chose not to be a silent sufferer. She explained that she immersed herself in a process of self-reflection in an attempt to analyse the reasons behind some of the challenges she faced. To illustrate, she pointed that communication with British speakers can be challenging not only because of the language barrier, but also because people coming from different cultures tend to think and react differently. This awareness made her less anxious about her language and more aware that there are more intricate factors that affect cross-cultural communication:

At the beginning I felt there was something wrong but I did not know what it was. Gradually, I started to discover the changes in the way of thinking and speaking between me and others. This means that my processing is different from theirs so the output has to be different [5<sup>th</sup>].

For Amjad, coming to the UK made him realise that there is no particular language level where learners can assume that they have had enough. Amjad's journey opened his eyes to see that he still had a long way to go with language learning:

I mean I used to consider language as a tool and that I should reach a certain level to reach my goal and my goal was not the language. Language was just a means and for that reason I stopped at a certain level... My way of looking at language has changed slightly. There is no doubt it is a means but in the UK it is more than a means and I am convinced that I need to improve my level but even if I try to improve my English more and more, it won't be enough and I will still need a lot. I started to feel that I have a long way to go [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Amjad was not alone in realising that he still needed to improve his English, as using English in an English-speaking country differs from using it as a foreign language. As a matter of fact, all participants expressed a sense of frustration that their English did not help them as they used to believe. When Reem was interviewed following her first term results, she started doubting the admission criteria at UK HE institutions. For her, and many other participants, achieving the required IELTS score used to reassure them that they could survive in UK academic and non-academic environments. Put in other words, prior to their

arrival in the UK, all participants used to believe that meeting the IELTS cut-off score means crossing the language barrier peacefully. This belief was a major factor that affected their attitudes towards *their* English before coming to the UK. Overwhelmed by the high linguistic expectations expected from them in UK HE, the participants appeared to have lost faith in how they used to think of their English. The following testimony from Reem addresses this point:

It [English] did not help me as much as I expected. When I saw my marks and my English, I started to ask myself why they accepted me to study here. I don't know **honestly**. I don't want to lie to you and I know you need **realistic data**. I don't know why they accepted me. I mean my English level is much better than that of many other girls in my country. I have better writing and speaking skills, but when I came here I realised that my English is not average. It is below average. This is what I see now [3<sup>rd</sup>].

**Finding 3** sheds light on detailed accounts of participants' experiences of shifts in language value and the implications thereof on their identity and self-expression. Suffice to say that moving across time and space has shaken some previously held attitudes towards English and personal ownership of 'enough' levels of English. What is more is the role English used to play in participants' lives in their countries was not sustained when they arrived in the UK. This can be seen as a prominent paradox that deserves further attention. Shortly after arriving in the UK, participants' interviews were about the past opportunities English offered them in their home countries. All participants were passionate about their English, appreciative of how it helped them to succeed in their countries, and conscious that it is all because of their English that they managed to compete, win scholarships, obtain a UK visa, and finally land in the UK. They talked about how much they used their English in their countries and how that used to be a source of pride for them. For example, in his first pair interview, Hassan was proud that his English level was the reason why he was chosen as the school representative:

K: How did that make you feel about yourself as an Arabic speaker of English?

H: Confident and cheerful to join this thing. A bit nervous, but it's an opportunity to have fun and to meet with foreigners [Pair Interview]

However, living in the UK seemed to have changed how the participants felt about their English. They appeared less passionate about using it and described it as a mere tool to get things done. In fact, some explained that they used more English in their countries. The following quote comes from Hassan and reflects the dramatic change in how he perceived English towards the end of his first academic year in the UK:

It [English] does not represent me. I don't rely on English a lot here. I only use it when I have to and I use it to get things done and to get my message delivered [5<sup>th</sup>].

It is important to highlight that Hassan's first three interviews were in English, but the last three interviews were in Arabic. This could indicate that he started to be less passionate about his English and perhaps this is attributed to his unpredictable experiences of value shifts and the difficulties of socialising and making friends with home students. Both issues will be addressed in further detail in 5.3 and 5.4.

## **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, this section has described the intricate factors that, altogether, affected academic sojourners' attitudes towards English. It has highlighted how the participants arrived in the UK with some expectations and beliefs that they had developed through their previous language education or by virtue of prevailing language ideologies in their contexts. Moving to real Britain, on the other hand, offered them the opportunity to verify their previous expectations and as seen in this finding, this journey has opened the participants' eyes to see the gap between *using* English and *learning* English.

## **5.2 Finding 2: Reasons for studying in UK HE**

### **Introduction**

The narratives and profiles of the research participants featured various motives for their study abroad journeys. As discussed in 3.3.1, investigating reasons for studying abroad brings insights from different disciplines such as migration research, psychology, sociology, and applied linguistics. Because the study draws on the economic metaphor of 'exchange value', the 'human capital' notion

has been a pivotal reference point while coding and analysing the data. Therefore, my overarching categorisation was based on instrumental vs. non-instrumental reasons for studying in UK HE and this categorisation incorporates aspects of motivation, subjectivity, and becoming as will be seen later in this section. However, the problem with this broad categorisation is that it cannot be used to explain or justify many other reasons that lie in between. Therefore, this section starts by describing some instrumental reasons that motivated the participants to study abroad. After that, it addresses non-instrumental reasons. The last section problematises this dichotomy by featuring the overlap between these two categories.

### **5.2.1 Instrumental reasons**

As discussed in 3.3.1, instrumentalism refers to using particular skills to achieve utilitarian goals such as economic benefits, social mobility, and personal development, etc. Using instrumentalism as a drive for a particular behaviour fits with the new neoliberal order (Fairclough, 2000) that describes the world we live in today. In response to why they decided to study in the UK, participants' responses described a wide range of instrumental reasons which operated at different, quite nuanced, and multi-faceted levels of instrumentality. Some of these reasons related to instrumentality in simple terms whereas others are indirectly connected to expected instrumental outcomes, as will be seen in this section. Irrespective of these layers of instrumentality, it is worth mentioning that the participants themselves were uncertain whether the perceived benefits of studying in the UK are guaranteed or not. This is expected to remain a grey area until they go back to their countries and apply for jobs there.

The most salient instrumental reason for studying in UK HE is to gain economic benefits. At root, this refers to improving one's employability chances. To this end, research participants identified various factors of economic, instrumental value which, altogether, can make them more employable in their increasingly competitive job markets. These factors are: English in an English-speaking environment, the academic 'brand' of their UK university, and their UK life experiences.

### 5.2.1.1 English in an English-speaking environment

Improving one's English in an English speaking environment emerged as a key reason for why the participants decided to pursue their studies in UK HE. Amjad referred to the UK as 'the country of English and Western Civilisation' [1<sup>st</sup>] and argued that even though there are many graduates who have similar academic degrees from local universities in Palestine, the fact that he studied in English and in the UK makes him different from other graduates:

The only difference between me and those graduates is English. This will give me advantage. Of course not everyone will appreciate my UK degree and some might say so what? Why are you better than me? I will say I am better because of the language. English is my **strength** [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Amjad wanted to work in a local university in Palestine when he goes back and he saw in his English skills a potential opportunity:

Many faculties in my university wanted to offer more courses in English but they could not because they do not have **teaching staff** who can teach in English [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Although Ameen shared the same vision, he noted that he needed to speak a high prestige native speaker variety in order for his English to be appreciated:

For me, it does not matter which accent I speak, but when it comes to job opportunities, things are different in Oman because English is required and not any English will be accepted [1<sup>st</sup>].

Here, Ameen understood the pressure of trying to speak an accent that attracts a higher economic value in his field even though he himself explained that he was not concerned about trying to have a native-like English accent. To his advantage, his presence in the UK could be used as a distinction marker, suggesting that he might possess better language skills. He wanted to be employed at a petroleum company and pointed that these are prestigious companies whose staff are mainly British; therefore, they recruit individuals who have excellent English skills. He was particularly attracted to these companies because they offer high salaries and employ competitive candidates in a transparent process. Therefore, the key for him was to graduate with good grades but most importantly with better and prestigious English.



For Mahmoud, coming to the UK means widening his English vocabulary and having more than just academic words. He compared himself with other Emirati graduates who studied engineering in local universities and explained that although they also study engineering in English, he, as a student in the UK, has more vocabulary because he lived in the UK and used English in his daily life. He concluded 'you see I have both [*academic and daily-life vocabulary*] here so I am different' [4<sup>th</sup>]. Mahmoud's focus on being 'different' sprung from his willingness to distinguish himself in a highly competitive job market where speaking English is no longer a way to stand out from the crowd. Therefore, he believed that he owned a different form of linguistic capital that enables him to use 'daily-life vocabulary' because he studied in the UK.

Similarly, Asma mentioned that with the English skills she developed in the UK, she has had 'the **maximum**' of what is required in her local job market:

If I am in a country where there is only one language and English is the only foreign language, I will have better opportunities. This is the situation in my country and that is why I feel that with my English, I have the **maximum** of what is available in the market. ... In my country, English is the criterion. People either speak Arabic only or Arabic with some English [5<sup>th</sup>].

Asma understood that the linguistic capital she needed in her country would not be enough in different contexts. That is why she carefully articulated her views by stressing that her English, in comparison with the general English proficiency level in her country, was more likely to satisfy the requirements of employment in her local job market.

Dalal's journey to study in the UK was not her choice. She explained that she was obliged to pursue her higher studies in the UK in order to keep her position as a lecturer at a Saudi university. She wanted to do her Master degree in an Arabic university but that was not approved of by her department which insisted on sending her to an English-speaking country, with the assumption that the only way to improve the English skills of their staff is to send them to the UK. Dalal's actual UK experience, on the other hand, indicates that this is a misconception that overlooks the social hurdles faced by many Arab academic sojourners in the UK, as will be seen in 5.4. Still, Dalal had to make this journey for the sake of keeping her job. Therefore, it is important to explain that unlike other participants, Dalal came to study in the UK for instrumental reasons which were not her own.

In addition, Kholoud saw in her UK journey a different way to improve her English. She was confident that she owned enough English to make her employable. However, she was determined to come to the UK to learn slang and daily life idiomatic expressions. Besides having better academic writing skills, improving her idiomatic expressions was her way of broadening her repertoires. As the majority of students strive to improve their general language skills, she wanted to access what she described as the higher next level of language learning which she hoped to gain access to by virtue of living and studying in the UK.

#### 5.2.1.2 The academic 'brand' of participants' UK university

Even though the eight research participants came from five different Arab countries, they all mentioned that when they considered studying in the UK they had to choose a university from a list. These are lists issued by Ministries of (Higher) Education and they include the universities whose degrees can be verified and accepted in the participants' countries. The criteria for including or excluding universities are not necessarily clear but at the heart of these criteria come academic ranking and tuition fees (rates for international students). Whereas the academic ranking is believed to offer a guarantee of a good academic student experience, offering different tuition fee rates for international students can be seen as a competition among UK universities which try to offer discounted rates for international students coming from particular countries. Such 'deals' attract Arab sponsors to stick to a short list of UK universities. Considering that all research participants, except for Reem, were sponsored by their employers, governmental or non-governmental foundations, previous universities/academies, or even companies, they were asked to choose a UK HE institution from their lists. Evidently, the University of Leeds was listed on all the lists offered to the seven participants who came from five different countries. Ameen explained this process briefly when he said:

A: I wanted to go to the USA but all the universities on the list which has the names of foreign universities to which the government can send and sponsor students, have lower ranking than the **University of Leeds**. I wanted to go to **California University** but I was told that it will be removed from the list so I had to choose a different university.

K: Can you tell me more about this list?

A: This is a list of the universities which the Omani Ministry of Education can send sponsored students to. It has almost 42

American universities and 10 UK universities. The UK universities on the list have higher academic ranking. And because the **fees** in the USA differ considerably from a university to another, choosing among UK universities where the **fees** difference is not that big, is easier.

K: On what basis does the Omani Ministry choose these universities to be on their list?

A: They tell us that it is based on the **ranking**. Also, there are agreements with those universities to reduce the fees if more students are sent [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Overall, the process of choosing an academic institution from a list deeply entrenches the ideology of academic branding which can make academic sojourners believe that the name of their UK University is a guarantor that they would become employable once they graduate. Indeed, trust in the University of Leeds' 'brand', as one of the Russell Group universities, can be seen as a major instrumental reason for studying in the UK. In line with this mind-set, Kholoud illustrated that:

**I think the degree from Leeds is the most important thing. I am not worried about jobs that require English but when they see a certificate from Leeds, this will increase my opportunity to be hired [4<sup>th</sup>].**

Likewise, Hassan pointed that that if a Qatari student graduates from a university that belongs to the list, s/he will be considered as someone with a degree. He insisted that he did not want to go home with a degree from an 'easy' university. Additionally, Dalal not only stressed the high reputation of the University of Leeds, but also accentuated the importance of being taught by leading experts in the field of translation whose books are taught worldwide. She boasted that she did not just read their books; she was taught by them and this would make her different from other students who studied English/Arabic translation else where.

Reem had fewer restrictions because she was the only self-funded participant. Still, she wanted to study at a university that has a good reputation. She asserted that the University of Leeds is one of the top universities and that her colleagues at work were impressed when they knew that she was going to study there. Besides being aware of the academic brand of her UK institution, she was also aware of the commodification of knowledge, experience, and degrees in her society:

...of course, I'd like to improve my chances by my degree because our job market deals with degrees more than experiences. Undocumented experiences don't count even if the person has experiences better than a **PhD**. You have to have a title in front of your name (**Dr.**) in order to be someone and to receive good treatment. Our society does not appreciate experiences and someone without a degree will be nothing [4<sup>th</sup>].

Reem was disturbed that she was caught in a neoliberal trap where she had to work hard to have a title in front of her name, without which she complained that she would not be a recognised individual. Although she was uncertain how this is going to help her, she decided to have a degree from a highly recognised institution to 'document' her academic experience.

On the other hand, the remaining participants, Asma, Amjad, and Mahmoud, were sceptical about the value of their UK degrees. They did not think the academic brand of their university would make a big difference. They admitted that the presence of other complicated issues will ultimately affect their employability chances in their countries. This scepticism will be discussed in 5.2.3.

### **5.2.1.3 Participants' UK life experiences**

While this section dwells on elements of personal growth and development, it frames these aspects within the scope of transforming them into economic value, as part of the wider metaphor of human capital. Theoretically speaking, linking one's experiences with becoming more employable reflects deep awareness and understanding of the dynamics of competition in the job market and offers a new layer of instrumental motivation. Most research participants were capable of doing this and in fact they saw in their unique UK experiences a means of becoming distinguished candidates in their competitive job market.

The following quote from Kholoud is an exemplar of how she perceived the impact of living abroad on how she has become and the implications of this on her employability chances:

**Me: What makes you distinguished when you go home?**

**K: I think that is to do with everything. The degree, the English, the experiences here that make me different. I mean every day experiences. What happened and stuff and how I deal with things. All the things that I go through here are part**

**of what I have become and I think girls in my age in Oman do not see these experiences. Those build my personality. The way I am living makes me what I am. It is like what I see every day can affect me. I am more open-minded now because of what I see here, and I knew that this is going to happen and that this is the advantage of living abroad [4<sup>th</sup>].**

The quote above is an illustration of dialogic approaches to becoming (Harvey, 2014 on Bakhtin's 'ideological becoming'). She described the interaction between her experiences and her becoming in study abroad contexts as an advantage that she was prepared for. At the same time, she compared herself with other Omani girls and concluded that she has become different by virtue of her UK experiences.

Moreover, Hassan demonstrated that his self-reliance would continue even after he goes back to his country. He explained that he wanted to work in companies and wanted to show his seniors that he had learned how to interact with people coming from different cultures. He believed that his UK experiences would enable him to interact with his managers and colleagues in a professional way. He highlighted the importance of his UK experiences after he mentioned how Qatari universities are known for their strict admission policies and how their graduates are highly trusted. Still, since he was not able to meet the Qatari admission criteria, he wanted to foreground the idea that he also studied in a strong university and his academic sojourn experiences have made him more self-reliant and culturally-aware, which could contribute to making him a competitive individual.

Asma continued to dwell on her improved critical thinking skills to illustrate how her UK experiences continued to distinguish her. She explained that being taught how to be a critical thinker developed her sense of self-awareness and enabled her to trace her personal development and ability to make good use of her experiences. She concluded that the ability to interpret, reflect on, and understand what happened with her would make her learn a lot and this in itself is a valuable skill.

More obvious were Mahmoud's comments on his life in the UK:

K: What is the value of your UK degree when you go home?

M: What I know and according to my information, it is a normal degree. It is not a big deal. But the experience I live here is different. I live here with responsibility and I have better time-management skills and these things can make me a reliable employee who has better ability to control any situation. Students in UAE go to university, attend classes, submit assignments and graduate, but I am different here: here my whole life is an assignment. This is what I see [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Mahmoud's depiction of his life in the UK as an 'assignment' resonates with his emphasis on the value of his UK experiences. He stated that such skills contribute to making him stand out from other graduates who did not have similar experiences and skills. Put in economic terms, Mahmoud spotted in his UK experiences an opportunity to enrich his human capital with resources which he could not have gained or developed had he decided to study in a local university.

Amjad made a distinction between the economic and personal value of his academic sojourn. He admitted that economic investment is the main reason for studying in the UK. He defined the economic value of his sojourn as going home with better English and a UK degree. Yet, he pointed out that his journey is also important for his personality and self-development, but did not perceive this as an economic benefit. While Amjad separated the two, Reem commented on this saying, '**you take the person as a package** and in some jobs **personal skills** are more important than anything else' [4<sup>th</sup>].

Regardless of whether the participants were conscious of the economic value of their UK experiences or not, it appeared that they all valued the richness of their experience and the impact it had on their personal skills. In fact, all participants referred to the sojourn experience as a meaningful episode of their lives. The following quote from Ameen is typical of the responses that appeared across all participants' profiles:

K: What does your academic journey mean to you?

A: A certificate, experience, responsibility. All of it is useful in all aspects [4<sup>th</sup>].

Thus far, it seems evident that instrumental outcomes were prominent in the participants' discussions of their choice to study in the UK. There are various elements and layers of instrumentality, but English, a degree from a high ranking

UK university, and unique experiences remained at the heart of participants' instrumental reasons for studying abroad. The order and importance of these reasons varied from one participant to another and changed over time. In essence, later interviews had more references to personal growth and learning from experiences than the earlier ones where the participants mainly focused on their English and their degrees. However, it is crucial to close this section with a further note of caution by asserting that although the participants emphasised the importance of the aforementioned instrumental reasons, they were conscious of the chasm between the perceived economic benefits of academic sojourn and the actual benefits in the job market, as will be discussed in 5.2.3 below.

## **5.2.2 Non-instrumental reasons**

Going beyond instrumentality was also an important theme which resonates with participants' desires to live in a new environment, lead a new lifestyle, and explore a new range of identity options. There are various non-instrumental reasons which emerged in participants' responses. Broadly speaking, these can be placed under three umbrella notions: luxury consumption, agency as empowerment, and temporary escape.

### **5.2.2.1 Luxury consumption**

Following Ros i Solé and Fenoulhet's (2010, p.11) notion of language as a 'luxury product', and Kubota's (2011) 'language as leisure and consumption', the term luxury consumption is coined and extended to refer to participants' willingness to utilise their English as a tool and a resource to give them access to a 'new aspirational lifestyle' (Benson et al., 2013, p.23). The participants pointed out that studying in the UK offered them the opportunity to enjoy travelling, to see new places and to experience new situations. This was not a subsidiary reason for their academic sojourn. In fact, where some participants started their journey while being sceptical about achieving instrumental benefits, they appeared certain that their journey is a chance to do something different.

For instance, Ameen explained that he decided to study in the UK because university life in Oman was 'boring'. Although he did not try it himself, he found in his brother's university life an example of what it could be like for him. Therefore, he insisted on going away to lead an independent life with less routine. He wanted to live on his own in new places. Likewise, Kholoud reported that her Omani

friends who were studying in local universities were jealous of her because 'it is more fun' [5<sup>th</sup>] to study abroad. When asked which is more important for her: coming to the UK to improve her job opportunities or to experience a new lifestyle, she responded:

A bit of both, but I would say the second one is more important because I really wanted to leave the country and experience something else. The job comes next [5<sup>th</sup>].

In light of this quote, it appears evident that luxury consumption is a pivotal point to address. For Kholoud, the cultural tourism side of academic sojourning is more important than worrying about future job opportunities. In essence, this tourism offers her the opportunity to explore new encounters, which are part and parcel of conceptualising desire in learning (Kramsch, 2009).

In spite of being obliged to study in the UK, Dalal admitted that studying in the UK offered a better place for her son and her husband:

I had to pursue my higher studies anyways either here or in my country. Why not look for a different place? I can give my husband and my son the opportunity to study in a new environment. I can see new people and places. I will have to go to my job and old life so studying here is a way to break the routine....everything is paid for me. Why miss this chance? It is a better place for learning and it is a new place [4<sup>th</sup>].

Dalal's emphasis on the newness of her academic sojourn experience was an anchor which provided her with a feeling that it is a journey worth making. She also found in this journey an opportunity to temporarily set herself free from her old routine as well as a way to give her family a chance to live and learn in what she described as a better place.

Overall, all participant profiles featured an inclination towards luxury consumption as a motive for their academic sojourn. Fundamentally, this was reflected on their willingness to try different places as tourists who want to explore a new country by visiting new places and trying new things.



### 5.2.2.2 Agency as empowerment

While the participants were willing to visit new places, they were also seeking an independent life (in relation to the life they led in their own countries). This independence holds together luxury consumption, agency as empowerment and temporary escape. Whereas the previous section has looked at the tourism-related side of their sojourn, this section looks at how this journey can be seen as a way to offer the participants an opportunity to explore themselves and to try a new range of identity options. The next section, however, will address the notion of independence from a different angle, i.e. temporary escape.

To start with, Asma had clearly indicated that she wanted to see how she can function away from her family. She referred to her journey as ‘it is something nice. An experiment to discover myself’ [4<sup>th</sup>]. In fact, she stressed that she wanted to study in the UK not to be more employable, but to reach a higher level of personal fulfilment:

I tried myself in the local job market and I know **I can compete**. I know I can compete with my language, and I did compete and succeeded and passed that stage. Now, I am looking at a higher level in order to achieve personal fulfilment [4<sup>th</sup>].

Asma was willing to get out of her comfort zone to explore herself, her potentials, and her ability to be someone, away from the help and support of her family. Asma was eager to lead an individualistic lifestyle. For her, this is a higher mission of personal fulfilment. Essentially, this individualistic life throws a new range of identity options which were not offered to her before. One of them is Asma as an independent individual who can decide and plan for herself.

In a similar vein, Reem also stated that her intention to study in the UK was not entirely job-related because she might end up unemployed when she returns to her country. Therefore, she emphasised that ‘what matters to me is that **I decide for myself and I can do anything I want**’ [4<sup>th</sup>]. When she talked about activities such as walking, going out, shopping, playing sports, etc., she did not perceive them as a mere luxury consumption. Rather, these were means to assert her independence and ability to lead her life as an individual who used to live in what she described as a ‘**very conservative**’ [4<sup>th</sup>] society. She commented on her UK life by saying:

Here **I'm seizing every moment** to go out, walk....and this chance might not happen again except if I come again, but if this happens, I will come with another person and this means some **limitations** [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Reem was aware that her social norms and traditions might not allow her to come back alone. She foregrounded the point that she would need to come with another person if she decided to embark on an academic degree which takes more than a year. In essence, this means leading a different life in the UK. Consequently, the idea of 'seizing every moment' resonates with the opportunity to deploy her agency as a means of empowering herself. That is why Reem was more interested in leading an active, independent life rather than worrying about studying and getting good results. In more than one interview she asserted that, 'my study interrupts my activities' [3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>], and generally this indicates to what extent she was keen to make use of the different identity options that were made available to her in the UK e.g. as someone who is capable, willing, independent, etc.

Kholoud's profile featured similar views when she described her independent life in the UK as 'different' [5<sup>th</sup>]. She spoke about how her new lifestyle freed her from family regulations such as 'parents' curfews'- her family rules about going out and coming back before a particular time. She also found in her ability to go and walk around whenever she wanted a means of liberating her from her old lifestyle in Oman where 'if you see a girl walking in the street, it is really weird' [4<sup>th</sup>].

Still, it is not to be understood that agency as empowerment was a female-only quest. Male participants also took part in this pursuit. Mahmoud's journey is a way to offer him a new desired identity:

I want people to refer to me by saying that he was sponsored to study in the UK, was given a lot of money and look at the excellent result [5<sup>th</sup>].

Mahmoud aspired to a better recognition and a desired identity. Like other participants, he thought that his sojourn is the threshold to being received as an 'excellent result'. Going back with a UK degree and experience meant, for him, achieving the identity option that he desired, albeit it was too early for him to be certain that this recognition/identity option would be offered to him.

In addition, Mahmoud insisted that coming to the UK was his personal choice as he wanted to live a 'Western style'. However, he later stated that he no longer wanted to live 'their style' [3<sup>rd</sup>]. Mahmoud was trying to explain that coming to the UK is an exemplar of how he practised his agency and authority to decide for himself. Whereas the female participants, Asma, Reem, and Kholoud, saw in their sojourn an opportunity for empowerment, Mahmoud saw in his sojourn a proof that he has agency and freedom to decide for himself.

Ameen also wanted to study in the UK because he wanted to rely on himself, instead of being restricted by a life that was quite regulated by family and social expectations. He was looking for a life with fewer rules. Like Kholoud, he too referred to his father's rule of returning home before midnight as a 'curfew'. Ameen's father had told him that he could lead a free life and return to his accommodation whenever he wanted when he is in the UK, but once he returns to Oman, family rules remain rules. This made him willing to study abroad to experience the option of being an independent individual who sets his own rules.

Thus far, it seems apparent that exercising their own agency as empowerment has been an important reason for studying in the UK. Research participants considered their sojourn an opportunity to explore their potential and to manage their daily life on their own. Such practices are of considerable importance to them, given that they have come from environments where family and social ties have a significant impact on the life of the individual.

### **5.2.2.3 Temporary escape**

A further extension to agency as empowerment is the desire to escape from societal or political constraints in the pursuit of better conditions. This escape can be described as a temporary move because of two reasons: first, the participants who talked about the idea of escaping from particular conditions by travelling abroad referred to their sojourn as a break. Second, these participants were willing to go back to their countries once they finish their UK degrees.

Having come from a war-torn country and tough living conditions, Amjad referred to his sojourn as a 'convalescence', which is 'an important experience at an important time' [4<sup>th</sup>]. His peers described him as a lucky person because he managed to take a break from the devastating conditions in Palestine. For Amjad,

having this temporary escape comes before other instrumental reasons because it temporarily emancipates him from harsh political constraints which substantially affected his basic needs as an individual.

Moreover, Mahmoud revealed that he chose to study abroad in order to escape from his old environment:

It was not a constructive environment and my emotional state was bad. I feel better here and now I feel stronger so that when I go back to UAE, I will be more accepting and more willing to cope with life there [4<sup>th</sup>].

Mahmoud's sojourn offered him the opportunity to reconcile with himself and others. He had earlier explained that his relationships with some of his close friends were becoming weaker and that he needed to go abroad to reassess his relationships from afar. At the time of his interview, he described himself as a different person who had grown more accepting and it can be argued that this state of confidence and reconciliation is partly attributed to the impact of study abroad on sojourners' personal growth.

Reem has also referred to her sojourn as an escape from 'a negative society and negative energy' [4<sup>th</sup>]. Her journey was to allow her to focus on herself and enjoy her life away from social influences and constraints. She complained that women in Saudi Arabia could not go anywhere without a driver: she could not go for walks, and nothing was within a walking distance. She explained that she came from a 'flexible' family and this was the only reason why she managed to come to the UK on her own. She expressed her willingness to take a break from her society's constraints thus leaving the country for educational purposes was the only acceptable way to do so. Reem needed this break, therefore, she decided to use her studies in the UK as an excuse for her temporary escape.

#### **5.2.2.4 Other reasons**

In addition to the three umbrella reasons discussed above, some participant profiles featured other reasons for studying in the UK. These reasons were not further elaborated nor were they discussed by other participants so they did not have enough weight to be discussed in separate sections. Here are some examples:

Dalal raised the impact of the UK geographical location on her decision to study abroad. When she searched for a university that offers a one-year Master's degree in English/Arabic Translation, she found that the course she wanted was offered in universities the UK and in Australia. Although she had relatives studying in Australia, she decided that it was too far to study there. Therefore, she decided to choose the UK.

Reem had been keen to pursue her higher studies in the USA, however, the length of the Master's course in the UK was more suitable for her. Reem was the only self-funded participant and she was on a one-year unpaid leave from her job. Because she was not sure of how her new degree would help her find a better career path, she decided to keep her old job by not being away for more than one year.

The length of the course was also important for Hassan who explained that it is faster to get his engineering degree from the UK. He pointed that it could take him 5 or 6 years to get the same degree from a university in Qatar, whereas it is a four-year course (including the foundation year) in the UK. That said, Hassan did not raise this point as a main reason why he chose to study in UK HE. Instead, he referred to luxury consumption as well as instrumental reasons, as discussed above.

All in all, whereas one can argue that there will always be elements of economic gain or investment to justify academic sojourning, other non-instrumental reasons continue to be part of a wide spectrum of motivators that help academic sojourners make their journey across time and space.

### **5.2.3 Not a simple dichotomy**

This section problematises the instrumental vs. non-instrumental dichotomy by investigating two grey areas: 1. participants' scepticism about the actual instrumental benefits of their sojourn, and 2. the inevitable extensions of instrumental and non-instrumental benefits and the implications thereof.

To start with, the research participants did not take the perceived instrumental benefits of studying in UK HE for granted. Rather, they delved deeply into the situation of their local job markets and some seemed anxious about how their UK

degree would help them when they return to their countries. Mahmoud's last interview reflected some of these aspects:

What will I go home with? A certificate from the University of **Leeds**? So what? Everyone else will go home with a certificate. How will I be distinguished? I hope this certificate will be useful in UAE even though I doubt this. The situation there is very difficult. It is all about personal links and connections [5<sup>th</sup>].

The increasing number of Arab students in UK HE has made going back with a UK degree a less valuable asset. This overwhelming academic inflation has critical implications on individuals' perceptions of their human capital. This has driven Mahmoud to raise the 'so what?' of his education. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and the power of personal connections when applying for jobs made many research participants uncertain whether they would get a job upon their return to their countries or not. Similar to Mahmoud, many participants were not certain about how their UK degrees would affect their employability chances, nor were they able to predict how these degrees could help them pass competitive, still traditional recruitment examinations. To this Asma responded by saying:

I am more competitive now even if I do not find a new job when I go home. If I go back to my old job, I am sure I will perform better [5<sup>th</sup>].

For Asma, not finding a better job is not seen as failure nor does it diminish the value of her academic sojourn because she was convinced that she gained many other skills that would enable her to do her old job differently. She saw in herself a better, competitive individual who had led an enriching journey. This suggests that instrumentality can be a desired outcome of the participants' sojourn, but it is not the prime motive for it because there are other reasons that had made their journey worth making e.g. better recognition, new identity options, luxury consumption, temporary escape, better English, etc. as has been highlighted above.

The second area to visit is the fact that there are no fine lines between what is instrumental and what is not. Extending instrumental benefits leads to other non-instrumental advantages and vice versa. Consider for example agency as empowerment; it leads to personal development and better communication skills

and this, in essence, is an economic construct, keeping the human capital metaphor in mind. Similarly, gaining an instrumental benefit, e.g. a recognised degree in the job market, implies other non-instrumental advantages such as better identity options, desired recognition, agency, etc. It is clear that participants' responses suggest understanding the overlap between these two sets of overlapping categories. With this overlap in mind, it is best to view the instrumental and non-instrumental reasons as part of a dynamic continuum rather than a fixed dichotomy. A more theoretical discussion which invites aspects of becoming (Harvey, 2014), desire (Motha and Lin 2014; Kramsch, 2009), subjectivity (Kramsch 2009), imagination (Kanno and Norton, 2003) and motivation (Lamb 2012, Dörnyei 2005) will be presented in **Chapter 6**.

## **Conclusion**

Understanding the reasons for studying abroad is an important cornerstone of investigating the sojourners' sociolinguistic trajectories in the UK. The various components of this sociolinguistic investigation, if they are meant to provide sufficient details, have to be taken lock stock and barrel in order to shed light on the complexity of individuals' trajectories, desires, motivations, and identity (de)construction and reconstruction. Untangling these reasons offers insights into the kind of activities sojourners are interested in, the aspirations they have, and the meaning of this sojourn in their lives.

While the participants questioned the actual instrumental benefits of their academic sojourn, they were able to construct a personal meaning for their sojourn. They were actively involved in the process of reflecting on the unpredictability of their local job markets, but that did not hold them back from appreciating other utilitarian options they could have as a result of their sojourn. In fact, no significant regrets or disadvantages were brought forward, except for homesickness and missing family and friends. Other than that, all participants embraced their UK experience as a resourceful episode that had carried many lessons for them to learn, benefit from, and reflect on.

### 5.3 Finding 3: Academic sojourners' experiences of shifts in their language value

*Language is seen less for its use value than for its exchange value (Heller, 2003), i.e. it gives its users a profit of distinction on the market of symbolic exchange.*

Kramersch (2015, p.406)

#### Introduction

This section looks at participants' experiences of value shifts and investigates the factors which have contributed to assigning different exchange rates to the participants' linguistic resources. As discussed in 1.3, 3.1 and 3.4, the commodification of language in the globalised new economy has rendered language a measurable skill and produced new levels of competition and social selection (Heller, 2003). Mobility in the globalised, stratified world is a significant factor that triggers the negotiation of these dynamic rates of exchange.

As seen in **Finding 1**, the participants landed in the UK expecting that their English skills were highly valuable. Coming to study in UK HE, however, has introduced the harsh realities of negotiating new values assigned to their linguistic capital in discursive practices. The word 'value' here includes both the value placed or perceived by the speaker himself or herself (*perceived value*) and the way others assign value to the language of the participant (*assigned value*). Overall, there was a unanimous sentiment that participants' English skills were subject to re-valuing and downward re-assessment which, together, rendered their English skills less valuable, thus of lower exchange rates.

Research data suggest that there are at least four factors to consider as part of understanding participants' experiences of shifts in their language value. The factors are differing places, differing Englishes/registers/repertoires, differing topics, and differing interlocutors. These factors overlap and intersect in multiple ways and I do not aim to package them tightly. Rather, my aim is to present a rounded discussion of the circumstances under which the participants' English language capacity attracted different rates of exchange.

This section starts with a detailed discussion of these factors. Following that, it addresses the implications of value shifts on sojourners' identity and self-



perception in light of Benson's et al. (2013) 'facets of identity' model and my proposed modifications to this model, as outlined and discussed in 3.3.4.

### 5.3.1 Factors affecting shifts in language value

#### 5.3.1.1 Differing places

Moving across time and space comes as the first and most influential factor which contributes to shifts in the participants' language value. In fact, the participants identified this factor since their early days in the UK. When they talked about their English before coming to the UK, their responses were full of positive expressions such as: 'number one' [Asma, 5<sup>th</sup>], 'perfect' [Mahmoud, 1<sup>st</sup>], 'enough, no need for more' [Amjad, 1<sup>st</sup>], 'happy and cheerful' [Hassan, pair interview], 'satisfied' [Ameen, 1<sup>st</sup>], 'better than many girls' [Reem, 1<sup>st</sup>], 'distinguished' [Dalal, 1<sup>st</sup>], 'competitive' [Kholoud, 1<sup>st</sup>].

Yet, movement has changed these feelings as it led to the emergence of new rates of exchange which made the participant less competitive in the new 'market of symbolic exchange' (Kramsch, 2015). To start with, the level of competition in their new context has become much higher. Since the general English proficiency in the participants' countries is considerably low, their English capacity was relatively higher than the normal level. It is worth mentioning that all participants achieved their required IELTS scores at the first attempt. Having a slightly higher level of English, they felt that they were distinguished in their contexts and their English capacity was at the heart of their distinction. However, their new UK context has more competitive players: native speakers of English, other proficient multilingual speakers who might have used English as an official language in their countries. In addition, living in an English environment requires using English beyond academic and professional contexts and this imposes higher linguistic levels as an essential means of survival, let alone distinction. Amjad's following quote comments on how movement influenced the value of his English:

When I was in Gaza I used to feel that I am strong in comparison to others. What is it called? **the society**, those who are around me. But when I came to the UK what became different is that we started to meet other Arab students who have better English even those who are Arabs like me. A person feels weak when he sees others who are better than him. First of all, I am here with the *owners of the language*. I see them speak English and I feel that no matter what I do I will still have a long journey ahead of me and will never be like them. Second, it is possible to see other

Arab students and some of them came from my country and they speak English better than I do. These reasons made me start to feel that my English needs a lot of improvement [5<sup>th</sup>].

Aware of this intense competition, all participants explained that they needed to learn more English to be able to communicate effectively. More English, for them, means expanding their vocabulary and spoken expressions as well as improving their written English skills. In fact, one of the main advantages of academic sojourning, as described by most participants, is learning more words to be able to communicate better in an English environment. Reem and Asma, who both used English in their work in their countries, explained that even though they spoke English most of the time at work, their vocabulary was limited to their particular professional contexts which used to be all what they needed at that time. Similarly, Amjad was frustrated that despite lecturing in English in one of the best universities in his country, he felt helpless when he entered shops in the UK to buy groceries because he did not know the words for 'cucumber' or 'parsley' in English. Experiences like these, no matter how simple they sound, were very frustrating to them and consequently, a common response that recurred across participants' profiles was 'I need more English'. Commenting on this, Mahmoud expressed his disappointment when he experienced the value shifts of his English:

I have to say that I did not expect this and it made me feel that the English I learned in UAE is the English taught in kindergarten here. I feel deceived. I thought the English I was taught is the English that I can use everywhere but it turned out to be nothing and that I still have a very long way to go [5<sup>th</sup>].

More acute was talking about competing in academic contexts where marks were involved. Although all participants met the IELTS requirement to be admitted to their courses, they reported how difficult it was for them to excel in their courses. Throughout the study period, their ambitions dramatically decreased and instead of aiming at getting high marks, the aim was to just get a passing grade. Language was at the heart of any discussion about academic achievements. The four Master's students shared their courses with 'home' and 'international' students and they used the 'home' students' marks as a reference point to show either how high or low their marks were. In addition, some expressed how intimidated they felt at the presence of 'home' students in their classes and how

this affected their class participation because they felt less self-worthy thus less self-confident. Because Reem studied English/Arabic translation, she was aware of how she used her English and she had previously explained that she tried to be careful not to speak English with Arabic thinking and rhetoric. This understanding resulted in silence in situations where English native speakers were present. It is important to mention that Reem used to work in an international bank where she used English as a lingua franca (ELF) to communicate with staff who were mainly non-Arabic speakers. In spite of that, she was challenged in academic contexts and that made her understand the difference between her previous ELF context and her new context and positioning:

When I speak English here, I do not feel that I am better than others. I used to be more courageous at work in my country. Here I do not participate a lot in classes especially the classes where we have other British students. **I feel intimidated**. I feel I am not confident about what I say so I stay silent [1<sup>st</sup>].

The other four foundation students shared their classes with Arab and Chinese students. This made them feel that the competition is not too challenging. However, when they were asked if they preferred to share the course with home students, they preferred the status quo because they felt it is fairer to share the course with students who are all learners of English. The following extract comes from the initial pair interview with Hassan and Mahmoud<sup>13</sup> in which they discussed a paradoxical view towards sharing the course with home students:

**K: ... My last question for you today is about your friends in the UK? Do you have any British friends?**

**H: No. I think it's difficult**

**M: Maybe it's difficult because for us in the foundation year we are from different countries but not from the UK.**

**K: And do you see this as a problem?**

**H: mm. Yeah**

**M: maybe**

**K: Will the experience be different if you had British classmates?**

**H: It will be tough for us and easy for them.**

**K: why will it be tough?**

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<sup>13</sup> This part was recoded in English. No translation was required.

**H: Because of English. More vocabulary they know more than us.**

Suffice to say, at this juncture, that students' willingness to be in a 'fair' competition surpasses their desire to be friends with English native speakers. Regardless of whether they were already sharing classes with 'home' students or not, all research participants felt that their new UK context imposes higher linguistic levels on them which, in turn, has lowered the exchange rates of their linguistic capital.

Another important consideration is how changing places entails encountering new hybrid cultures. As seen in 3.3.3, culture refers to how people live and create meaning and includes rules, systems and material artefacts. Language is a semiotic means of representing and reproducing cultures (Halliday, 1979; Geertz, 1973). All participants explained that they were using English for professional and academic purposes in their countries and these purposes tend to have less cultural references if compared with the rich cultural references used in daily-life English in the UK. Asma used to teach English in a college in Palestine and all her students were Palestinians. She felt that she had enough English for the job she was doing. However, moving to the UK raised new concerns:

I mean my language is good but I feel that I have a problem in **communication**. I do not understand how they deal with others or how they think. This problem makes me unable to deal with others as effective as I used to deal with people in my country [5<sup>th</sup>].

When asked if having better English would enable her to communicate more efficiently, she boldly said:

Difference affects the ability to interact. Language is not the only factor that affects friendship making. Even if you were **professional** and spoke like a **native speaker** but you have a different culture, and religion, you will still struggle [5<sup>th</sup>].

Put in other words, changing places adds another layer to communication. In the UK, effective communication does not only require good language skills but also higher levels of intercultural awareness and competence as well. These levels were lower in the participants' old contexts. Taking language skills and cultural competence as a package in the UK context, participants' English skills do

ultimately attract a lower value by virtue of being different. For example, Reem's English enabled her to work in an international bank in Saudi Arabia. For her, that proved that she possessed competitive English skills. After coming to the UK, Reem noted that when her lecturers told a joke, the only people who laughed were the 'home' students. She pointed that situations like these made her feel bad about her English, and they reinforced the need for more English. Unlike Reem who believed that the quest for more English is the answer to deal with the lowered value of her English, Kholoud was aware that the value of her English was not entirely based on her English skills:

**Me: If you knew your English would have a lower value in the UK, would you have done anything differently?**

**Kh: No, I think it is not only about language. It is about being familiar with the culture [1<sup>st</sup>].**

Although Kholoud's first language was English, she was still exposed to shifts in language value. She was aware that she had good English skills, and what happened to her English in the UK was mainly due to her unfamiliarity with the new culture, the little c culture of informal conversations between native speakers in everyday life (Kramsch, 1993, 1998).

Asma engaged with this discussion when she reflected on the way she responded to questions in a classroom discussion:

The other side is cultural. I mean how meaning is conveyed and how ideas are explained. These are not only based on language but on ways of thinking. For example, when the teacher asks a question, for him, **the answer is straightforward** but for me it is complex. He sometimes looks for a simple answer and I try to give a complex answer. I think it depends on ways of thinking. Also they want us to use **critical thinking**. I remember now that I answered a couple of questions and the teacher said that my answers were excellent but he was looking for something much simpler [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Here, Asma separates between her language capacity and her way of thinking which is determined by her culture. Asma's answers did not meet the expectations of her teacher who was looking for simpler responses. Such encounters made her understand that the value of her English was not only

determined by her capacity to respond to questions but also by her ability to meet the cultural expectations embedded in patterns of thinking and logic.

In addition, changing places introduces other cultural manifestations such as the ability to follow new rules and system and this has implications on the value of one's language. Asma narrated a story of going to a local GP practice for the first time and how her unfamiliarity with the system left her speechless, embarrassed and unable to communicate:

I went to the GP once and when I was about to speak to the secretary, she asked me to go downstairs and talk to the reception to book an appointment with the secretary. Communication is very tough and there is little understanding [Pair Interview]

Judging the communication as 'tough' with 'little understanding' springs from her unfamiliarity with the system. She did not know who to go to in order to book an appointment and she was asked to go back to reception. When she went to ask at reception, she was told that she should check their website, to which she responded saying:

OK. I know it is good to check information online but there should be face-to-face interaction. I don't feel there is enough interaction with students [Asma, Pair Interview].

Similarly, Dalal drew a distinction between familiar and unfamiliar situations when she said:

When I talk about something I do not know, for example, when I called the **city council** to talk about the **council tax**. The person on the phone was talking about the law and I did not understand it and I did not know how to make him understand that I do not know the system. On the other hand, situations like in restaurants or shops are easier because I am used to the kind of conversations that take place there so I am less nervous [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Dalal's inability to make the other party understand that she did not understand the law is a clear example to show how one's English becomes less valuable because of one's unfamiliarity with the system. In Dalal's case, her English did not help her communicate her message because she did not know what to say

or ask. She ended the call to search for information on the internet to understand the system in order to be able to clearly raise her questions.

Dalal gave another example of how her unfamiliarity with the system, despite being an English/Arabic translation student, could have put her into a legal trouble:

How can I know that people here pay for watching TV? I received several letters by post [asking her to pay for a TV licence] and I did not know the system. At the end, they sent me a letter stating that I will be taken to court and I did not have a clue what that was about. Another Saudi family saved me and explained the rule to me. Without their help, I would have been taken to court without understanding the reason [2<sup>nd</sup>].

This is a critical event in Dalal's trajectory as a translation student who was trained to engage with the language and the culture of the text. Her failure to interpret the cultural message in the TV licence letters was frustrating for her. Like her earlier example of inquiring about the 'council tax', this is another example of how unfamiliarity with the system could lead to inability to interpret the language, leaving learners in a state of anxiety and self-doubt which ultimately affects how they value their investment in their foreign language learning.

Besides dealing with a stronger competition, a new hybrid culture with unfamiliar systems, the participants explained that they started to feel that their English capacity was no longer enough to distinguish them. Asma explains this point articulately:

In my country, English is a competitive advantage and it enables me to compete but here it is a tool to live, interact and get things done. This tool is owned by everyone here so I don't feel distinguished here [Pair Interview].

All participants' responses were in line with the statement above and this perspective made them feel that their English started to have a lower exchange value and that they needed to possess other skills if they wanted to remain distinguished in their new context. Hassan, for instance, believed that he could be distinguished here because he described himself as a 'professional footballer'. Reem referred to her Arabic as a means of distinction in an environment where not too many people speak this language. Other participants thought that

obtaining a UK degree would essentially distinguish them when they go home but could not think of other particular skills that could make them stand out in the UK context. The point that their English used to make them stand out in their local contexts whilst it does not perform the same function in the UK is one of the consequences of differing places:

The competition is higher and I feel that I am still weak. In my country and among those of low level, I felt distinguished but when I am placed among people whose language is used in study and everywhere else, I feel I need more and I lack something [Amjad, 1<sup>st</sup>].

In response to 'what would have happened to your English if you did not come here?', the participants explained that they would have continued to view their English as a valuable asset that distinguishes them. The general sentiment is that maintaining their old view of their English value was good because it used to give them a sense of self-worth. However, Amjad disagreed and insisted that coming to the UK opened his eyes to see the 'truth' about English:

Now that I came to the UK, I know the truth and I no longer perceive myself as a proficient speaker of English. I know that I am not perfect and that I need to gain a lot of language and knowledge [1<sup>st</sup>].

Thus far, it seems obvious that changing places has contributed to shaking some of the participants' old language-related beliefs. It was clearly noticed how this has resulted in a sense of frustration and self-doubt. Even though all participants appeared to be aware of the impact of changing places on their English, they were not psychologically prepared to experience such shifts in their language value. Coupled with the academic pressure and the high expectations of families, friends and even sponsors, talking about these shifts was depressing for some participants. Section 5.3.2 will discuss this in more detail.

The last point to address here is how some participants believed that their English had a higher value in their countries even if they interacted with English native speakers there. Changing places incorporates changing battlefields and this has implications on who has the power to speak, how is the authority in the field, and who is familiar with the field (the insider). The following quote from Mahmoud provides some insights:



In UAE, I am in my country and when I speak English with them [British people], it shows that I have learned this language to talk to them. They appreciate that. But here they do not appreciate the fact that I spent years trying to learn English. They take this for granted [5<sup>th</sup>].

Another side of the picture was proposed by Kholoud:

**In Oman, it [interaction with native speakers] will be easier because they know how we speak and would not get high hope of our English. They will find our English fine because it is in our country [5<sup>th</sup>].**

In addition, Reem presented an important argument when she said:

I will be the one **who is helping** because the native speaker is a foreigner and I know the tradition and rules and I can help [5<sup>th</sup>].

These insights indicate that language value is not only dependent on changing the geographical location of the individual but is also dependent on other place-related factors such as familiarity with the field. This brings issues of agency, power and positioning in social interactions. The insights above challenge Blommaert's (2010) ideas of low scale English. That is to say, in the above examples the participants perceived themselves as agentive and powerful in interactions with native speakers because their source of power in their home countries sprung from being insiders regardless of whether or not their English conformed to native speaker norms. Eventually, their perceived value of their language in their countries was high even if their English, following Blommaert (2010), can be placed in low scales.

### **5.3.1.2 Differing Englishes, registers, and repertoires**

Differing Englishes, registers and repertoires are another major contributor to participants' experiences of shifts in their language value. Unlike learning English as a foreign language where learners are taught 'Standard English' with particular focus on formalities, grammar, and language functions, using English in the UK necessitates a wide range of spoken and written repertoires which include the formal and the informal. Even though the participants came from a rich linguistic background and some could speak more than one Colloquial variety, they seemed not to have the awareness that English, like Arabic, has different varieties and that what they were taught in formal classrooms does not

necessarily reflect the intricate linguistic scene in real life. This is partially due to their previous formal language education that misleadingly introduced English as a one monolithic variety as will be discussed in 5.5. Due to this simplistic conceptualisation of English, coming to the UK made them realise that the English they learned was not necessarily the English expected from them to use in the UK. Therefore, the value of their English has again become lower and the way they perceived it changed considerably.

Within less than a month of his arrival in the UK, Mahmoud was perplexed and unable to decipher what had happened to his English by virtue of movement:

I have a problem: here my tutors always ask us to speak in academic words so what I was learning in my school? Is that normal English or what? I have a question: did we learn English or not? Here they say, no, English must be used with different words unlike the normal words. This frustrates me [Initial Pair Interview].

All participants reported a similar feeling after viewing feedback they received on their assignments. They were told that their English was not academic enough and their vocabulary range is too limited. Comments as such made them devalue their English and realise that their English is different from the academic English their tutors expected to read.

Another problem was sounding too serious and formal in less formal occasions. Dalal demonstrated that her previous language experiences were in classroom contexts. Consequently, she struggled in less formal situations because she felt that her English sounded 'odd'. Trying to be too polite is cultural and understanding the difference between 'could you...., please?' and 'would you mind....?' can be difficult for students who learned these formulaic expressions without understanding the different connotations they have. Dalal, as an English/Arabic translation student, was aware that she used formal English in less formal situations and she understood that she should not do that, but the struggle for her was how to be less formal without being less polite. Therefore, she tried to be silent most of the time. Similarly, Hassan reported that he felt uncomfortable using less formal English because he was not used to it. Unlike Dalal who tried to be silent most of the time, Hassan tried to be serious. In fact,

he explained that in his early days in the UK, his English was formulaic and he sounded serious and tried not to laugh.

Such instances show to what extent these individuals were forced to behave in a certain way (to be silent, not to laugh, etc.) because they lack the linguistic and cultural competence that helps them communicate in less formal situations. Not only does participants' English not help them complete their assignments because it lacks wide a vocabulary range as well as accuracy and diversity of structures, it also makes them aware of their linguistic disadvantage in less formal situations. Put together, encountering the need for using differing Englishes, registers, and repertoires is another factor that has resulted in lowering the perceived value of sojourners' English.

### 5.3.1.3 Differing topics

Broadly and for the purpose of this discussion, topics are categorised into two types: academic-related topics, and non-academic related topics. Participants' profiles feature a unanimous sentiment that their English capacity helped them communicate effectively in academic-related topics where the words and the contents are more familiar. This section overlaps with the previous two in two ways: (1). culture is at the heart of academic vs. non-academic topics and (2). differing English repertoires and registers are also incorporated in this section. However, what this section tries to underline is how the participants talked about the gap between using their English inside and outside the classroom and how this affected their perceived and assigned values of their English capacity.

Many participants talked about how they used English with their classmates while preparing for a group activity. They felt happy that they had to use English while working on group presentations and they did not seem to have any problems. Ameen described his enthusiasm about being a group member in a task that required him to use English:

I was part of a **group** when we worked on a **group presentation** and there were no problems. All chats were in English because we had a student from **Iceland** and that was an **advantage** because all of us had to speak in English. I really enjoyed that [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Similarly Asma and Amjad explained that talking about academic concepts either inside or outside the class was generally easier than talking about other topics. This is mainly because they are familiar with the terminology of their disciplines and they can easily use it to elaborate their ideas. Like them, Mahmoud asserted that the class is the only English environment where he could comfortably interact in English because he felt safe talking about academic topics at the presence of a tutor who understood his linguistic struggles and classmates who came from a similar linguistic and cultural background (see also 5.3.1.4 on differing interlocutors).

Consequently, it can be argued that the value of participants' English was higher in situations where they discussed and engaged with academic topics and debates. This became evident when noticing participants' positive attitudes towards using English in class discussions or out-of-class academic activities (mainly when grouped with other non-native speakers of English who do not speak Arabic).

Unlike academic topics, social talk posed a challenge that lowered the perceived value of participants' English. In her first days in the UK, Kholoud, who spoke English since she was a child, explained that she did not want to be silent around her British flatmates because she believed that she was a fluent English speaker. Still, every time her flatmates talked about a radio programme or any local topic, she was quiet except when she tried to participate by asking questions. She felt challenged because she did not have enough knowledge to engage with social chats. Moreover, she pointed out that understanding some spoken expressions was a problem and she was embarrassed to ask about the meaning of these expressions. She concluded that situations like these made her decide to start learning more spoken idiomatic expressions to improve her English. In addition, Asma reported a similar experience when she said:

In **social talks**, I am a listener most of the time. I mean when we talk about **shopping, daily life, films**. Once my friend and I went to the cinema and watched the same film. A third friend asked us about the film on the following day. I told her it was really nice and I stopped. I wanted to tell the story of the film, but I felt I needed to stop to collect the words and the ideas. While I was doing that, the friend who went to the film with me told the story easily. I don't know why I was not able to describe what I saw easily [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Although Asma described herself as an active participant in class, a task like describing a film or talking about her shopping required her to pause and think of the words. She explained that she was not confident talking about social topics perhaps because she did not use English to perform this function before coming to the UK. Situations like these contribute to lowering the perceived value of her English. Yet, in a later interview she reported that she started to participate more and this goes in line with Benson's et al. (2013) observation that language learners ability to project their desired identities continues to 'fluctuate and improve with experience and growth' (p. 40).

Furthermore, Amjad wished that he would never need to go to a GP in the UK because he was worried his English might fail him:

When I need to go to hospital, God forbid, how can I understand the doctor? I have nothing not one medical term. I have not been to a GP here and if I go to places like courts, or police stations, I have no words to use there [2<sup>nd</sup>].

During the same interview, he mentioned that he got the highest mark in his class and he was proud of this as he had expected that 'home' students would always get higher marks than him. However, when he talked about using his English at hospital or police stations, he realised that his English would not equally help him in all situations. As a result, he drew a distinction between 'studying contexts' and 'other contexts' and described the latter as problematic because they involve new unfamiliar terms and systems.

On the other hand, Kholoud was the only participant who thought that academic topics were more challenging. She pointed out that she used English in her daily life when she was in Oman. However, she said that she would worry more about her English in classrooms because she needed to be more academic. This worry made her more hesitant to participant in class discussions. Also, she raised the issue that she used to think that her English was good, but it turned out to be good in some situations and insufficient in other more academic and formal situations.

#### 5.3.1.4 Differing interlocutors

Interacting with different interlocutors involves various psychological, linguistic, and social dimensions that influence the content and dynamics of interaction, leading to possible shifts in one's language value. This section addresses how participants' English was subjected to multiple value shifts depending on the different interlocutors they interacted with.

To start with, all participants reported that their psychological state affected their fluency and willingness to interact in English. Put in other words, language anxiety can become a major obstacle in situations where participants are assessed or when they talk to people of a higher status. In these conditions, the participants noticed that they became less fluent and more sensitive to grammar mistakes (a constant reminder of their linguistic disadvantage). For instance, Amjad noticed that his English communication was not always successful and he was disturbed that his English failed him in some situations:

Maybe it depends on the person I talk to: if I understand them easily I feel reassured and relaxed but if I struggled to understand them I stay tense throughout the whole interaction. I am really surprised that this happens with me. Why do I feel that my English is excellent? But later I feel that I have problems?...I am very proficient with my **classmates**. I struggle with people who have **managerial positions** at university. I also struggle in the **supermarket**. Sometimes these situations are easy and in other times they are not. Generally my communication with my **classmates** is very successful. I don't know why. I hope someone can explain what happens [4<sup>th</sup>].

Amjad's comments show how differing interlocutors affected his English. He pointed out that when he understood others easily (linguistic dimension) or when he was familiar with others (social dimension), he communicated fluently and confidently (linguistic and psychological). At the presence of people of a higher status (social dimension), he became less fluent and more conscious of his English. For him, this is an example of a less successful communication. It is a situation when his English attracted a lower exchange rate for him.

Hassan was also disappointed that his presentations were not as successful as they used to be outside the UK. He explained that he used to give presentations in his academy in Qatar. Because of his strong presentation skills, he was a

representative for his academy and gave presentations in English in KSA and UAE. However, when he was giving a group presentation for one of his modules in front of an English panel, he forgot his points, searched for his cards, was laughed at by his colleagues, and was given a low mark. He was trying to explain what happened to him:

I did not have the **time pressure** that I have here. Also they did not deal with me as a student who will be given a mark and I did not feel that I was a stranger even when I travelled to UAE. It was normal. I did not feel I was an outsider. I was very proud. Here it is different [5<sup>th</sup>].

Hassan's psychological state (being positioned as an outsider) affected his performance. He is aware of his new unfavourable positioning in the UK (a student, an outsider, a learner of English) and this made him understand that 'it is different here'.

What is more, for most participants interacting with university lecturers and supervisors was different. There seems to be a division in the way they portrayed interactions with their tutors. Most participants maintained that their teachers understood their struggles and that made them feel less stressed. They explained that their teachers tried to speak clearly and knew how to communicate with them avoiding difficult words or expressions. Dalal and Reem, the English/Arabic translation students, talked about how their teachers helped them use English expressions by commenting on their language use and how they were influenced by Arabic. They explained that situations like these did not embarrass them because they learned from their teachers. However, if they were corrected by other people, they would feel disappointed; therefore they would resort to silence to avoid these situations.

Amjad expressed a different view. Unlike the other participants, interacting with his teachers was a stressful experience for him because his interaction with them was very limited and he found it difficult to ask them to repeat or explain what they said. Also, he deliberately tried to speak quickly in front of them to exude fluency: 'speaking slowly means weakness in my English and they speak quickly' [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Thus far, it seems apparent that different interlocutors bring different interactions which directly affect the perceived value of participants' English. However, this is not to suggest that language learners are passive subjects whose language value is entirely predetermined for them. An important illustration came from Mahmoud whose linguistic behaviour and willingness to be heard was determined by him. He added that the extent to which he was willing to go the extra mile and pay more efforts to make himself understood depended on the status of his interlocutors:

Look, when I see that I have to speak to a British speaker I know beforehand that the communication will not be easy and I am now convinced that they have to pay some effort in order to understand me. But imagine if I have to communicate with an important person, say, a manager responsible for our Foundation course. The situation is different here. I have to pay a lot of effort in order to be understood because he might say that my English is weak and dismiss me from the course. So the amount of effort I pay when I talk to others using English depends on the status of the person I talk to [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Mahmoud's insights offer another perspective to understanding shifts in language value. Looking at his description, he was an active agent in determining the assigned value of his language. When he chose to let the other interlocutor do the communicative task and try to understand him, Mahmoud's English could be assigned a low value and he, in one way or another, contributed to lowering the value of his English. On the other hand, when he spoke in front of an authority, he tried to be fully engaged in the communicative task to make the impression that he had good English and deserved to be admitted to a Higher Education institution, thus attempting to attract a high assigned value for his English in this situation. Mahmoud's example shows that he was aware of what he could do with his English and he tactically deployed agency in situations where he felt he needed to.

In addition to interlocutors' social status, their linguistic awareness plays a role in the success or failure of interaction and this affects the value of learners' language. Based on participants' responses, linguistic awareness means realistic expectations of students' linguistic abilities, accommodating local accents, rewording while repeating, speaking with a slow tempo, and using simpler expressions. When the participants struggled to understand a variety of English,



they reported being assigned a lower value which also affected the way they perceived their English. Whereas when interlocutors tried to adjust their accents to accommodate to sojourners' linguistic levels, the latter reported that they were less challenged and more encouraged to communicate. During their first weeks in the UK, all participants reported that their English was not as good as they thought of it. Being exposed to Yorkshire English (among many other local varieties) after years of learning 'Standard English' in their countries made them lose faith in their English which was assigned lower exchange rates. For instance, even though Reem studied English phonology as part of her undergraduate degree in KSA and worked at an international bank before coming to the UK, she faced many problems understanding local accents around her. She narrated a story of how she was stopped by a passer-by and she did not understand what the woman was asking her. The passer-by repeated the question three times and Reem could not understand her and walked away. She also talked about how she repeated her voice messages seven times without understanding them. When asked about how these incidences made her feel about her English, she responded:

Part of the responsibility falls on them. Our British **instructor** told us that she also does not understand some strong accents. She gave us a written example. I did not understand any single word and I **figured** some have strange accents and they use uncommon words [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Being aware of how other native speakers of English might find it difficult to understand some 'strong' accents made Reem more confident that she was not completely responsible for understanding others. Instead, it is a shared responsibility and this requires other interlocutors to have some linguistic awareness in order to negotiate meaning and positioning.

Unlike Reem, Dalal, who comes from a similar academic background, did not like to be in situations when she needed to say 'excuse me?'. For her, these were embarrassing situations that she attempted to avoid by trying not to communicate with non-Arabic speakers. Even communication on campus was a challenge:

People on campus, especially other British students, do not understand my struggles. They assume that because I am a student here, I should understand everything they say and that is why I was admitted to study with them [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Dalal did not want to be blamed for not understanding others. Although she used to work in a Saudi university where she interacted with many students, she did not have the courage to use her English to express herself in the UK. Dalal was silenced by anticipating others' lack of linguistic awareness and high expectations of her English. Together, these factors lowered her perceived value of her English, causing her to resort to silence to save her face.

Interestingly, Mahmoud asserted that linguistic awareness makes people communicate more effectively and he explained how this awareness enabled him to interact with other non-Arabic speaking interlocutors in his country:

You see when someone comes to our country and he speaks little Arabic, I try to speak in broken Arabic so they can understand me. They should consider us as guests in the UK and speak with an easier accent. If they speak with a strong accent, no one will benefit from that because there will be no mutual understanding [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Mahmoud's quote sheds light on how language learners can be more sensitive to language issues because they have experienced these issues themselves. He tried to help other non-Arabic speaking interlocutors in his country and he wished that sojourners, like him, were treated in a similar way in the UK.

What is more is that situations involving asking for repetition can reflect interlocutors' linguistic awareness. Kholoud complained that when she asked some interlocutors to repeat what they said, they shouted back. She explained that these people thought that making their voices louder would make her understand them and she felt offended by such behaviours. Similarly, Asma and Dalal criticised those who repeated what they said using the same words and expressions instead of rewording what they said.

Some participants reported different strategies for dealing with unaccommodating interlocutors. For example, Asma responded with 'do you mean....?' to make sure that she understood what was said to her. Mahmoud used a different technique as he would respond back saying: 'I don't speak English very well but I'll do my best. Please do your best' [5<sup>th</sup>]. When asked about how effective that technique was, he mentioned that even though it made many people use simpler and slower English, he was not happy to say that his English was bad. Mahmoud felt

ashamed that he had to foreground his linguistic disadvantage to make others understand his struggles.

Furthermore, preferring interactions with non-native speakers was another common theme across the different profiles. Reem pointed out that she felt more relaxed talking to other non-native speakers because they also had their own errors and problems, and this places interlocutors in similar positions and makes them more accepting of one another's mistakes. Mahmoud explained that when he dealt with other non-native speakers who had better English, he did not feel anxious and nervous. In fact, he took them as role models because they might have worked harder than him to improve their English and this did not disappoint him. Instead, it made him feel that he could get to their level one day.

### **5.3.2 Implications of value shifts on sojourners' identity and self-expression**

With reference to my proposed modifications to Benson's et al. (2013, p. 19) 'facets of identity' presented in section 3.3.4, I will now address the implications of value shifts on sojourners' identity and self-expression in light of my proposed modifications. As a result, this section slightly deviates from the general tone of this chapter as it overtly engages with a theoretical discussion about identity.

As seen above, the participants went beyond their geographical borders and their comfort zones expecting that they had been equipped with sufficient linguistic, social, and cultural capital. On the contrary, they were faced with the challenge of trying to express themselves in unfamiliar contexts using unfamiliar linguistic repertoires to communicate with unfamiliar interlocutors with different norms. Simultaneously, they were confronted with unexpected shifts of their language value. Taking these together, these circumstances can have acute impacts on sojourners' identity and self-expression.

To start with, the participants engaged with comparing their 'imagined' Britain with their 'lived' Britain. Their expectations revolved around two pivotal points: English, and social life. To illustrate, the following quote comes from Amjad's last individual interview and describes his imagined Britain and how it differed from his lived reality:

Before coming here I expected it will be easy to progress and that a month is enough to be 100 % perfect but now I know it is not easy and it depends on practice. I don't use English that much with my **societies** because I don't need it with my friends..... I expected **social life** to be easier and that people here communicate better. Life here is not as **social** as I expected it to be. People are not interested in knowing **international students**... They expect us to understand the system and when you ask they direct you to a website and everything here depends on being self-reliant [5<sup>th</sup>].

Amjad's words represent a clash between his 'imagined' identity as someone whose English would be perfect in a month's time and as someone who would have English friends interested in his narratives as a Palestinian, international student in the UK. He imagined that life in the UK would offer him a wider range of identity options and this imagined identity contributed to his motivation to study in the UK. His reflexive identity, on the other hand, comments on his lived reality which seems to have crushed his expectations. Thus, Amjad's view of himself has dramatically changed: he became conscious that he could not possess 'perfect' English within a short period of time. He admitted that all his friends were Arabs and that he failed to validate a better identity because he was positioned as an 'uninteresting' international student (his recognised identity in the UK).

Not only was Amjad's imagined identity shaken by his new realisations (slow linguistic progress and lack of social recognition), his experiences of shifts in his language value added to his dilemma, too. In spite of such disappointing encounters, Amjad's 'ideal' identity reflected how he was still willing to strive for better recognition and identity options:

K: Do you want to sound like the **native speakers of English**?

Am: Yes of course. This is very important for me. When I talk to a **native speaker** I try to be closer to them by imitating their style and using their expressions. I try to use their daily language and imitate their **accent**. I try to be like them.

K: when you try to imitate them do you feel that you are changing your personality?

Am: No but I feel that I am a developed Amjad. Amjad who is **confident, capable**. I mean I have better abilities and can communicate with others [4<sup>th</sup>].

Amjad appears to maintain his enthusiasm and refuses to admit that his English

skills contribute to changing his personality. This is an example of some contradictions that emerged while analysing participants' identity-related comments. Amjad's reflexive identity (his view of himself) does not necessarily match his projected, recognised, and ideal identity facets. Whereas he insisted that he was still the same person (reflexive identity), he complained that the low value of his English made him less confident (projected identity), and that he was perceived as an international student (recognised identity) who tries to imitate native speakers of English to be like them (ideal identity).

The rest of the participants had similar expectations of life in the UK and as seen in **Finding 3**, their experiences of shifts in their language value made them develop new reflexive identity facets. They were aware of their linguistic disadvantage and the need for more linguistic and cultural capital and this had critical impacts on their social interactions. They started to perceive themselves as less confident, weaker, nervous, etc. Nonetheless, most participants felt threatened to admit that their linguistic encounters in the UK could affect their identity:

'I refuse to let English change my personality' [Asma, 4<sup>th</sup>]

'My personality does not change. It will remain the same personality. You see no matter how **competent** in English I am, this will never make me a different person' [Reem, 4<sup>th</sup>].

These examples indicate that one's depiction of one's identity is a site of struggle. At the same time when the participants described how their 'imagined' identities were crushed by the realities of living in the UK, they insisted that they did not change (imagined vs reflexive).

Moving to the projected vs. recognised facets of identity opens more doors for further destabilised views. As seen in **Finding 1**, most participants linked speaking English with being modern, civilised, educated, developed and different. They reported that using English in their countries was a tool to project these traits. Linking these attitudes to identity work, it can be argued that they are part of participants' projected/reflexive identities. However, when they moved to study in the UK, English ceased to be a tool of being modern and different:

K: When you spoke English in Qatar, how did you feel about yourself?

Ha: Well, I feel when I speak with foreigners that I am modern and different.

K: Do you still have the same feeling here?

Ha: Mmm. Well, I don't feel anything. I don't know [Hassan, 1<sup>st</sup>].

Hassan's reflexive/projected identity has been destabilised and he no longer believes that speaking English is a sign of being modern and different. It can be argued that his experiences of value shifts affected his 'recognised identity'. Like Amjad, Hassan was also perceived as an international student in an English-speaking environment where speaking English did not make him distinguished anymore.

Another example of the clash between reflexive and recognised identity facets comes from Kholoud who was uncomfortable that she was not perceived as an Arab because her English was good. This frustrated her because she saw herself as an Arab (reflexive identity) but was not positioned as such (recognised) on the basis that Arab students are stereotyped as poor English learners/speakers. This positioning made her willing to fight for the recognition that matches her view of herself. Not achieving this recognition had important implications on her social trajectories in the UK and made her cling to her Arab friends even though they spoke English most of the time.

On the other hand, Ameen and Mahmoud did not mind being perceived as non-Arab students. Their recognised identities are more important than their reflexive identities as long as they offer them better identity options:

K: Is it good that you are not always identified as an Arab?

Am: Yes, of course. This tells me that my English level is excellent and that I speak real English and I am fluent [1<sup>st</sup>].

Ameen's quest for being positioned as a fluent speaker of English shows to what extent he was trying to attract a higher value for his English, therefore a better recognition for himself. This offered him an opportunity to validate his preferred identity, albeit it might not be valid all the time.

On the other hand, Dalal took a different path because she was trying to preserve her view of herself (reflexive identity). Since the beginning of the study, she introduced herself as a shy person. She even pointed out that she preferred to be friends with people from her particular geographical area. She was critical of her previous language education and complained that she could not interact well in less formal situations. However, she continued to avoid social and academic participation and was perceived as a reserved person by some of her classmates (recognised identity). In addition, her experiences of value shifts made her feel more pressurised. Coupled with her view of herself, these experiences made her less willing to express herself, either in English or Arabic. Dalal's story matches the story of Leila, who lost her voice in the new language and the new culture (Pellegrino Aveni, 2007) as seen in 3.2.

The last example comes from Mahmoud who discussed the role of his interlocutors' reaction on his reflexive identity:

When I talk to some people I don't feel afraid or nervous. However, other people create fear and worry in me by the way they speak or the way they react to my language. They give me strange looks and ask **what do you say? What do you want? Say that again?** Those who don't understand me from the first time make me feel nervous. Those who ask me to repeat make me feel that my language is not good enough to make myself understood [5<sup>th</sup>].

Mahmoud explained that he initiated conversations while feeling confident (reflexive identity), yet the reaction he received changed his initial reflexive identity and subjected him to undesirable positioning. We are reminded by Pellegrino Aveni (2007) that 'learners strive to foster a sense of *validation* through social interaction, that is, a sense that their presence is welcome, even sought after' (pp.18-19) [*Italics* in original]. Later, Mahmoud explained that he only felt 'modern' when he spoke English in his country, among people whose English skills are not as good as his. That reflexive/projected identity did not surface in his UK interactions where his English attracted different exchange rates.

## Conclusion

To conclude, participants' experiences of shifts in their perceived language value were triggered by various factors that continued to emerge as part of their

unpredictable, discursive social interactions in the UK. This section has looked at the role of differing places, repertoires, topics and interlocutors in (re)producing different rules of the interaction game, leading to the emergence of various exchange rates dependent on these complex, context-related influences. Fundamentally, participants' experiences of shifts in their language value have significantly affected aspects of identity and self-expression and continued to create a sense of destabilisation, tension, and paradox in the trajectories of these mobile individuals. The next finding explains how these destabilised realisations have also affected sojourners' socialisation practices.

## **5.4 Finding 4: Social aspects of Academic Sojourning**

### **Introduction**

This section addresses some social aspects described by the research participants. As language plays a key role in social interactions, this section touches upon the impact of sojourners' linguistic challenges on their socialisation practices in the UK. It starts by investigating participants' social circles in an attempt to understand the factors that underlie grouping and friendship-making. After that, it questions the notion of 'border carrying' in light of various barriers that could inhibit social integration, namely: religion, sojourners' perceptions of universities' policies, stereotypes and tensions. Finally, the last section looks at how academic sojourning and the social encounters thereof have contributed to participants' personal growth.

#### **5.4.1 Insights into sojourners' social circles in the UK**

One common feature across all the eight participants' profiles was that they surrounded themselves with Arabic-speaking friends. They were asked about their social circles at several points during the period of this study, but the response that persisted throughout was that they did not have British friends. They had classmates who were not Arabs, but those were not referred to as friends. Still, it is worth mentioning that all research participants wished they had British friends and admitted that they should have expanded their existing circles of friends, yet that wish was not met by serious attempts because there were various sociocultural factors that affected their grouping and friendship-making.



The first factor to consider is the support and reassurance offered by fellow Arab students. Finding similar people was a way to handle the shock of living in a new country. All participants explained how frustrated and disoriented they were when they arrived in the UK. This bewilderment was overcome by tightly clinging to their Arab peers who helped them explore aspects of life in the UK and adjust to the new academic system by trying new things as a group. The task of finding Arab friends was prioritised by Amjad who believed that it was because of his friends' support that he was able to cope with the new lifestyle:

For me the presence of Arab friends is more important than worrying about language [practising English] because they provide psychological comfort through which one can learn, but if I live in an English atmosphere with no Arab friends, the difficulty of life won't enable me to learn properly. If one is comfortable, he can learn and who wants to learn will learn. Plus, it is possible to have Arab and British friends. Not a big deal [1<sup>st</sup>].

The 'psychological support' Amjad referred to was embodied in finding someone who speaks the same mother tongue, probably embraces the same religion, understands his unfamiliarity with the UK lifestyle, and attends the same places that Amjad would like to visit: halal restaurants, mosques, Islamic centres, non-alcohol activities, etc.

Hassan described another kind of support from his Arabic friends. He considered his friends as his 'significant other' in the UK. They were his source of moral support and they always encouraged him to study, and work harder so that they all could pass and move to the next year together. When asked if his dependence on his friends would become less in the next year, he responded:

I don't think so. We will be together. We are used to this. Look how many months we spent together. Even when we end up in different programmes we will visit each other. Not all of us will study **mechanical** but we will study some courses together. During exam times we are always together spending the evenings, studying, and supporting each other [5<sup>th</sup>].

Hassan's Arabic circle was not seen as a problem that prevented him from practising English in the UK. Instead, he pointed out that he expected to study with other Arab students and that was not seen as a disadvantage since he

practised English inside classrooms and with others who do not speak Arabic. His main English input came from formal classes and assignments.

Ameen summarised his social interaction by saying 'we have our own Oman in the UK' [1<sup>st</sup>]. He demonstrated that living in the UK with his Omani friends was like living in a different city in Oman. He was part of a large Omani group and shared the accommodation with his cousin. However, Ameen explained that he wanted to know more people but he got used to being with his group and his group did not like to invite more people. Eventually, he surrendered to that peer pressure which heavily affected his social encounters in the UK.

The only participant who did not like to be surrounded by Arab classmates was Kholoud who complained that she came to study in the UK to lead a different experience:

**It is a different continent but with the same kind of people, especially with girls. They stick together and will find it odd if another Arab friend meets other people from different countries. They find it weird. You are here in the UK, you are supposed to make other friends and not stick with your own [5<sup>th</sup>].**

In spite of that, Kholoud reported that she did not have any British friends and that was very disappointing for her. Her determination to lead a new life in the UK with different people was met by stumbling blocks that prevented social integration in the UK and had eventually made her surround herself with other Arab students who, like her, were willing to practise and improve their English.

The second factor comes from language and its role in positioning interlocutors in discursive practices. It seems evident that the participants surrounded themselves with people who are more likely to assign favourable positionings to them. As discussed earlier, participants' experiences of value shifts made them less willing to interact with people who have better English proficiency. The following quote from Kholoud is a case in point:

**Me: Did you expect to speak more English in the UK?**

**K: Yeah. Most of the people here speak Arabic unlike when I was at home; I used to speak mostly in English. Arabs here**

**are not confident when they speak English and they make me speak Arabic or maybe they are just proud of Arabic [5<sup>th</sup>].**

Most participants made the point that using English in their countries was a tool to mark their distinctive skills. However, the impact of mobility on their language value made them reluctant and less confident to use English. Kholoud was not sure as to why her friends did not speak English. She suggested two possibilities: lack of confidence or being proud of their Arabic. In fact, these two options are part of a single argument. When English fails to validate sojourners' preferred identities, they can resort to the language which offers better options, and in essence, this can change their perceptions of/relationship with their mother tongue, Arabic, and make them proud of it.

It was because of trying to avoid unfavourable positionings that Mahmoud wanted to have British friends but did not want to share the class with them. He asserted that their presence would pressurise him and they would participate more. Ultimately, this would assign him an unfavourable position which he might not be able to resist and/negotiate, given his linguistic disadvantage. There is a general sentiment that avoiding native speakers of English is the easy way to deal with language anxiety. Consequently, in their limited attempts to know different people, the participants approached other students who were non-native speakers of English. The best depiction of this relation comes from Amjad who said,

All **international** students face the same issues. They feel isolated, and those isolated individuals look for other isolated individuals and be friends with [5<sup>th</sup>].

Thus far, it has become apparent that there are two important factors that contributed to academic sojourners' grouping and friendship-making: moral support and language anxiety avoidance. Although the participants were able to justify, and sometimes defend, their social decisions of staying in particular groups, they expressed interest in expanding their social circles and mingling with non-Arabic people. These paradoxical views can become less self-contradictory when addressing other issues that could inhibit social integration in the hybrid host society, as discussed in the next section.

## 5.4.2 Carrying borders (unwillingly)?

After analysing the social factors that brought Arab sojourners together in semi-closed circles, questioning whether these participants have actually carried their linguistic and socio-cultural borders with them to the UK seems a valid inquiry. There are at least four issues worthy of further investigation in order to understand whether academic sojourners had chosen to stay isolated in closed groups, or if they were subjected to a set of complex social issues whose answers favoured isolation.

### 5.4.2.1 Religion

The role of sojourners' culture and religion is very prominent in drawing lines between what they can and cannot take part in. When asked to comment on their isolation in the UK, all participants talked about their culture and religion, how this affected how they were perceived by others, and how lack of cultural and religious understanding could lead to social tensions which the participants had tried to avoid by embracing isolation. Considering that all research participants were Muslims, they did not take part in alcohol-based events, did not eat pork or non-Halal meat and these dietary requirements affected their participation in many events.

In his last interview, Amjad was asked if he had regretted surrounding himself with Arab friends, he responded:

I don't know. It is not to the extent of regretting it. Other options would not suit me. There is a limit to the degree I can mingle with others due to religious and cultural differences. I mingle within my own cultural and religious limits and I believe that I did my best.... I experienced situations where my background prevented me from taking part in many events and gatherings. Still, I don't see this as an obstacle or a big problem [5<sup>th</sup>].

Amjad made a brave statement when he asserted that other options would not have suited him. He could not join his classmates who wanted to discuss an assignment in a pub or a bar. The restaurants he went to were different from the places his friends wanted him to go to. As a result, he was gradually perceived as a 'reserved, unsocial' person who turned down several social invitations.

Unlike Amjad who lived in a shared accommodation and could not invite others to his limited space, Hassan and Mahmoud shared a spacious flat and that enabled them to invite their classmates to discuss assignments in their accommodation. Hassan explained that since cafes close by 7:30 p.m. and the only social spaces that stay open after that are pubs, they used their accommodation as a social space, brought food from Halal restaurants, and sat together with their non-Arab friends working on projects without the need to keep on reminding others of their difference.

Kholoud came to the UK wearing a head-cover and willing to lead a different life. Shortly after coming to the UK, she took off her head-cover because she felt wearing an Islamic dress code affected her social interaction:

**Me: You told me that when you wear a scarf people treat you differently. How do they treat you?**

**Kh: You can sense a little bit. It is something you sense. It is different. I don't know. They don't really talk to you if you are wearing a scarf the same way if you don't. Stuff like that! Little things! I don't know. I cannot describe it. It is something you sense [5<sup>th</sup>].**

Nevertheless, that was not all what she needed to do in order to interact with others more effectively. This realisation frustrated her because she was still perceived as a 'weird' person because she did not drink alcohol:

**K:.. when I meet someone who is not Muslim and they are so used to drinking and they find it odd that they meet someone who does not drink ....**

**Me: Does this affect your relation with these people?**

**K: No. I think it makes them feel that maybe they should not hang out with me. She does not drink and stuff like that. But the friends I have right now have different religions and they drink and stuff and they already know. They'd warn me if there is something in the food that I should not eat and they understand. Even they know about Halal food so when we good for lunch, they make it halal [5<sup>th</sup>].**

Kholoud's attempt to be friends with other non-Muslim students were partially successful. This was mainly dependent on her friends' decisions to respect her difference and create social spaces where she could join them. She was sad when she said that she did not have any British friends, but remained hopeful that she might meet some who would understand her difference and be willing to be friends with her.

Asma took a similar decision while trying to integrate. She also felt that her dress code had hindered her integration:

From my appearance I take a particular label. I changed my appearance to see if the label changes or not. [*She removed the head-scarf*]. Indeed, it changed. People's willingness to talk to me changed. They are friendlier now and willing to talk to me more now, especially the English [5<sup>th</sup>].

Asma decided to take off her head-cover after six months during which she complained that she did not have any British students as friends. Before that, she took part in the university Student Union events and was chosen as one of the intercultural ambassadors. She perceived this as an opportunity to learn more about others. However, some incidents reminded her of her difference:

Once we went to a place to discuss some of the plans for the **intercultural ambassadors**. We ended up in a **bar** and I did not know that it was a **bar**. They ordered alcohol and I was too embarrassed. I did not order anything. People looked at me in a strange way because of my head-cover. After this embarrassing experience, I became more careful. When I go out with others, I have to ask where we are going. I learned something about the British culture and I learned that I was in a **bar** by mistake [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Had her group understood that she did not drink and could not go to a bar with a head-cover, they would not have discussed their project in a bar. Situations like these could lead to: (1) trying to get rid of religious dress codes so one appears less different, which is what Asma and Kholoud did, or (2) deciding to avoid being around people who do not share or respect one's religious beliefs which is what Reem and Dalal chose to do.

Another important point was brought up by Ameen who, like the rest of his classmates, had to attend classes on the day of Eid El Fitr, a Muslim festival to celebrate the end of the fasting month of Ramadan:

It was the day of Eid and my friends and I entered the classroom a minute after the class started. The tutor did not like that because we were a big group of late students. We were 15 and some of us were wearing deshdashas [a traditional thoub]. The tutor asked us about the reason for coming late and wearing traditional clothes. We told him it is Eid day and explained to him why it was an important day for us. At the end he understood. It is

like going to classes on **Christmas** day. The problem here is that they did not even know that it was Eid [1<sup>st</sup>].

This incident is an example of how Ameen and his classmates were faced by lack of recognition which can foster social isolation and tension. This situation carries important implications for universities that celebrate diversity. Whereas internationalisation is widely celebrated in the UK HE sector, not understanding the cultural and religious backgrounds of students poses serious problems that challenge cross-cultural understanding and problematises intercultural contact zones.

#### **5.4.2.2 Participants' perceptions of university policies**

This sub-section looks into how universities' decisions to group and distribute 'international' students largely affect the social trajectories of these students. These multilingual, multinational spaces can be used to foster intercultural communication if careful, informed decisions are made to achieve this goal.

The four foundation students complained that they were grouped with other Arab students in most of their classes. Grouping students who speak the same first language together has devastating impacts on sojourners who came to the UK aiming to improve their English and their cross-cultural communication. Considering that these sojourners spend most of their time studying or working on projects, grouping them with other Arab students limits their chances of choosing friends. Mahmoud, for instance, argued that he did not have the option to be part of an Arabic-only circle. Rather, he was forced into this:

You see as university students our integration should start at classrooms but this does not happen because all those who study with me are from the Gulf and most of them are girls. And due to the traditions in the Gulf, boys try not to talk to the girls. I have a small group of boys from the Gulf and I had no choice but to be with them. The British don't like us and try to get away from us. But nothing is impossible maybe next year I will have more friends [5<sup>th</sup>].

Mahmoud's disengagement created room for negative attitudes towards those who are outside his social circle. Mahmoud was not alone in feeling that British students are not interested in being friends with international students as will be further discussed in 5.4.2.3.

Another outcome of this distribution policy is lack of English practice. All research participants expected that studying in the UK essentially means being immersed in an English environment. However, they reported that they used English in very limited contexts: classrooms, shops, restaurants, cafes, and when interacting with other non-Arabic speakers (occasionally). In fact, Mahmoud explained that he did not come to the UK to practise English only in restaurants and shops. As a reaction to his disappointment, he decided to order his meals and groceries online.

In addition, there was a general sentiment that the participants were not offered enough opportunities to work with others. Asma noted that her course should include group work projects. She was part of a small class with other 'international' students and complained to her personal tutor that she did not have enough interaction with her classmates. In response, her tutor suggested weekly discussion meetings, yet the students did not show commitment to such meetings since they were not a component of their course assessment. The four foundation students, Hassan, Mahmoud, Ameen, and Kholoud talked about their positive experience during the induction week when they were asked to interview 'home' students on campus as part of an assignment. Mahmoud commented on this task saying:

One day of the induction week was better than a whole month on our own. The university should do more to engage us and the British accent is difficult. My friends back home expect me to come back with British English [1<sup>st</sup>].

The four participants wished they had continued to do similar tasks, and this in itself offers practical suggestions to engage 'international' students even if student recruitment resulted in attracting students from the same country or students speaking the same first language on the same course. Mahmoud's above quote reflects his internal struggles of trying to meet the expectations of his family and friends while grappling with social and linguistic barriers in the UK. His words emphasise the ethical responsibility of UK HE towards its recruited students (customers).

Another point to address comes from Asma who was actively involved in Student Union events and meetings. Asma observed that the university separates between academic and social sides. That is to say, it assigns the social



engagement of students to Student Union. All research participants pointed that they were not interested in Student Union events because they are late, uninteresting, irrelevant, and/or alcohol-based. Asma further illustrated that the International Office is known to be the place that deals with visa-related inquiries thus its role in engaging international students is not prominent.

Overall, students' comments on how they needed to be better integrated contradicted with their wish to avoid competing with 'home' students. In fact, this constitutes an overarching paradox that remained noticeable during the study period. The participants wanted to interact with native speakers of English but were afraid of: (a). being assigned unfavourable positionings, (b). failing to validate their preferred identities, (c). being dragged into an 'unfair' competition with the 'owners' of the language, (d). dealing with others who may not understand their religious and cultural backgrounds, and (e). getting into situations that are contrary to their values, i.e. pubs.

#### 5.4.2.3 Stereotypes and tensions

Stereotypes, generalisable views of others, and the tensions they create affect one's views of others, influencing one's readiness and openness to communicate. The participants too had their own views of the British society and such views affected their social interactions. Moreover, participants' limited interaction with people outside their social network could have fuelled stereotypes and tensions.

The most common stereotype across participants' profiles is that the British are not willing to be friends with 'international' students. Kholoud pointed out that she tried to have many British friends and when she did not manage to achieve this social goal, she concluded that they did not even try to know 'international' students. Asma's comments were in line with this view when she said that:

The English are not obliged to know people different from them. They might be curious to talk to you once, know something about you but they are not obliged to be friends with you because they have a lot of friends like them and even from the **social side** they don't have to deal with **international students**.... The bottom line: the English don't find a lot of **mutual benefits** with the **international students** [5<sup>th</sup>].

Such stereotypes create social tensions which might have predetermined future social interactions. Put in other words, when the participants were convinced that the British did not want to be friends with them, this negative attitude might have continued to affect future attempts of widening their social networks.

Another stereotype was pointed out by Reem who explained that the British were not 'cooperative' especially when they deal with non-British individuals. She was disturbed by expressions such as 'I am afraid we cannot' which was a common response that she received. As a result, she noted that the British were not willing to help or even explain why they could not help. She hypothesised that such behaviours could have sprung from xenophobic discourses:

You are categorised based on your hijab as a **Muslim**. There are certain ideas about Muslims. They heard things and will deal with you in a particular way. If I take off the hijab, they won't know where I am from or who I am [5<sup>th</sup>].

Mahmoud made a similar comment when he said, 'the British are not kind especially the old women. Some of them even have prejudice against us' [1<sup>st</sup>]. These points were used by some participants as reasonable excuses to justify their social patterns of staying in their own circles. Irrespective of whether or not these decisions were made based on single, intermittent incidents, they seemed to have strongly affected the participants' social encounters.

On the other hand, Hassan framed his views of the British based on some stories he had heard from his friends:

One of them told me that his British friends always encourage him to do better and ask about his progress. Stories like this make me feel better [4<sup>th</sup>].

The word 'stories' is critical in the sense that although he lived in the UK, he did not have enough participation and he relied on the experiences and stories of his friends. This suggests to what extent Hassan and many other students had isolated themselves (or were forced into isolating themselves). At the same time, they needed to hear positive experiences to encourage them to get out of their linguistic and cultural shells.

Kholoud, however, chose not to get out of the cultural shell but to add a different linguistic colour to it. As shown above (5.4.2.1), Kholoud tried to integrate in the British society and chose to take off her head-cover assuming that she would be able to communicate better without a religious dress code. Still, she was perceived as a 'weird' person because she did not drink alcohol. To resolve this tension, she decided to have her own social circle of Arab friends who were willing to speak English:

**My friends and I agreed that we are in the UK so we need to use English. They are all Arabs. Other people in our class get upset when they see us speak in English because we are Arabs and we are supposed to speak in Arabic. I tell them we are in the UK [3<sup>rd</sup>].**

Kholoud and her friends associated being in the UK with speaking in English. She was critical of her Arab friends who spoke Arabic most of the time while they were supposed to seize the opportunity of being in the UK.

Consequently, some participants responded to their inability to have British friends by deciding to take language lessons. For example, Reem demonstrated that she would work harder to improve her English when she goes back to her country. Her isolation made her think that living in the UK should not be seen as the only way to improve her English. Likewise, Mahmoud planned to take English courses in UAE during the summer holiday. Dalal also thought of taking conversation classes to improve her ability to communicate in informal situations and she wanted to be taught by a teacher who spoke Yorkshire English. She explained that it is always better to learn from a teacher because she did not want to face the embarrassment of trying and failing. This suggests that classrooms were perceived as safer venues for many participants.

### **5.4.3 Personal growth**

This section looks at the impact of sojourning on one's personal development. Benson et al. (2013) drew a distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes of study abroad. Personal growth is one of the non-linguistic outcomes of study abroad as language and non-language learners could notice the impact of being away from home on their maturity and self-reliance. The problem with this distinction, however, is that language remains at the heart of social interaction, affecting one's confidence and sense of maturity (Benson et al.,

2013). Because of this rather problematic separation, section 5.3.2 discussed the impact of shifts in language value on sojourners' identities whereas this section addresses aspects of personal development. Generally, while the discussion of language-related identity (re)construction tended to be a site for struggle, negotiation and resistance (see 5.3.2), participants' comments on their personal development by virtue of studying in the UK tended to be more positive and aspirational.

The first outcome of studying in a different socio-cultural context is encouraging individuals to appreciate their difference and to be accepting of others. Asma indicated that life in the UK had influenced her and made her perceive difference as the norm. Mahmoud explained how living in a diverse environment has made him a flexible person who became more accepting and less rigid. He wondered if these new traits would remain with him when he goes back to UAE at the end of his course. Like them, Reem demonstrated that coming to the UK and seeing people who accepted her cultural difference made her more willing to accept others. Although Reem used to work in an international bank with members from different countries, her new positioning as a different, foreign, and 'international' made her more understanding of others who were different from her.

Another outcome is developing different views of the world. Amjad, who came from the besieged Gaza Strip, pointed that he started to have faith in other peoples only after coming to the UK:

I am **more sociable** now and I started to have faith in other peoples. I was isolated in Gaza and I knew about other nations only from the news. Now, I know how people live. I started to view the world in a positive way [4<sup>th</sup>].

Amjad's experience affected his political views and made him able to reconcile with others. Before coming to the UK, he was politically and geographically isolated and that made him develop negative attitudes towards other nations. Coming to the UK was an enlightening experience that gave him the opportunity to understand what happens in other parts of the world. As a result, his earlier negative attitudes were replaced by more informed attitudes.

Other outcomes such as becoming responsible, more organised, independent, and more mature recurred across all participants' profiles. Living away from home for such a long period was a new experience for all research participants. Regardless of the sociolinguistic challenges outlined above, they were happy that they were offered this opportunity and were able to see its positive impacts on their personal growth. One of the main things that helped them develop different ways of thinking was the ability to become a critical thinker, as explained by Asma:

My way of looking at things has changed. It is something I learned from studying here. We learn how to alienate ourselves from the topic, be objective and use higher **critical thinking** skills to solve problems without being emotional. I think the way we study and write here makes me different. We try not to be personal and to look for **evidence** to convince others. My family has noticed this and how this has changed the way I deal with things. My mother calls me nowadays to tell me about some situations and asks for my suggestions [4<sup>th</sup>].

In spite of such positive feelings and attitudes towards their personal development, many participants were worried about going home and dealing with their old societies. They were conscious of the changes in their ways of living and thinking and were not sure how they could use these changes in their home countries. The following quote comes from Reem's last interview:

I changed a lot. My personal, professional, academic, and practical life has changed. **I gained new perspectives**. My thinking has changed. You learn a lot of things when you are away from home. You learn how to help others. People here respect your privacy and freedom. When I say **I'm busy** to my Saudi friends here, they understand, but if I say the same to them when they are back in Saudi Arabia, they will get disturbed. Living here makes you more practical. The problem, however, is when you get back... I don't know what will happen when I go back, **I'll have restrictions** and people will ask me what happened to me and where I think I am. I expect this is going to cause troubles. It is early to worry about this now but it won't be easy [5<sup>th</sup>].

More acute were Mahmoud's accounts when he went back to UAE during the Christmas Holiday. He narrated how his UK lifestyle made him unable to go back to his old lifestyle, causing clashes with his family members:

Something strange happened to me and I didn't understand it. The personality that I developed here stayed here. I don't know

how. Don't ask me how. I went back to my old self; the self that I left the UAE with. I liked the style I lived in the UK and wanted to go back to the UK because I lived a **free** life there. When I went home, I felt that my family did not understand that I became more **responsible**. Instead, they wanted me to go home at a certain time. I told them that I used to come home whenever I wanted when I was in the UK. I used to eat whatever I wanted and say whatever I wanted. I wanted them to allow me to lead the same lifestyle. They didn't understand me and at the end I was forced to follow the restrictions of the **field** in which I was living. I didn't like that of course. We had a family gathering in our house to welcome me. I did not like the way they spoke about me. Their words were flattering and not realistic. That annoyed me. I am afraid because I know when I go back after I finish my studies, I will experience **culture shock**. You see the people who live there remain the same but I am rebellious by nature and I don't like to live boring routines [3<sup>rd</sup>].

These instances add new perspectives to personal growth. Whereas Jackson (2008) and Benson et al. (2013) depict personal growth as positive outcomes of study abroad experiences, the participants celebrated their personal growth with caution and uncertainty. They had their eyes fixed at their homes, their families, and their old communities and they were aware that their personal growth, e.g. problem-solving skills, time management, responsibility, cultural tolerance, independence, etc., are not necessarily what their communities expect them to come back home with. Therefore, the fear of a reverse culture shock was a common response to questions about going back to their countries at the end of a life-altering event such as the one they had experienced in the UK.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at social aspects of participants' social life in an attempt to understand the factors that affected their friendship-making decisions and the role of language in such decisions. It has also investigated the notion of 'carrying borders' in light of inhibitors such religion, university grouping policies as perceived by the participants, and stereotypes. Finally, it has become evident that participants' study abroad experiences have important implications on their personal growth, an advantage that deserves to be addressed with scrutiny, considering participants' worries and concerns regarding going back to their countries.

## 5.5 Finding 5: Academic Sojourners' reflections on previous education

### Introduction

This section discusses sojourners' reflections on their previous, formal English language education prior to coming to the UK. Whilst the focus is on participants' previous English language education, the dataset proves that it is difficult to separate previous language education from the wider context of the educational system and academic culture in the participants' home countries. Put in other words, the fact that the participants had moved to an English-medium environment and to a new academic culture puts English at the heart of the scene, either as a subject or as a new communicative tool. As a result, when prompted to talk about their previous language education, references to the educational system and the academic culture in their countries continued to creep into the discussion and this justifies the use of '**Reflections on previous education**', rather than '**Reflections on previous language education**' as the title of this section.

By and large, both undergraduate and postgraduate participants had raised similar concerns regarding their previous education, and thus it seems apparent that those who completed their undergraduate degrees in their countries did not seem to have better preparation for life and study in the UK, as will be further elaborated in this section. This is not only attributed to English language education, but also to differences in the academic and educational cultures and the implications thereof on participants' unfamiliarity with the academic culture in the UK and the frustration of using English in such a new system. This inextricable relationship between using English for new academic purposes (ENAP), and English for formal and less formal purposes drags into the discussion issues related to how English was taught and how academic research was introduced to the participants in their countries.

This section is structured around a journey/trajectory metaphor. The first section looks at 'English as a subject' and comments on how the participants talked about the language education they received in their countries. The second section 'English for new purposes' addresses the new needs and encounters of the

students as they moved to the UK. The final section 'Comments on the educational system' features how the participants reflected on their previous educational system after experiencing aspects of academic culture in the UK.

### 5.5.1 English as a subject

As seen in 5.3, the unexpected experience of devaluing and revaluing the linguistic repertoires of the participants was daunting and triggered deep reflections on their previous language education and on the role of their education as preparation for life and study abroad. Noticeably, the participants criticised the way they were taught English and raised four issues related to how English, as a subject, was introduced to them:

- Focus on Standard English
- Focus on oral competence and formal registers
- Gap between life inside and outside the classroom
- Focus on IELTS

#### 5.5.1.1 Focus on Standard English

To start with, all research participants complained that their English language education focused only on Standard English. Some of them even indicated that they thought that all English speakers use one English variety which is the Standard variety they were taught, which has two types: American and British. Amjad was critical of how English was presented to him at school and the following quote features a change in his attitudes towards Standard English:

K: When we started, you told me that you want to speak like a **native speaker** and wanted to speak **London accent**.

Am: For us, this is the **standard accent** but honestly now it does not matter. I no longer care about **standard** because I feel that I am more involved in the English society, and any English I am used to has become **standard** for me. Why did I make a difference at the beginning? Because when we were taught English we used **Standard** English which I called **London accent** when I first arrived. Now I don't care about this accent and **Yorkshire English** has become the **standard** and the **normal** accent for me. Those who taught us did not tell us that there are other accents besides the **Standard** and that is why I was shocked when I first arrived [5<sup>th</sup>].

In his first interview, Amjad explained that he wanted to speak 'London Accent', which he referred to as the 'Standard Accent'. This choice was heavily influenced



by his previous conceptualisation of English as one monolithic entity (Hall, 2012; Pennycook, 2007) which he developed as a result of his previous English language education. When that interview was conducted, Amjad had not visited London (nor did he visit it during the study period); therefore, he appeared to assume that people in London speak the same English variety i.e. the English he was taught. After almost eight months of living in West Yorkshire, Amjad asserted that Yorkshire English had become the 'standard' for him because he was accustomed to it. He blamed his language teachers for not introducing other accents or varieties to their students and saw in this misleading practice a reason why he was shocked when he was exposed to different varieties of English in the UK. The pressing question is whether his language teachers were actually aware of the presence of these varieties given that they did not experience life in an English-speaking country themselves. Another important point raised by Amjad's quote is the understanding of what 'standard' is. It seems that he perceived a standard variety as a variety that he can understand and use regardless of its social and ideological status in the society where he lived. This could indicate lack of ideological understanding of the connection between language varieties, social status and class, and identity.

Like Amjad, the rest of the participants explained that they were unaware of the presence of the English varieties they came across in the UK. Ameen and Mahmoud used to think that English has just two varieties: American and British. For them, the British accent is the original accent whereas the American accent is more common. Kholoud, and Asma used to think that there were two accents in the UK: one in England and one in Scotland. Hassan already knew that there are different types of English spoken in different parts of the UK, but that was not because of his language education. Instead, he came to this realisation because he had met many English people in Qatar and noticed that they spoke different English accents:

**I think I'm used to see different accents all around the world, American, Australian because I met many people from everywhere and they spoke different English. The Gulf has different English, you know it. The Africans have different English. All the world has different accents [Pair Interview].**

In addition, Hassan's father and elder sister had previously studied in the UK, and that gave him an opportunity to listen to first-hand experiences of dealing with

various English accents. That said, Hassan, like the rest of the participants, found it difficult to understand Yorkshire English. He mentioned that when English-speaking visitors came to his country, they tended to use simpler English because they were visiting a non-English speaking country, so even though he was exposed to different varieties of English, he felt that those were simpler than the English he needed to understand and use in the UK.

Mahmoud reported a similar experience when he talked about his English high school teacher:

My grade 12 teacher was British....He did not speak *British* English. He spoke normal English. He was used to teaching students. He used to write synonyms for us and trained us to get **IELTS** 5.5 [1<sup>st</sup>].

Mahmoud's conceptualisation of 'normal' English goes in line with the understanding of English as a language with one Standard, normal variety. It is noteworthy that Mahmoud drew a distinction between British English and normal English which suggests that he perceived local varieties of English as British English, whereas the Standard variety he was taught was regarded as the normal accent he expected people to use. Mahmoud's emphasis on the fact that he was taught by a British teacher who also did not introduce other varieties of English to him suggests that focusing on Standard English is a crucial ideological underpinning of language education in his country (this can be extended to many different parts of the world).

Even though Dalal and Reem's undergraduate study was a mixture of English linguistics and English literature which included a course on English phonology and the phonological differences between some major accents in the UK, they explained that this previous knowledge did not help them cope with the English varieties spoken around them because the course was 'theoretical'. Therefore, although both participants came to the UK with some theoretical awareness of the linguistic scene in the UK, that did not have a considerable impact on preparing them to communicate more effectively.

To this end, Asma suggested that teaching listening should be done in a different way:

There are many things that should be done. First they should focus on **listening** and it should not be based on **global English** accent. Students should listen to **different accents** so they can communicate with everyone. Students need to understand that they won't necessarily communicate with someone whose English is 100 % clear and who speaks **Global English** accent. They should prepare students for this [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Asma's suggestion carries important pedagogical implications for language educators. She asked language teachers to stop focusing on Standard English, what she referred to as 'Global English'. As someone who had been living in the UK, she was able to notice that different speakers/users of English speak different English(es). Therefore, this diversity needs to be reflected in advanced language classes in order to better prepare language learners/users for life and study beyond their geopolitical borders. Fundamentally, this will also raise ideological awareness among language learners/users and will widen their horizons to embrace pluralistic conceptualisations of English (Hall, 2012, 2013, 2014).

It has become clear that participants' previous English language education has misled them to believe that the Standard English they were taught is what they are expected to be exposed to wherever they go. Across all participant profiles, it appears that the frustrating chasm between being a learner of English in an EFL context and a user of English in an ENL context was not met by educational attempts to prepare language learners for life and study abroad. This is true because the way research participants conceptualised English was mainly influenced by simplistic, monolithic conceptualisations embraced and reinforced by their previous language education. In essence, this has serious implications not only on participants' future attitudes towards their English (as seen in 5.3) but also on how they perceived English(es) around them. For instance, Amjad tried to make use of his academic sojourn to learn the 'correct' pronunciation of English words. He had complained that when he studied English in Palestine, he had different English teachers and they used to pronounce the same word differently. He explained that these different pronunciations had confused him and made him unable to decide which pronunciation is 'correct'. This reason coupled with a monolithic conceptualisation of English made him willing to avoid speaking with other non-native speakers of English in order to pay enough attention to observe how his English classmates pronounced the words:

To be honest I don't learn from the Chinese because my English is better than them.... At the end, I want to hear what is correct. I focus on what my British classmate says because she speaks correctly [Pair Interview].

For Amjad, living in the UK did not appear to have promoted the ideology of World Englishes, or ELF as pluralistic conceptualisations of English. Put in other words, He was surrounded by multilingual speakers of English in a heavily multilingual (English-dominant) university setting. He also lived in quite a linguistically diverse city. This could have affected his perceptions of English, and in his case, it seems to have reinforced for him the importance of NSE.

The following insight from Dalal resonates with the title of this sub-section as it discusses an interesting analogy between teaching English and other subjects such as maths:

We teach English like maths. It is very rigid and we don't teach language as a flexible thing. For example, we teach students that they should add '-ed' to the verb when they see the word 'yesterday' [Pair Interview].

Teaching English like maths overlooks socio-pragmatic aspects of language. Consequently, learners can be good at English grammar but they may not be able to use this knowledge to communicate successfully. All participants reported that their previous language education helped them know the differences between different tenses. However, when they came to the UK, they realised that what used to be the complete picture turned out to be just one side of a rather complex, messy and diverse linguistic scene in the UK. Some participants started to question what they used to take for granted. Amjad noted that he did not meet people who speak 'Standard English' outside classroom spaces. Instead, people around him spoke different accents. Ameen wondered why he was not offered the option to choose the accent he wanted to learn.

#### **5.5.1.2 Focus on formal registers and oral performance**

In addition to focusing on Standard English, several participants reported that they were better prepared for using formal registers and the focus was on oral performance. Participants' introduction to English 'imagined communities' (Kanno and Norton, 2003) was through formulaic expressions and imagined conversations which taught them how to be polite and formal. Despite its

usefulness in formal situations, this practice has two major drawbacks: (a) it does not prepare language learners to use appropriate forms in less formal situations i.e. lack of socio-pragmatic competence (Holmes and Riddiford 2011, p. 377) and (b) it does not offer enough input for and practice of skills such as reading and writing. The first issue was further elaborated in 5.3 which explained how participants' English had a lower exchange value in less formal situations.

Some participants suggested some strategies to help future sojourners interact more effectively. Reem suggested offering optional courses that teach idioms and less formal expressions. She, however, emphasised that these should be elective courses and only interested students can apply for them, given that not all language learners plan to study and/or work abroad. Similarly, Amjad believed that courses on introducing local expressions, e.g. Yorkshire English expressions, could facilitate communication and offer some reassurance to language learners/users. For instance, Hassan and Mahmoud reported on their experience of taking an optional workshop on understanding local accents:

H: because we face a problem with accents here, we took a **workshop on accents** and they taught us how they eat the speech<sup>14</sup>. They trained us and made us feel that it is **OK** and **we know it now**... they gave us sentences and asked us to read them and to eat some words.

K: Was it a compulsory workshop?

H: No, my friend and I signed up for it. We had the option and we learned a lot [5<sup>th</sup>].

Instead of confronting academic sojourners and forcing them to attend more language courses in order to gain more linguistic assets, offering an elective course was important for Hassan and Mahmoud who decided to attend the workshop after reflecting on their linguistic needs and understanding the potential benefits of this course. Making it a personal decision enabled Hassan to defend his choice and to embrace his experience. Furthermore, he felt more confident that he also could 'eat the words' and this made him feel less deprived of linguistic resources.

Moreover, Dalal emphasised the importance of trying to show students what

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<sup>14</sup> An Arabic metaphor for speaking quickly.

happens in real life. She complained that conversation classes in her university were thematic. They used to teach their students a set of words and expressions related to a particular theme or topic without offering students the opportunity to see how these expressions are used in real life, either in formal or informal situations. Thus, her previous language education was based on making students memorise expressions without necessarily being able to use them in discursive practices.

The aforementioned suggestions indicate the extent to which the participants were involved in reflecting on what they received in their countries as opposed to what they actually needed in the UK. They were also keen to suggest what else can language teaching provision in their countries do to improve the experiences of future sojourners. This indicates that the participants did not choose to be silent sufferers. Rather, they were reflexive and reflective trying to interpret what happened to them and why.

In addition, focusing on learners' oral performance impacted on their reading and writing skills. Hassan complained that although his spoken English enabled him to communicate with international visitors to Qatar, his reading and writing skills were weak. He pointed that in his academy, the focus was on oral communication and thus writing and reading were seen as less important. The underlying assumption of such practices is that language learners will need English to communicate with others and not all of them are interested in pursuing academic degrees in English-speaking countries. While this can be a justification for focusing on oral performance, it disadvantages students who aim to study abroad and need high levels of reading comprehension. Eventually, Hassan commented on his academic sojourn experience by saying that it had transformed him into a better reader who enjoyed reading, analysing, and commenting on what he read.

Likewise, Kholoud pointed that her formal English language education was not very useful for her. As she was born to a South African mother, she learned English at home, and found English (as a school subject) easy because it focused on oral skills which she had already developed at home. The problem that she faced, however, was in shifting from spoken to written discourse and she admitted that her previous language education did not offer enough training on trans-modal communication which would have enabled her to speak and write different genres

in English. The exception to this was being trained for IELTS writing, as will be seen in 5.5.1.4.

### 5.5.1.3 Gap between life inside and outside the classroom

An extension to focusing on Standard English, formal registers, and oral performance was that the participants became aware of the gap between life inside and outside the classroom. This point was raised by Dalal and Reem who both studied an undergraduate degree in English language and literature. Given their academic background, the two participants had had the longest period of previous language education prior to coming to the UK. Still, that did not seem to have offered them better chances of effective communication. In fact, Dalal boldly asserted that the way English is taught in her country does not teach learners what happens in daily life. She further criticised education at her university by saying that:

I feel my language education at university did not offer the psychological and social preparation for life in the UK. We can get the highest marks at university and then come here to be shocked and to stay silent for a long time [1<sup>st</sup>].

Dalal not only criticised the focus of language education in her university, but she was also critical of the assessment criteria there. She clearly stated that she was not psychologically and socially prepared for life in the UK and the assessment, which was based on memorising vocabulary and expression lists and grammar rules, was misleading. As a result, she was exposed to experiences of shifts in her language value that forced her to stay silent for a long time and this considerable impacts on her perception of herself and on her identity projection and reception as discussed in 5.3 and 5.3.2.

Moreover, Reem was more specific in addressing the content of her university degree:

I graduated from university with poor skills even though I studied **English literature and linguistics**... I did not feel that my language improved at university. We studied specialised modules. We mixed literature with **linguistics** and this was not too useful. It does not help you speak better English. You **mainly** know what this person said or wrote, this image, that symbol, and how sounds are articulated. I did not have better **English** skills from my university. I learned more from my school... Instead of focusing on **Emily Dickinson** and old plays, they should focus on the English we will use in real life. The English we studied is

**unrelated** to what we use here. It's old and unused. Even learning places of articulating sounds is not important. We should focus on where to place the **stress**. These are important things [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Having experienced life in the UK, Reem was able to determine what language aspects would have been more useful for her. For example, she wanted to be taught how to use sentence and word stress instead of learning theoretical terms such as places of articulation. She was conscious of how stress changes meaning and affects communication. She also called for reforming the course offerings at her university. Instead of focusing on figurative language and literature, she wanted the focus to be on how language is actually used. She understood the discrepancy between what she was taught and what she actually needed for life and study in the UK, and this made her actively reflect on the content of her university degree.

Reem's words stress the importance of establishing a particular level of linguistic proficiency and socio-pragmatic competence before introducing meta-language courses to university students. That is to say, introducing literary courses and theoretical linguistic courses to students whose English and intercultural competence is not well-established devalues the importance of these courses. Instead of appreciating that she was taught, Reem emphasised the nuisance and uselessness of what she learned as an English literature and linguistics student.

Along the same lines, Asma admitted that language education in Palestine did not teach her how English is actually used in real life. She insisted that language learning would never be similar to experiencing life in an English-speaking country. Still, she suggested that students in her country could be better prepared for study abroad by showing them more videos, offering more student exchange programmes, and engaging them with a wider online community. Amjad also mentioned the importance of communicating with others online. He noted that connecting with 'foreigners on Facebook' was the most important technique that enabled him to have a clearer reflection of how English is used outside the classroom. Ameen and Kholoud also emphasised the usefulness of online tools in making them more interested in using and improving their English. They explained how social media channels as well as YouTube videos had enabled them to connect with people from other countries and this was their way of



knowing about other countries. They described their sojourn as an extension to their mission of knowing more about the world.

In conclusion, whereas some participants blamed their previous language education for not bridging the gap between life inside and outside the classroom, other participants tried to find a way to know more about English in real life through immersing themselves in online environments which could have offered them safer environments for trial and error. The latter group offers pedagogical implications for language educators who are encouraged to engage English language learners in online environments as one way of offering authentic, real-life communicative practices. The challenge, however, is in determining the extent to which language educators can prepare English language learners for the increasingly unpredictable life outside the classroom and beyond cyber-space communication in order to face the nuances of real, messy, and unpredictable situations in face-to-face interactions.

#### **5.5.1.4 Focus on IELTS**

Another common description of participants' previous language education suggests that it was IELTS oriented. This point was particularly raised by the four undergraduate students (Hassan, Mahmoud, Kholoud and Ameen). In essence, focusing on IELTS skills was generally perceived as a justifiable practice, given the powerful gatekeeping status that IELTS has in UK HE as a requirement for university admission and visa purposes. On the other hand, the participants identified several disadvantages of this practice. First and in Kholoud's words, 'they make us feel that it is all about IELTS but it is not really' [2<sup>nd</sup>]. The gatekeeping power of IELTS had misleadingly promised the participants that once they pass through the IELTS' gate, they would be able to handle academic and non-academic tasks in the UK. Confronting the harsh reality that 'it is not really' all about IELTS was a disappointing and frustrating experience. In practical terms, focusing on the IELTS skills and format made the transition to other skills and formats challenging. For instance, Hassan described how being tuned to IELTS writing was problematic for him:

K: You told me that you expected the **essays** and **reports** here to be similar to the ones you used to write at home, but they were not?

Ha: Yes, they are different. I mean the **essay**. We used to do the **IELTS** way of writing advantages, disadvantages and our opinion. It did not exceed 250 words. When we first arrived here we were asked to write 500 words. We were shocked and after that the next essay was 1200 words. What is going on? In our last **mock exam** it was 1200 and my tutor told me '**you have long introduction**'. I wrote 500 words for the **introduction**.

K: Was it only an issue of word count?

Ha: No, even the **structure** was different [5<sup>th</sup>].

Hassan's comments were typical of the problems raised by the rest of participants when they talked about academic writing and the genres expected from them to produce for their different assignments (more details are presented in 5.5.2). Because they were prepared to handle different IELTS writing tasks, they were able to write essays in the range of 250 words, discussing personal opinions and outlining advantages and disadvantages. Such a simple structure was taken as a given for all academic tasks and that justified their low marks especially for their early assignments. This occurred across all participants' profiles and contributed to lowering the perceived value of their English.

Not only did focusing on IELTS affect participants' writing skills, it also affected their listening skills, as well. In their pair interview, Asma eagerly interrupted Amjad to make the point that what they were taught was not a realistic representation of what they faced in the UK:

Asma: Wait a minute. Let's talk about the **listening section in the IELTS** for example. You feel it is easy but when I hear people here, I don't understand them.

IELTS test takers can easily believe that if they get a high score in listening, they would not face problems understanding English speakers. This mismatch between expected and lived life in Britain was not a pleasant surprise for the participants, who could feel 'deceived' by their previous language education (a word used by Mahmoud). In fact, this minimal transferability of skills to real life interactions poses a serious challenge to language learners and language teachers alike. In theory, language teachers are responsible for several complex tasks and preparing their students to pass IELTS is one of them. Regardless of whether they are aware that 'it is not really all about IELTS' or not, they are kept in a loop of institutional requirements and IELTS preparation is one of them.

### 5.5.2 English for new purposes

This section engages with the new purposes which emerged by virtue of movement. That is to say, upon arrival in the UK, the participants needed to use their English for new purposes. As discussed in **Finding 3**, these new purposes which required familiarity with more repertoires and registers have contributed to participants' experiences of value shifts and self-doubt. To this end, Amjad was able to understand his confusion by drawing a line between English as a language and English for new purposes:

My English helped me. I did not feel it let me down when it comes to studying. My problem is not with language per se; it is with understanding the system of the academic life here. I mean their **assignments, the writing** we are expected to produce, **their evaluation**. I did not struggle with language but their system is new [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Although Amjad had come from an EFL context (Palestine) where he used English for academic purposes inside classrooms (English for Local Academic Purposes- ELAP), his exposure to a new academic culture in the UK has called for new linguistic repertoires that match the expectations of using English for UK academic purposes i.e. what I call English for New Academic Purposes (ENAP). Amjad was not alone when he identified that there was a big gap between his ELAP and ENAP since all participants had come from different academic cultures where academic genres, assessments, and academic resources were defined and perceived differently.

Academic writing came as the top issue raised by all participants. Although they all used English for academic purposes in their countries, their ELAP tended to be simpler in structure and content. The following quote from Kholoud sheds some light on her ELAP:

**All our school writing was really basic about day-to-day stuff. You know in academic essay, the vocabulary is different. In IELTS, the essays were more similar to the school work that we did. Even when we started here, they told us that our writing is more like IELTS writing and this is not good in academic essays** [2<sup>nd</sup>].

In light of Kholoud's quote, as well as other comments from other participants, the following ELAP writing features were discussed as typical of participants' previous academic assignments:

- Length: short essays or single paragraphs
- Register: limited/no awareness of academic style
- References: limited/no awareness of plagiarism and poor scholarship.
- Analytical Skills: mainly descriptive, lack of criticality.
- Genres: simple paragraphs/essays
- Assessment: different grading system/shallow feedback

It is worth mentioning that these overarching writing ELAP features were present across all participants' profiles regardless of whether they studied at university level in their countries or not. In fact, the four postgraduate students were more frustrated that they were not aware of serious issues such as poor scholarship, and plagiarism, and that their writings tended to be simple, descriptive, and sometimes copied from other sources. They pointed out that the grading system was different in their countries because their course assessment was based on exams, rather than academic research. Some participants went further to explain that they did not use to receive feedback on their 'research'. Even when feedback was given, it tended to focus on grammar and formatting mistakes rather than higher cognitive skills. A sense of this frustration can be noticed in Asma's following quote which comes from her last interview and suggests that despite being in the UK for around 8 months, she had not still acquired enough ENAP skills:

I was shocked to know that I have serious issues in **academic writing**. I do not know how to structure my writing or how to elaborate my ideas or synthesise arguments or paraphrase. I still struggle with these things [5<sup>th</sup>].

On the other hand, the four undergraduate students appeared less perplexed as they were able to draw a line between being a school student (in their country) and a university student (in the UK). With this in mind, they expected that their ELAP skills would not be enough for university level even if they studied at university in their countries. This spirit was prominent in Kholoud's quote above where she spoke about her ELAP skills (school essays and IELTS essay) as skills that would need to be improved in her new academic context (UK university). Still, this spirit was not always sustained across the profiles of other undergraduate students. For example, Ameen called upon school teachers in Oman to teach academic writing skills:

K: What suggestions do you have for English teachers in Oman to make the life of Omani students in the UK easier?

A: To focus on **academic English** even if it is just one **course**. They should teach us how to write an **academic argument** and what the difference between academic and non-academic words is [5<sup>th</sup>].

The course Ameen suggested goes in line with the requirements of the new ENAP skills he needed in the UK. His emphasis on introducing academic conventions 'even if it is just one course' suggests the level of unfamiliarity and confusion experienced by academic sojourners who not only use a different language, but are also bombarded with other necessary skills and repertoires. In fact, Asma, too, suggested that academic writing should be taught to all university students in her country regardless of whether they are majored in English or not. Such requests, repeatedly, problematise the tasks required from language teachers who are expected to meet the needs of their students including those who do and do not want to study abroad. Also, they pose another question regarding the non-universality of academic conventions and how the discrepancies among different academic cultures and practices can be handled or even alluded to, and who should be responsible for that.

### 5.5.3 Comments on the educational system

As indicated earlier, participants' comments on their previous language education were not isolated from reflecting on their previous educational systems and the issues they had identified by virtue of studying in the UK. This section raises participants' voices to draw a picture of how they viewed their previous educational systems. To this end, longer citations are used followed by critical investigations of the points raised.

To start with, Asma, who studied MA Educational Management, was very critical of the educational system in her country:

As: You asked me about education which means the way they teach us. This way is useless. Why? First, we need **skills** and we do not study these skills such as **research skills, critical thinking**, and ways to avoid **plagiarism**. This **plagiarism** is a big story. We used to **copy and paste from the internet**. This is the simplest skill and we did not even learn that. This **concept** is the basis for **academic work**. In addition, the level of **commitment** is very high here. I struggle to **plan my essays** so that I could

submit before the **deadline** with no pressure. I do not even know what **skills** we learned there. I consider the last term as more important than the four years I spent to do my undergraduate studies. During those years, I did not write one **essay** with **references** and I was not assessed the way it is done here [3<sup>rd</sup>].

Here, Asma is concerned that she was not equipped with necessary academic skills in her country. She asserted that the purpose of the educational system is to equip students with skills for work or further study. She complained that she was not equipped with academic skills: research, critical thinking, academic integrity, nor with other important practical skills such as planning, time-management, commitment, meeting deadlines, etc. Because she was disappointed with her previous educational system, she referred to it as 'useless' and asserted that one term of her MA degree is worth more than the four years of her undergraduate studies in terms of usefulness and practicality. These reflections indicate that the participants were not just faced with English-language related challenges, but they were also trying to decipher a new educational system and culture, the language of which happened to be also English.

Whereas Asma referred to her previous educational system as 'useless', Amjad referred to his previous educational system as 'wrong' and 'bad' [5<sup>th</sup>] because it was based on exams. He maintained that the academic research he was part of, as a student in the UK, had engaged him with the process of learning and this made him more likely to remember what he had studied. His old educational system, however, trained him to cram for exams and forget what he memorised soon after taking them. Amjad's reflections suggest that his sojourn experience had enabled him to assess not only how he was taught English, but how the whole process of teaching fitted in a wider system whose issues became clearer to him as a result of trying what is not similar to that system. It can be argued that the accumulation of these reflections and the destabilisation that followed them had carried considerable implications on participants' sense of self-worth. Criticising one's old system and referring to it as 'bad', 'wrong', or 'useless' can acutely impact on individual's perception of their skills, knowledge, and human capital (as a whole), leading and contributing to not only shifts in language value (as seen in Finding 3), but also to shifts in how they assess the value of their education as a whole. Although it might seem to be tangential to look into the wider educational system in the participants' countries, it has proven necessary

to understand the ideology that underlies teaching and learning in their contexts in order to have a closer look at English language education in particular.

Dalal's comments on the educational system in her country were directly linked to language teaching and the wider purpose of teaching English:

K: to what extent has your previous education prepared you to study here?

D: I do not think it prepares us to travel. The only thing we benefitted from language lessons at school and university is **grammar**. We learn the rules but we do not know how to apply them when we speak. We memorise the rules like maths. This does not prepare us for study abroad, not even for using English inside my country. We do not have enough English to use in a restaurant. Before coming here, my university organised a three-day workshop for those who will go to study abroad. The workshops were about cultural differences, our duties, and that we should not be shy to speak. But the general situation is that sponsored students have to take language courses for a year because it is known that we are not prepared for life abroad. I imagine in other Arab countries, the percentage of those who take language courses before starting their degrees is lower. Imagine that they offer English language graduates a year to study language courses before their masters because they expect that English graduates are not qualified to live and study in the UK [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Dalal explained that the focus of her previous educational system, as perceived by her, was to make students memorise rules, e.g. grammar rules. She argued that her previous education does not prepare students to study abroad nor to use English locally. She maintained that when students memorise grammar rules without understanding how to use them in actual communicative practices, they will not be able to take part in basic dialogues such as those typical of restaurant communication. She further indicated that even when workshops were arranged to prepare sojourners for study abroad, the content of such workshops was poor. She was not alone in criticising her pre-departure support. In fact, five participants, including Dalal, reported that their pre-departure workshops were basic and covered topics such as health, weather, safety, duties towards their sponsors, and the need to get high marks, etc.

Another important idea raised by Dalal was offering pre-sessional classes to Saudi students sponsored by their higher education institutions, with the assumption that Saudi graduates are not prepared for life and study in the UK

including those majored in English. She, as a student with a BA in English Language and Linguistics, wanted to take a pre-sessional course even though she met the IELTS requirement for admission to her UK HE institution. However, because of a visa delay, she was not able to arrive in the UK early enough to join the pre-sessional course. Dalal was not sure if other Arab countries have a similar situation, but she assumed that the largest number of pre-sessional takers in the UK come from Saudi Arabia where their sponsors also cover the fees for pre-sessional courses.

As gloomy as this may sound, it still carries important implications for English language education in particular. Academic sojourners, who had spent years learning English in their countries and were optimistic that they would reap what they sow when they visit an English-speaking country, are practically not equipped with enough linguistic capital to effectively alternate between different repertoires. What is more critical is when there is a general sentiment that university graduates are not taught enough English and instead of working on improving the local quality of English language education, these graduates are offered financial support to take pre-sessional (and sometimes in-sessional) classes abroad.

A final note to close this section with is that the points that have been raised under the wider educational system came from three postgraduate students who focused on the educational system of their university education. On the other hand, the four undergraduate students, as explained earlier, were more engaged with reflecting on how they were taught English as a subject at school and how they were trying to cope with ENAP. Therefore, whereas this section is not representative of all profiles, it still carries important implications for educators both in the UK and in the participants' countries.

#### **5.5.4 Conclusion: Implications for language educators**

This chapter has explored participants' reflections on their previous education and the extent to which their previous knowledge and skills had met the new requirements of life and study in the UK. The process of engaging academic sojourners with commenting on their previous English language education in light of their new sociolinguistic demands in the UK has put forward various implications for language educators and has also raised more challenging tasks



facing English language education in EFL contexts. The following points summarise some of the key issues that have emerged from the current discussion:

- Participants' monolithic conceptualisations of English were challenged by encountering different varieties and repertoires of English in the UK context.
- Participants' familiarity with formal spoken registers and oral performance meant that they were uncomfortable dealing with other registers.
- In an increasingly unpredictable world, the gap between learning English inside classrooms and using English outside classrooms is getting bigger. Therefore, more is required to prepare language learners/users for the 'messy' life beyond classroom-space and cyberspace.
- The understandably exaggerated role that the IELTS has as a powerful gatekeeping tool has proven to be troublesome, especially for academic sojourners who assumed that English education is all about IELTS.
- Further thoughts are required to handle the discrepancies between sojourners' previous academic culture(s) and their new academic culture(s) in the UK.

Finally, whether or not the devaluing of the home education system by the sojourners and its implication for identity is a temporary reaction to their struggles to cope in the UK remains a question that opens new doors for future research. That is to say, it is worth investigating if these sojourners will still think that their education back home was inferior in five or ten years' time and to what extent these reflections can be seen as a reaction to their relatively recent arrival in the UK.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has focused on communicating the voices of the participants who actively engaged with reflecting on the influence of their family and previous education on shaping their relationship with English. They came to the UK for various reasons and found this life-altering experience a valuable episode in their life in spite of being faced with unpredictable experiences of shifts in their language value which, along with other factors, affected their social networks in the UK. Nevertheless, they were not silent sufferers as they constantly reflected on their trajectories and attempted to justify their encounters. It is hoped that this research has succeeded to represent the sociolinguistic trajectories of individuals

who have been significantly underrepresented in the study abroad research. The next chapter offers a deeper theoretical commentary on the study's main findings.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the significance of the research findings in relation to the existing literature in order to address the research questions which provided the original impetus for this inquiry. The main aim of the study, as presented in **Chapters 1 and 3**, has been to investigate the sociolinguistic trajectories of Arab academic sojourners in the UK. It is hoped that a better understanding of the sociolinguistic trajectories of Arab academic sojourners can provide deep insights into sojourners' conceptualisations of English, the role and impact of previous formal language education in EFL contexts, sociolinguistics of globalisation, international student experience in UK HE, and social hurdles in contact zones (Pratt 1999). Such insights have considerable weight when considering the importance of catering for the emerging linguistic and intercultural demands brought by globalisation and mobility. Together this carries important implications for language educators in the UK, in Arabic contexts, as well as other EFL contexts. It also offers future academic sojourners to UK HE an opportunity to read about the sociolinguistic experiences of former sojourners and the implications thereof on their perceptions of their linguistic repertoires, student experience and intercultural contact.

As articulated before and demonstrated in **Chapter 4**, this qualitative, longitudinal inquiry was conducted through in-depth interviews over a period of eight months. Research data came from initial pair interviews, which were conducted within a month of the participants' arrival in the UK, as well as five rounds of individual interviews with the eight research participants, resulting in a total of 44 interviews and approximately 27 hours of recording. As seen in **Chapter 5**, the thematic analysis of the generated data features the emergence of five analytical strands, the order of which attempts to produce a readable narrative, within a wider journey/trajectory metaphor. The findings as discussed earlier include five core concentrations:

**Finding 1:** Factors affecting academic sojourners' attitudes towards English

**Finding 2:** Reasons for studying in UK HE

**Finding 3:** Academic sojourners' experiences of shifts in their language value

**Finding 4:** Social aspects of academic sojourning

**Finding 5:** Academic sojourners' reflections on previous formal education

The current discussion is an endeavour to provide interpretative insights into the findings presented in **Chapter 5** in order to reconstruct an integrated picture portrayed through a multi-layered synthesis. The discussion is loosely structured in relation to the five analytic sections (6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5). Following that, 6.6 synthesises the discussion in order to revisit the research questions. Finally, 6.7 presents a more holistic understanding of what it means to move across time and space to embark on an academic sojourn.

## 6.1 Conceptualising English

The analysis chapter has indicated that the process through which academic sojourners conceptualised English is dynamic and multifaceted. This process features continual interaction between a plethora of factors such as familial and institutional habitus (Reay et al., 2005) in which desires of parents, individuals, communities, institutions and states are embedded (Motha and Lin, 2014). Together, these factors contribute to forming certain language ideologies (Kroskrity, 2001) that affect how individuals perceive the importance and function of language in their lives. In addition, it has become clear that the participants' lived experiences in their home countries and in the UK have considerably affected how they conceptualised English. The importance of tracing the development of these conceptualisations stems from the belief that the way language learners conceptualise English affects their attitudes towards it, the way they perceive themselves as users or learners of it, and further contributes to their perceptions of the role of English in their lives, and which type of English they would like to learn, speak, and use.

The early interviews featured the role of the participants' familial upbringing in their education choices, i.e. their English language education when they were young and later when they decided to embark on an academic sojourn in the UK. As seen in **Finding 1**, all participants attended private schools at some point in their educational lives because private education is usually associated with better English education (Ramanathan, 2005). The participants explained that their parents wanted to offer them higher quality English education so that they could

have access to study abroad opportunities, travel, jobs, and social status. English for the participants and their families fits with Pennycook's (2007, p. 101) description when he said, 'this thing called English colludes with many of the pernicious processes of globalisation, deludes many learners through the false promises it holds out for social and material gain'. In addition, in light of Reay's (2005, 1998) 'familial habitus', it is apparent that participants' families had emphasised the economic and social benefits of learning English and such parental involvement impacted the educational choices of the participants. It can further be argued that this emphasis stems from the desires of the states or governments to compete in the global marketplace by having more citizens who are competent in English and this desire is entrenched in language policy (Motha and Lin, 2014). Fundamentally, this empowers the status of English and associates it with opportunities which can also be seen as an attempt of transforming the cultural capital, gained through learning English, into social capital that could ultimately lead to social mobility (Bourdieu, 1993, 1985).

At heart of familial and institutional habituses, which are enmeshed (Reay, 2005), lie ideologies which 'win the day' by virtue of 'reproduction' via 'institutional, semi-institutional and everyday practices' (Blommaert, 1999, p. 10). These ideologies resonate with and are empowered by the increasing market demands which significantly impact on the participants' lived experiences. In other words, the participants were not just told or made to believe that they need English to succeed; rather they had already witnessed the power of English in their local job markets. For participants like Reem, Dalal, Amjad, and Asma, their English proficiency was a 'marker of distinction' (Piller and Cho, 2013) in their job markets which are, by virtue of globalisation and political economy, part of the new neoliberal order (Fairclough 2000). The four undergraduate participants were sent to study in the UK HE sector on similar grounds. That is to say, they were promised jobs by their sponsors if they returned with better English skills and a UK academic brand, following the marketisation of academia (Furedi, 2011; McNamara and Harris, 1997). Consequently, possessing English has become tied with aspirations and future dreams of being, as will be further discussed in 6.2.

All research participants, except for Mahmoud, were part of families where other family members had access to higher education locally (Asma, Amjad, Reem), in

the USA (Dalal), or in the UK (Hassan, Kholoud and Ameen). However, Mahmoud was the first family member to get into higher education. This was not attributed to social class, but was instead due to English proficiency. Mahmoud was the only member of his family who was sent to a private secondary school to improve his English skills so that he can attend university. The failure of Mahmoud's siblings to join university was largely because they did not have the English proficiency required to join a university. This made Mahmoud all the more conscious of the gate-keeping power that English has. Hence, it can be argued that the gate-keeping role of English can be seen as one of the 'mechanisms of social closure' (Reay et al., 2005), which reproduces and feeds into existing inequalities within the sector of higher education in the UK and in many parts of the world, where English proficiency is a prerequisite for university admission irrespective of applicants' destination courses. To this Block (2015, p. 11) responds asserting that, 'English is not the cause of inequality in the world (we can leave that status to the logic of capitalism), but it does mediate inequality and, as a result, the reproduction of class hierarchies in those societies where it has become the centre of debate in education'. Regardless of whether English causes or mediates inequality, its current gate-keeping power is a post-colonial challenge perpetuated by globalisation and internationalisation agendas (Pennycook, 2007).

Consequently, access to higher education for non-native speakers of English is made more challenging as applicants are fighting several battles such as securing financial and linguistic assets, to say the least. Whereas these two battles are pertinent to the research participants, it is important to reiterate that with the exception of Reem, the rest of the participants were sponsored and had signed binding contracts to work with their sponsors for the same period of their sojourn. Whether the participants had had the financial means to undertake a degree in the UK without a scholarship was not addressed and therefore an elaborate discussion in light of participants' material lives cannot be developed, with the exception of the discussion of sponsoring students from different social classes to invest in them in 6.2. That said, it is crucial to indicate that aspects of social class and its impact on foreign language students' learning remain underexplored and are worthy of future research (Block, 2015; Vandrick, 2011; Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2004). Still, social class can be easily confused with

wealth and income. For example, those who think of the Gulf countries as rich might assume that all students coming from the Gulf are rich and are from a high social class.

Turning now to the word *English*, it is crucial to understand how the research participants conceptualised the essence of this word. In this regard, it is important to remember that not only familial and institutional habitus, language ideologies, and lived experiences shaped participants' attitudes towards English, but they also affected their conceptualisations of *which* English can bring them the perceived benefits of speaking the language. In spite of academic endeavours to disinvent and reconstruct English (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007) and models of plurilithic Englishes (Hall, 2012; Pennycook, 2007), monolithic conceptualisations of English predominate in everyday discourse (Hall, 2012). As seen in **Finding 5**, participants' previous formal English language education had played a role in reproducing the monolithic myth of English. With the exception of Hassan, who had met many international foreigners in his academy in Qatar, and Dalal and Reem, who had a course on English phonology as part of their undergraduate degree, the rest of the participants held the view that there were only two marked varieties in the UK: one in England and one in Scotland. Even with this understanding of English, there was an inclination towards Standard English, be it British Standard English- what Ameen and Amjad referred to as the 'London accent' or American Standard English, which was preferred by most participants during their early days in the UK. This preference can be seen as an initial reaction to being exposed to a range of unfamiliar varieties in the UK. That said, it seems that the participants attributed their preference of Standard American English based on different grounds. In addition to the influence of Hollywood industry, exposure to US media, and the prominent political role of the USA in the Middle East, some participants had more personalised reasons for preferring Standard American English. For instance, Kholoud linked her American accent with the power of the USA when she said; 'America is a strong country after all' and therefore she explained that she was not willing to change her accent. That is to say, the political and economic power of the USA made Kholoud believe in the power of the accent she chose to use in the UK. Another example comes from Reem who associated her preference of American English with her attitude towards the Americans whom she described as friendlier and more cooperative.

The last example comes from Dalal who explained that the value of a degree from the USA in her Saudi University is higher than that from the UK, and this extends to include her attitudes towards American English.

Therefore, the early interviews featured the role of participants' familial upbringing, previous formal education, lived experiences, as well as institutional language ideologies in conceptualising English as a language whose mastery was viewed as a 'door-opener' (Bachman and Purpura, 2008). Furthermore, English was perceived through the lens of the two Standard varieties: American and British, and participants' attitudes towards English accents were framed accordingly. However, what became more prominent throughout the study period was how the participants' mobility and sociolinguistic trajectories in the UK destabilised their previously held beliefs and contributed to the emergence of new, frustrating but more realistic conceptualisations of English.

First, the sojourn experience offered the participants the chance to be exposed to super-diversity in the UK (Vertovec, 2007) which also entails exposure to many different and unexpected varieties of English. Towards the end of the study, Mahmoud, Hassan, Dalal and Asma demonstrated that their idea of best English had been extended to include any English which is easy to understand, thereby foregrounding the communicative value of language. On the other hand, Amjad insisted that he should focus on the 'correct' English which he can learn from some native speakers of English. This can be interpreted in light of being in a heavily multilingual university and a linguistically diverse UK city, which could have reinforced the importance of a standard variety for ease of communication. Regardless of whether participants' mobility had challenged or reinforced the idea of a standard variety, it can be argued that the intelligibility of any English variety had been emphasised as the most important factor. Particularly, earlier interviews showed how participants' familiarity with Standard (American) English made it the most favoured variety because they perceived it as 'easy to understand'.

Second, the sociolinguistic trajectories of the participants gave rise to new conceptualisations of English, which can be unsettling to the participants who used to view English through the prism of the monolithic myth (Hall, 2013; Pennycook, 2007). As seen in **Finding 3**, the participants started to be aware of the presence of different English registers, varieties and repertoires. All of them



became aware of the differences between what they referred to as normal English, general English, academic English, IELTS English, and social English, etc. Such realisations destabilised their previous conceptualisations of what English is. An example of this can be seen in Mahmoud's question: 'did I learn English or what?' [3<sup>rd</sup>], which reflects that Mahmoud became conscious of the difference between the English he learned and used to believe in and the English he used and was exposed to in the UK. A detailed discussion of the manifestations of movement and the impact of mobility on understanding the sociolinguistics of globalisation is presented in 6.3.

Therefore, it is apparent that participants' ongoing conceptualisations of English emerged from a pool of factors that continued to ideologically shape and reshape their views of why they need English and which English they should learn and use. An ethical response to that comes from Motha and Lin (2014, p. 354) who maintain that responsible education should make learners see the colonial, racist, sexist origins of their desires in order to make informed decisions as to resist or accept these desires. Therefore, if the participants' conceptualisations of English are, arguably, seen as 'unconscious', addressing the unconscious consciously is a moral responsibility of the provision of English language education. That said, this 'consciousness' raising should not be an apolitical celebration of learners' agency because individuals in the job market are ultimately kept in a loop of rigid and predetermined expectations and requirements, as this next section illustrates.

## **6.2 The quest for 'Human Capital' and beyond in sojourners' trajectories**

A key facet of the participants' conceptualisations of English lies in how learning English is connected with economic opportunities and future aspirations. As seen in **Finding 2**, the participants identified various reasons for studying in the UK. These include awareness of the need to enrich their human capital and thus attest to 'employability for life' (Tomlinson, 2005) through gaining a UK degree with a recognisable brand, and going home with better English skills (McNamara and Harris, 1997), as main pull factors (Wilkins et al., 2012). They hoped that this would enable them to access more knowledge and skills as part of the lifelong learning process required to keep them employable (Kubota, 2011). At the same

time, coming to the UK was also associated with aspects of becoming (Harvey, 2014), desire (Motha and Lin, 2014; Kramersch, 2009), subjectivity (Kramersch, 2009), imagination (Kanno and Norton, 2003) and motivation (Lamb, 2012; Dörnyei, 2005). Consequently, using a continuum metaphor that includes instrumentality and non-instrumentality with various intermediary scales can represent the overlap between these drives, which not only encouraged the participants to study in the UK, but also helped them embrace their sojourn experience.

From a neoliberal perspective, the research participants' instrumental drives align with Flores' (2013) description of the 'ideal subject'. That is to say, they made decisions to study in the UK in order to advance and seek social and economic benefits. Pertinent to these decisions is the role of linguistic instrumentalism (Kubota, 2011; Wee, 2008) which makes the willingness of improving their English in an English-speaking country more prominent. The point that all the participants, with the exception of Reem, were sponsored to study in a UK HE institution, with the condition of working with their sponsors upon their return, explains how vocational and academic policies in their countries reproduce the ideology of linguistic instrumentalism (Kubota, 2011; Wee, 2008) and academic branding (Osman, 2008), which collectively continue to shape public opinions and perceptions of market demands. As a result, Ministries of (Higher) Education in many parts of the world, including the participants' home countries, have lists of foreign universities whose degrees can be accredited. This implies that some higher education degrees from foreign (and even local) universities might not count. This was the main reason why the participants chose to study at a Russell Group University, or in Hassan's words, not 'an easy university' [4<sup>th</sup>]. Indeed, public opinions and employers' demands have been heavily influenced by academic capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Within this discourse comes university ranking which not only determines the reputation of the university but also affects the decision of hiring companies as to whether an applicant is a reliable graduate or not (Piller and Cho, 2013). It is within such lines that the participants chose or were made to choose their UK HE destination.

Another feature of the marketisation of academia is embodied in the tuition reduction deals between sending universities and receiving universities. This was a major factor that controlled the decisions of the participants who were

sponsored by a governmental body such as the case of the two Omani participants: Kholoud and Ameen. On the one hand, they understood that they needed to study at a reputable institution in order for their degrees to count. On the other, they were aware that the options they were offered were controlled by tuition reduction deals and this did not seem to disadvantage them as the need to be in a high ranking university was already met.

In addition, the expected uniqueness of the sojourn experiences and its associate impacts on non-linguistic outcomes such as personal growth (Jackson, 2008) can also be incorporated within individuals' commodified skills and cultural and social attributes (Keeley, 2007). Mahmoud's depiction of his life in the UK as an 'assignment' implies the level of unfamiliarity with the day-to-day tasks that he had to engage with in order to get by. This metaphor communicates a holistic sense that the total experience of being in the UK was a test. The ability to perform these tasks despite their difficulty resonates with Byram's (1997b) definition of 'intercultural communicative competence' which stresses the ability to use a second language to 'cross frontiers' (Byram and Zarate, 1997, p. 11). These encounters were appreciated by the research participants, with several able to understand them in economic terms as part of the human capital metaphor. Nevertheless, it is worth indicating that instrumentality operates at different levels and this implies that the economic value of acquiring better English, a vocational skill or a degree is more prominent than that of other personal skills. That is to say, the economic value of a UK degree can be more conspicuous than that of personal growth in the short term, for example.

In spite of understanding the economic value of their sojourn, participants like Amjad, Asma, Reem, Mahmoud, and Hassan showed awareness that the quest for more human capital is not a straightforward path. Therefore, when asked to talk about their professional career after graduation, their responses were characterised by an overwhelming sense of scepticism and uncertainty. For instance, the following quote from Mahmoud highlights his awareness of the changes in the market demands in the UAE:

In the past we had the belief that those who study abroad are better than those who study in local universities but not now. Local universities compete and care about their ranking and they teach most of the subjects in English. They also have staff members from all over the world which means that they can offer

better education. Also, in the past those who spoke English were hired to communicate with foreigners but now everyone speaks English. Some of our local graduates speak English better than those who study here [Mohamed, 3rd].

In essence, plugging national economies into each other and into the world economy (Keeley, 2007, p.13) results in increasing the level of competition, thereby maximising the chasm between perceived and actual benefits of study abroad. In light of Mahmoud's quote, there are various factors that affect the actual value of speaking English and having a UK degree in the job market. These factors include: academic restructuring of local universities which entails the expansion of English as medium of instruction, hiring native speakers for the sake of English native-ness, the emergence of 'English frenzy' (Piller and Cho, 2013), as well as other factors that strike hard such as gender, race, age (Kubota, 2011), religion, personal links, social class and lack of transparency. On top of these factors comes the role of academic inflation which leads to devaluing the qualification 'because it becomes accessible to people without social value' (Bourdieu 1993, p. 97). Although Bourdieu's words refer to the old French educational system, they still have a ring of truth in relation to the UK higher education system, which Reay et al. (2005) define as being bought into the idea of elitism. Whereas it is still the case for many university applicants and graduates, sending a large number of sponsored students to study at an 'elite' UK university will eventually contribute to devaluing the qualification once the sponsored students return to the sending country. In fact, all sponsored participants expressed a sense of frustration and anxiety when asked to talk about what makes them distinguished among other sponsored students who came from their countries, and it is this feeling that made Mahmoud wonder; 'what will I go home with? A certificate from the University of **Leeds**? So what? Everyone will go home with a certificate. How will I be distinguished' [5<sup>th</sup>]. At this juncture, it can be argued that sponsoring students who come from different social classes and sending them to study at one of the UK institutions on the list of accredited universities allows students from different social classes to access the UK HE sector. That said, sponsorships can also be given to wealthy students who can access UK HE anyway. Therefore, although social class did not inhibit participants' access to the vertically stratified UK HE because seven of them had received financial support from their sponsors, social class can be an issue for

accessing the job market after their return. After all, Kubota (2011, p. 249) reminds us that 'human capital is not professionally and economically rewarded across different groups', and therefore participants' instrumental reasons for studying in the UK can be based on an imagined mobility (Kariya, 2010) or 'a fantasy of future happiness' (Lamb, 2013) which may not eventuate. Unlike the observations of Salisbury et al. (2009) that individuals from low or average social capital backgrounds do not see the benefits of study abroad even if given financial assistance, all the sponsored research participants showed a high level of commitment to their academic missions in the UK and they all seemed to value the privilege of being financially sponsored.

The literature on learner motivation in light of 'future components of the self' (Lamb, 2011; Dörnyei, 2009, 2005) and studies of self-determination motivation (Chirkov et al., 2007; Ryan and Deci, 2002) remind us that learners who have clear visions for their future selves are more autonomous and motivated learners. These studies have also indicated that future selves are usually associated with *economic* attributes, be they career-related aspirations (Dörnyei, 2009) or a move towards metropolitan cities or study abroad (Lamb, 2012). This is, of course, not to suggest that learner motivation is always reduced to instrumental motivation, but is to indicate that the desire to accumulate more human capital is inextricable from learners' visions for their future selves. After all, a Bakhtinian approach to becoming in the world emphasises that it is through interaction/dialogue with the other that a person can be perceived as successful or not (Harvey, 2014, Ball and Freedman, 2004), and with the dominant neoliberal discourse that characterises all walks of life today (Block, 2012; Fairclough, 2006), one's success is usually measured against aspects of human capital. Within these lines, it can be noted that the participants perceived their sojourn as an investment in their human capital, but the configurations and manifestations of this investment differed across the participants' profiles. Whereas investing in language learning and getting a UK degree were the most prominent perceptions of investment; the ability to communicate interculturally and learn about life in the UK, as well as aspiring for better recognition and enhanced identity range options upon returning to their countries were also highlighted by some participants. Fundamentally, attributes such as dealing with difference; being balanced, objective, and social; having faith in others; going beyond the family nest; and

gaining new perspectives, etc. are all essential personal qualifications that fall within the extended understanding of the 'human capital' metaphor, and are, at the same time, crucial steps towards reaching aspects of sojourners' future selves.

On the other hand, **Finding 2** has also indicated that participants' personal aspirations do not necessarily align with the aforementioned prominent neoliberal discourse all the time. Hence, going beyond instrumentality, or delving into components of the 'self', i.e. elements of subjectivity (Kramsch, 2009), is a crucial element for developing a more exhaustive understanding of participants' reasons for studying in UK HE. As seen in this finding, luxury consumption through cultural tourism, agency and empowerment, and temporary escape emerged as themes denoting non-instrumental reasons for the participants' journey. With that said, it is also possible to extend these seemingly non-instrumental reasons to see embedded economic benefits as discussed in 5.2.3. Kramsch's (2009) description of language learning as an outlet for learners' imagined dreams and visions coincides with the participants' desires to 'consume' the language they 'invested' in to obtain freedom, escape the constraints of their local contexts, deploy agency, choose for themselves, meet new encounters, and achieve all of these while trying to preserve what they have by clinging to the familiar. In essence, these goals align with Kramsch's (2009) interpretation of the manifestations of desire in language. As observed in **Finding 2**, the participants talked about these aspects with more certainty because they were the more personal aspects of their sojourn. Therefore, it can be argued that such personal aspirations had the power to make them envisage their journey in more positive terms in spite of the day-to-day hurdles which served as constant reminders of their differences and linguistic disadvantage.

### **6.3 (Un)thinking the sociolinguistics of mobility**

Increasing mobility is a contemporary manifestation of globalisation that characterises many parts of the world today. That said, it is worth mentioning that there are still parts of the world where mobility is restricted or even obstructed due to various political and economic conditions (see 3.1 on discourses of globalisation). Subject to their ability to 'go' mobile, the movement of individuals nationally and internationally can be seen as the movement of mobile resources,

be they linguistic, social, or cultural. As demonstrated in 3.4, the values and degrees of usefulness of these resources vary in the contemporary 'messy new marketplace' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 28). Within these lines came Blommaert's call (2010, p. 3) for setting ourselves free from the traditional 'sociolinguistics of distribution' in order to rethink of sociolinguistics as a sociolinguistics of 'mobile resources', 'mobility', and 'globalisation'. This new conceptualisation foregrounds the stratification of sociolinguistic scales by power, inequality and the (unfortunate) difference. That is to say, the movement of individuals across time and space also entails the movement across new scales, centres, norms and expectations which altogether contribute to the unpredictability of the discursive communicative practices and encounters of mobile individuals. Whilst acknowledging the usefulness of Blommaert's (2010) 'sociolinguistic scales', Canagarajah (2013) insists that they are normative and impersonal and argues that scales should not shape people because the power of agency can summon other scales, within the context of ongoing rescaling in day-to-day talk (p. 158-9). The most prominent message in Canagarajah's (2013) *Translingual Practice* is that meaning springs from negotiations, rather than shared norms.

This ongoing debate about what happens to the value of individuals' linguistic repertoires when they go mobile and how this can be theoretically framed sparks two major points:

1. The understanding of Blommaert's (2010) 'sociolinguistic scales' and Canagarajah's (2013) 'negotiation strategies' can attract economic interpretations of the value of individuals' language resources and negotiation strategies in the new, unpredictable marketplace, thereby fitting within the extended 'human capital' metaphor suggested above.
2. While acknowledging the high level of unpredictability and super-diversity that characterise contemporary social encounters, it is crucial to admit that interpreting individual's sociolinguistic trajectories need not to be restricted to the power of either inequality or negotiation and thus less certainty needs to be exercised to avoid the risk of overgeneralisation.

First, in order to be competitive in different marketplaces, individuals are expected to meet the predetermined expectations of these places. These expectations involve (and are not restricted to) the ability to speak English with a *particular*

proficiency level that meets and is compatible with high-value linguistic scales, as well as the ability to negotiate not only meanings but also positioning of power. Within the salient use of financial language, Holborow (2015, p.1) reminds us that ‘*valued customers* are what we are and *competitive and market efficient* what we could be’ [*italics* in original]. And this fits with the research participants’ interpretations of what happened to their English when they moved from their Arabic contexts to study in the UK. As seen in **Finding 3**, the participants’ geographical movement influenced the value and usefulness of their investment in English. In other words, their language capital which was exposed to value shifts by virtue of movement rendered them less competitive in some kind of life competition in the UK. The participants were actively engaged with drawing comparisons between the value of their English in their countries and in the UK. The following quote from Amjad is representative of the participants’ sentiments in this regard:

The competition is higher and I feel that I am still weak. In my country and among those of low level, I felt distinguished but when placed among people whose language is used in study and everywhere else, I feel I need more and I lack something [Amjad 1<sup>st</sup>].

The competition referred to here can be analysed in terms of *extending and complicating* Blommaert’s (2010) ‘sociolinguistic scales’. Instead of arguing that the movement of Amjad, and the rest of the participants, represents the confrontation of their localised English (local, low-value scale) with the idealised English of the native speaker (international, high-value scale), it is important to keep the participants’ local contexts in mind. (a.) since English in Arabic countries is a foreign language whose use is restricted to certain domains, it is difficult to claim that the participants’ English had already been localised or re-appropriated as an ‘inside’ language prior to their sojourn. Rather, English in these contexts needs to be seen as an ‘unfinished (and never to be finished) product’ whose ‘quality’ is dependent on learners’ personal trajectories, opportunities, and capabilities. Therefore, placing the English spoken in KSA, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, or UAE in a single local scale goes far beyond any realistic representation of the complex and dynamic linguistic settings in these contexts and in other contexts around the world. (b.) As a result of this understanding, it can be argued that within the participants’ local contexts exist *various* ‘local scales’, the highest



of which can (or cannot) be rendered low-value by virtue of movement (as it depends on other factors as will be seen later in this section). Amjad's words, 'in my country and among those of low level, I feel distinguished' show how Amjad's English in Palestine was placed in a high local scale (not necessarily the highest) in comparison with other Palestinian speakers of English whose English can be placed in *different* local scales. The same can be said about the English of the other participants in relation to other Arabic speakers of English in their local contexts. In fact, the same vision can also apply to English native speakers. Consider, for instance, the pressure to modify and accommodate social and regional varieties of English in the direction of the 'Standard' and its associate prejudice (Hughes, Trudgill and Watt, 2013; Snell, 2013; Lippi-Green, 2012). Therefore, it is more feasible to view sociolinguistic scales in more *complex* and *dynamic* terms to feature how in every context and with the introduction of new interlocutors different arrays of sociolinguistic scales emerge and re-emerge and that the highest scale at a time (as this changes all the time) is expected to be assigned a higher economic value at *that* time, leading to a better exchange rate for the individual's linguistic capital. Put in other words, these high value, low value orderings as always relational.

In addition, it can be argued that the speaker who possesses a richer linguistic capital can also possess symbolic power to 'impose reception' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648), and therefore lead negotiations, and assign 'first order positioning' (Harré and Langenhove, 1991). By regarding language as an instrument of action and power (Bourdieu, 1991), it can be said that inequality (embodied in Blommaert's (2010) sociolinguistic scales) and the power to lead negotiations are two sides of the 'English-as-a-tool-of-power' coin. This vision seems to be missing from Canagarajah's (2013) argument when he emphasises the importance of negotiation strategies. He tends to celebrate the agency of non-native speakers of English and he seems to overlook the power structures within which individuals interact and negotiate. After all, we are reminded by Norton Peirce (1995) that language learners do not choose the circumstances under which they interact with others. That said, it is also crucial to indicate that social interactions cannot and should not be seen as predetermined.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that a high economic value of one's linguistic capital does not necessarily ensure a high social capital. Some research

participants indicated that they preferred to interact and work with other non-native speakers of English. Such a predisposition raises the social capital of non-native English varieties which could be *economically* placed in low scales. The following quote from Dalal provides insights into the rich social capital that speakers of what she referred to as 'broken English' have in comparison with English 'native speakers':

Someone with broken English is better because at the end I will understand what they want to say. Most of **native speakers** do not take into consideration that we are foreigners so they need to speak slowly and choose simpler words. Communication is harder with them and I will keep on saying **excuse me** and this will embarrass me. I don't like to be in these situations that's why I try to avoid them [Dalal 2nd].

Acknowledging the high social capital of what, in Blommaert's (2010) terms, can be described as low-scale English appears to be overlooked by scholars interested in scalar approaches to language. At the end, social interaction goes beyond individuals' linguistic capital to involve aspects of social and cultural capital which together contribute to effective intercultural communication. When Canagarajah (2014, p. 776) said, 'my own teacherly non-native identity...is friendly to international English', he pointed at the richness of his social capital, underpinned by his 'non-native' identity. However, this richness is not to be taken for granted as its value and usefulness is dependent on the audience and the interlocutors involved in any communicative practice, and hence his emphasis on the value of his non-native identity with reference to *international* English. Therefore, it can be argued that similar to sociolinguistic scales, the value of individuals' social capital is always dynamic, changing, and is dependent on a plethora of factors. In other words, the social capital of non-native English speakers might be higher among other non-native English interlocutors, and this exchange rate is subject to reassessment at the presence of English native speakers or other more proficient non-native speakers. Therefore, these exchange rates are always relational.

As a result, when addressing the question of what happens to the value of individuals mobile resources when they move across time and space, it is crucial to consider individuals' linguistic, social, and cultural capital. Mobile individuals are 'rounded people' (Coleman, 2013, p. 17) who should not only be seen as language learners. What is more important is to consider the idiosyncratic nature

of individual discursive communicative practices by considering the relative value of individuals' linguistic and social capital in relation to their ever-changing interlocutors. Considering these aspects contributes to complicating scalar approaches to language in social interaction, and this is the threshold to the next major point in this section which calls for less certainty to avoid the risk of overgeneralisation.

**Finding 3** has revealed the daunting experiences of witnessing a gap between participants' initial self-assessments of their language capacity (i.e. their initial perceptions of the economic value of their linguistic capital) and their actual experiences of life and study in the UK, during which their linguistic, social and cultural capital attracted a lower value through trajectories of 'downward mobility' and 'declassing' (Simpson and Cooke, 2010, p. 66 following Bourdieu's 1978 *déclassement*). The finding featured the voices of the participants while talking about their English and the low exchange rates it attracted in the UK. It can be argued that participants' initial, positive self-assessments of their English, which were crucial to encourage them to study in the UK, are not necessarily attributed to having inflated self-perceptions or unawareness of their incompetence (Kruger and Dunning, 1999). Rather, their unpredicted experiences of shifts in their language value are tied with the implications of movement which essentially entailed moving across spaces filled with changing norms and expectations (Blommaert, 2010).

One of the most intriguing accounts came from the participants who blamed their English for any failure they had encountered, even in situations where failure was not necessarily attributed to English *per se* such as dealing with unfamiliar rules or unaccommodating interlocutors. That said, I still embrace the view that language is a semiotic means of representing and creating cultures (Halliday, 1979; Geertz, 1973). The participants, with the exception of Asma and Kholoud, blamed their linguistic capital at times when other sorts of capital needed to be brought to the picture. On the one hand, it can be argued that the discourse of foregrounding English is absorbed and reproduced by many learners who attest not only to the power of English but also to the practices of 'Othering' based on English, during which English is used as a proxy for many other factors (Simpson, 2015). Dalal's following example, which was also mentioned in **Finding 3**, is a

case in point. In response to ‘what worries you when you speak English?’ she said:

When I talk about something I don't know, for example, when I called **city council** to talk about the **council tax**. The person on the phone was talking about the law and I did not understand it and I did not know how to make him understand that I don't know the system. On the other hand, situations like in restaurants or shops are easier because I am used to the kind of conversations that take place there so I am less nervous [2<sup>nd</sup>].

Talking about unfamiliar topics is not problematic only because of English. It is problematic in nature because of other cultural considerations. As rules, systems and material artefacts are part of how people live and make meaning of their lives in a given culture, the difficulty of talking about the ‘council tax’ is attributed to Dalal's unfamiliarity with the system, whose meaning is conveyed through the medium of language. And since the core cultural message in that interaction was not present, the medium of language was not sufficient to fill the cultural gap. That is why Dalal ended the call to google ‘council tax in the UK’ to understand the system and then to try to make sense of the semiotic message she received from the person on the phone. Furthermore, being familiar with the cultural system in restaurants and shops made her more confident using her English because she understood the cultural core and how to use her linguistic (semiotic) capital as a medium of interaction. When she said ‘the kind of conversations that take place there’, she foregrounded the idea that she knew what expressions to use to function in those places. These expressions are not only linguistic but are also cultural and therefore successful communication involves awareness of the culture as well as the linguistic medium to communicate in that culture.

In addition, **Finding 3** featured how the participants' linguistic capital attracted different values in different situations and discussed how these value shifts were determined by several factors such as the topic of the interaction (academic or social), the place of the interaction (inside or outside the classroom), their interlocutors' linguistic awareness, and the register (formal English or less formal registers). All of these factors involved cultural, pragmatic, social and linguistic components, and the extent to which the participants were familiar with these multi-dimensional aspects determined the exchange rates of their English. In other words, socio-pragmatic competence or ‘the ability to use language in order to achieve specific purposes or to understand language in context’ (Benson et

al., 2013, p. 43) captures the social, pragmatic, cultural and linguistic facets of interaction.

Where does this lead to? This understanding imposes the need to unpack the notion of sociolinguistic 'scales' to uncover what factors place one's English in a particular scale at a particular situation (given that scales are always dynamic, and are constantly (re)set according to who is present at any given interaction). Sociolinguistic scales are connected with individuals' linguistic, cultural and social capital in relation to their interlocutors, and their value is always relative and dependent on the other. Therefore, there should be less certainty when describing a particular English as 'timeless, translocal, and widespread' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 34).

To summarise, there is no doubt that speaking about the sociolinguistics of mobility means speaking about idiosyncratic individual trajectories and encounters. The same individual can be placed in countless situations depending on the 'where, when, what, how and who' of any interaction. It is hoped that the understanding embraced in this study contributes to empirical research to investigate the notion of complexity in the sociolinguistics of mobility (Blommaert, 2014), as a way of (un)thinking the sociolinguistics of mobility.

#### **6.4 International student experience(s): Sociocultural encounters**

The participants' sojourn experiences, as elaborated in the analysis chapters and discussed here, fit within Block's (2002, p. 4) definition of critical experiences as 'periods of time during which prolonged contact with an L2 and a new and different cultural setting causes irreversible destabilisation of the individual's sense of self'. The trajectories of the eight participants highlighted aspects of their destabilised identities, and it can be argued that the long-term impact of this often life-changing experience will continue to have a significant meaning in their lives. Unfortunately, this meaning cannot be easily captured due to time-limited research and funding constraints (Coleman, 2013).

Moving to the sociocultural encounters which emerged from the data, we are reminded that linguistic and economic gains are just some aspects of a dynamic sojourning episode which has various outcomes. Other studies have similarly

indicated that the personal concerns, such as tourism and novelty of experience, outweigh linguistic and academic progress and cultural and professional insights (Coleman, 2003). Because it is crucial not to separate learners' 'minds, bodies, and social behaviours into separate domains of inquiry' (Kramsch, 2009, p. 2), the focus should be on 'real persons, rather than learners' (Ushioda, 2009, p.220). Although Ushioda's words come from motivation research, it still holds a lot of relevance to researching study abroad narratives which should focus on individual trajectories rather than generalisations or models of adaptation because no 'sensible generalisations' can be obtained from a variety of individual experiences (Alred and Byram, 1993, p. 59). As a result, essential to understanding sojourners' trajectories is referring to their sociocultural encounters, the hurdles they faced, and the strategies they adopted to overcome these challenges.

Section 1.3 has problematised the term 'international' and depicted how it is generally used in the UK context to refer to students coming from outside the European Economic Area (EEA)<sup>15</sup> and thus the term does not emphasise nor reflect the international experience of communicating across cultures and languages. Fundamentally, this puts forward some concerns regarding the term 'international student experience' as it can hold two different meanings: (1) the experiences of students from outside the EEA, and (2) the intercultural experiences of *all* students on campus. This section embraces the first meaning and argues that the term needs to be used in its plural form in order to foreground the plurality and idiosyncrasy which characterise individual trajectories.

**Finding 4** has shown that all participants preferred to socialise with their co-nationals or with other Arabic-speaking students. This trend has been long recognised by researchers as a natural response (Fay and Spinthourakis-Katsillis, 2000; Bochner et al., 1977) and a potential obstacle (Coleman, 2013; Wilkinson, 2012). However, it is noted that the participants did not renounce their social choices, nor did they indicate a preference for the status quo. Instead, some justified the choices they made while remaining hopeful that they might be able to expand their social circles to include British friends. It became apparent that socialising with other Arabic-speaking friends provided the psychological

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<sup>15</sup> The EEA includes all EU-member states as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway.

support through which they could learn and progress, and that alienating themselves from their existing circles of friends is less likely to happen in the following months. This goes in line with Bochner's and colleagues observations (1977) regarding the importance of co-nationals in study abroad contexts. Another important feature of the participants' social circles is referring to other international students as more accessible individuals because 'isolated individuals look for other isolated individuals' (Amjad, 5<sup>th</sup>).

In essence, participants' descriptions of their social circles conform to Coleman's (2013) 'concentric circles of study abroad social networks', whereby socialising with co-nationals is at the core, followed by other outsiders in the middle circle and locals in the outer circle. What is unique about this model is its emphasis on the dynamic nature of friendship groups and how they change with time. That is to say, Coleman proposes that social progression involves moving from co-nationals, to other 'out-group' members, and towards locals (2013, p. 31). Still, it is necessary to indicate that this model is neither a theory nor a fact, but it could be used to inform institutional strategies for grouping students by keeping in mind a 'mix and mingle' approach to avoid ghettoization (Wilkinson 2012, p. 20).

On the other hand, **Finding 4** has also demonstrated that border crossing can also be an act of border carrying and identified the following factors which emerged from the narratives of the participants: religion, participants' perceptions of university policies, and stereotypes and social tensions. To start with, Kinginger (2013, p. 334) asserts that 'certain aspects of learner identity, such as religion, sexuality, or social class... are rigorously avoided, as if taboo'. Whereas recent research projects have addressed learners' sexuality (e.g. queering ESOL seminar series), and learners' social class (e.g. Block 2012, 2015), learners' religious identities and their impact on the quality of their sojourn remain underexplored. It can be argued that religion draws the line between what learners can and cannot take part in, and thus it plays an integral part in sojourners' adaptation and integration<sup>16</sup> in the host community. Amjad's words 'other options would not suit me; there is a limit to the degree I can mingle with others due to religious and cultural differences' (5<sup>th</sup>) remind us that any attempts

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<sup>16</sup> The term 'integration' is becoming more challenging in contemporary urban Britain. It poses the question of 'into what can people integrate'? (Simpson, 2015).

at engaging international students should first consider their religious backgrounds and should be sensitive to their religious needs. The sociocultural encounters, as highlighted in **Finding 4**, have shown how participants' religious identities influenced not only the choices of who they spent their time with, but also where they eat, socialise, and study. Ultimately, all these choices imply a particular life-style, which could inhibit involvement in more open social circles. Bochner et al. (1977) argue that co-nationals help sojourners settle in and engage with wider circles. Although I agree with the important role co-national networks have, I also argue that engaging with more networks very much depends on the extent to which individuals feel that their linguistic, religious and cultural identities are validated and are not seen as barriers.

Moreover, participants' perceptions of university policies regarding grouping students posed another major issue. Aware of their religious and cultural differences, all participants indicated that their integration should start at university. Hassan's question 'how can we communicate with British people if we don't study on the same course?' (5<sup>th</sup>) emphasises the importance of strategic mixing when grouping students. Essentially, this underlines the ethical responsibility of UK HE towards its international students. All participants complained that the way they were grouped did not offer them enough opportunities to meet 'home' students, and that increased social tensions and stereotypes. Research data featured the dichotomy between 'we' and 'they', 'us' and 'them' and some participants went far to assert that 'the British don't like us and try to get away from us' [Mahmoud, 5<sup>th</sup>]. This sentiment led to a preference of separating the self and to save one's face by clinging to what is familiar (Fay and Spithourakis-Katsillis, 2000 on 'facework') while imagining an unaccommodating other. This resort can be counterproductive because sojourners who faced social tension may go back with strengthened national identity (Block 2007; Byram 2008a; Jackson 2010) as well as entrenched negative stereotypes of the host society (Jackson, 2010, 2008; Kinginer, 2009). A critical discourse analysis of how pronouns were used in the dataset can indicate aspects of positioning, stance and alignment and how the participants positioned themselves in relation to others (following Fairclough, 2013; Harré and Langenhove, 1991; Davies and Harré, 1990; Goffman, 1981). This can be one of the directions for future research (see **Chapter 7**).



In addition, encountering social hurdles and experiencing shifts in language value can contribute to lowering participants' self-esteem, resulting in a 'reduced sense of the self' (Benson et al., 2013; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). As presented in **Finding 3** and discussed in 6.3 above, unfamiliarity with the new culture, which includes material artefacts, systems and ways of getting things done, coupled with the social hurdles outlined above fostered some forms of ghettoisation, and this goes against the envisioned global identities that study abroad learners aspire to (Jackson, 2013; Kinginger, 2013). In order to foster ethics of care, hospitality and ethics (Sidhu and Dall'Alba, 2012), UK HE should be committed to coherent student support policies which are not only implemented in student unions or international offices but are also integrated in aspects of curriculum development and staff training to offer a more culturally inclusive pedagogy (De Vita and Case, 2003). Although the following questions were raised three decades ago, they are still relevant to the current situation in UK HE: 'how many of these [overseas student] advisors contribute to curriculum development, staff training or policy making? How many even have access to senior management outside their own department?' (Ecclesfield 1985, p. 619 cited in Harris, 1997, p.36).

More acute is the sense of bewilderment that accompanies life-changing experiences such as academic sojourning. This unsettling perplexity is not only characteristic of the during-sojourn stage, but its influence can be extended to the post-sojourn stage, as well. In this regard, Benson et al. (2013, p. 41) contend that a study abroad learner can become 'another person'. This spirit was prevalent in the narratives of Mahmoud, Reem, Asma, and Amjad who were aware of the dynamic changes they had undergone in the UK and thus were uncertain how easy their adaptation back home will be. When Mahmoud said, 'I know when I go back after I finish my studies, I will experience culture shock. You see the people who live there remain the same' [3<sup>rd</sup>], he accentuated the powerful impact of his sojourn, which could mean that he was no longer 'the same' person who left his country few months ago.

By attending to the tremendous impact academic sojourning has on the lives and identities of international students, it is crucial to bring to the fore the role, ethics and responsibilities of UK HE. As previously explained in **Chapter 3**, Sidhu and Dall'Alba (2012) argue that the neoliberal discourse of international education imposes the depiction of international students as 'rationale, choice-exercising

consumers, preoccupied with a desire for positional goods and instrumental learning' (p. 415). This agenda, they explain, frees educational institutions from their responsibilities to foster knowledge, and contribute to global civic duties. Furthermore, viewing student mobility as trade (Li and Bray, 2007) overlooks the embodied experiences of international students. Therefore, a starting point of responsible international education may be to recognise the limitations of contemporary conditions of intercultural communication in order to be able to envisage pedagogical solutions for developing ethics of care (Sidhu and Dall'Alba, 2012) which ultimately means attending to the individual, embodied experiences of academic sojourners.

Finally, academic sojourners are vulnerable to 'disorienting dilemmas' (Mezirow, 2000) which can shake long-held views of their existence in the world, of the languages they speak, and of their relationships with their societies and their wider social spheres (Marginson, 2014). And because language is always at the heart of social interaction, the provision of English language education worldwide is responsible for preparing language learners for the nuances of social life beyond the classroom space, as the next section discusses.

## **6.5 English language education as preparation for the unpredictable**

As seen in **Finding 5**, participants' presence in the UK evoked critical reflections on their previous education in general and their previous formal English language education in particular. Research data suggested the emergence of four characteristics of how English as a subject was introduced to the participants. These strands are (1). focus on Standard English, (2). focus on oral competence and formal registers, (3). gap between life inside and outside the classroom, and (4.) focus on IELTS (see 5.5.1 for details). By delving into these issues, it can be argued that the English language education which the participants received did not prepare them for the unpredictable life beyond the classroom space. In order to elaborate this statement, several major issues need to be addressed.

First, the four characteristics mentioned above spring from the perception that English is a coherent system whose acquisition is incremental over years (Kramsch 2015), or in other words, conceptualising English monolithically (Hall,

2012). There is no doubt that language instruction based on 'Standard English' norms and forms facilitates learning, and may meet the aspirations of millions of non-native speakers who want to learn the 'best' English (Hall, 2014). However, 'what is not helpful... is the presentation of these norms as the only ones for successful English usage' (ibid, p. 377) because, as Hall (2014) points out, there are two inherent problems with the monolithic view of English: social and cognitive. Whereas 'Standard English' does not accurately reflect the linguistic competence and performance of native and non-native speakers, it is also an unrealistic learning outcome from a cognitive perspective because it is unattainable for most adult learners in educational contexts. Consequently, 'Standard English' alone is not useful for all language learning and use contexts. This was evident in the testimonies of the eight participants who complained that their English repertoires did not help them express themselves in less formal situations, or when talking about non-academic topics, or listening to different English varieties in a multilingual and multicultural environment such as the one they experienced in Leeds. Moreover, insisting on native speakers' norms as the ideal learning outcome serves as a constant reminder of the learners' linguistic deficiency which in a neoliberal discourse justifies the existence of an ongoing quest for more linguistic capital and more customers in the English language teaching and testing market. Essentially, this poses a challenge for both language teachers and language learners/users, and justifies the need for raising ideological and sociolinguistic awareness among native and non-native speakers of English.

Besides the problematic conceptualisations of English, which are reinforced in the ELT provision and testing practices in many parts of the world (as argued in **Chapter 3**), the changes brought by globalisation add to the complexity and inadequacy of foreign language teaching. In an increasingly globalised world, language educators are faced with increasingly diversified needs. Questions such as what English is and why it should be learned have as many answers as there are learners of the language. This poses a challenge for language educators who are torn between national agendas and transnational entailments (Kramsch, 2015, p. 410). Added to that, Kramsch (2015) posits that communication in a global age is not restricted to transmitting facts as it also entails developing a voice, and making oneself heard (Harvey, 2014; Ushioda,

2011). However, it seems apparent that the focus of the participants' language education was on transmitting facts (through formal registers), or what Byram (2008b) calls 'propositional knowledge', rather than nurturing participation through cultivating the 'procedural knowledge' of the 'how' (Byram, 2008b) and developing 'socio-pragmatic competence' (Benson et al., 2013; Holmes and Riddiford, 2011). Participants' trajectories featured moments of losing one's voice (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005) because of unfamiliarity with other English repertoires which rendered them unable to communicate in less comfortable situations (e.g. informal chats, small talks, social events). Subsequently, it can be argued that the 'tourism discourse' (Kramersch, 2015) featured in the 'global coursebooks' (Gray, 2002) is a major contributory factor. Foreign language classrooms, through scripted conversations and role-plays, depict a rather simplistic panorama of human social interaction. That is to say, learners are taught that when interlocutor (A) asks a question (X), interlocutor (B) will respond by saying (X) or (Y). Interlocutor (B), who is usually part of learners' 'imagined communities' (following Kanno and Norton, 2003; Anderson, 1991), is almost always introduced as a participant who is willing to respond and interact. This way language learners are not prepared to deal with the other possibilities of interlocutor (B): someone who is not willing to respond, someone who may discriminate against the language learner, or someone who may give a negative response, etc. In social spaces beyond classrooms and test rooms, interlocutor (B) can be anyone and therefore predicting his/her responses is an unattainable task. As a result, instead of foregrounding a 'tourism discourse' (Kramersch, 2015), language learners need to be socio-culturally and socio-linguistically aware that what goes inside the language classroom is usually a simplistic archetype of the speech acts which might occur outside the classroom.

In addition, the research participants have indicated that less formal situations are more challenging for them. There are various factors that contribute to this challenge. First, all participants explained that their previous formal language education focused on formal registers. Consequently, giving an academic presentation or participating in an academic discussion is a safe zone as far as their linguistic repertoires are concerned. Second, unlike informal social situations, in formal situations fewer emotions are exhibited and this makes formal situations easier to handle. Research into the relationship between

language and emotions (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2015; Pavlenko, 2008) explain how different emotions are expressed differently in different languages. In addition, Pavlenko (2008, p. 157) asserts that foreign language classrooms do not offer opportunities for 'affective socialisation' which can make learners feel perplexed in situations where emotions are involved. According to Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2015), more research needs to be conducted on how emotions can be taught in foreign language classrooms. In essence, preparing language learners for expressing their emotions in the target language can help them become more active socially. Most importantly; this can help them develop a deeper sociocultural understanding of how to bridge the differences between themselves and others.

Section 3.2 has addressed some of the attempts to bridge the gap between what is taught inside the foreign language classroom and what is used or encountered in the outside world (Kramsch, 2015; Canagarajah, 2014). With reference to Canagarajah's (2014) 'new paradigm for teaching English as an international language', it can be said that his proposal for nurturing procedural knowledge sounds too ambitious as it requires intensive teacher training practices and might make teachers feel that focusing on how different grammars work distracts them from focusing on their primary task. Therefore, instead of focusing on how grammars in different languages work, the focus needs to be directed towards two main issues:

1. Cultivating 'conscious learning' (Holmes and Riddiford, 2011) through raising ideological, sociolinguistic, and socio-pragmatic awareness and,
2. Embracing plurilithic conceptualisations of English in order to offer flexibility in the outcomes of language teaching (Hall, 2013), as well as a more realistic representation of the dynamic linguistic scenes beyond classroom spaces and English proficiency examination halls.

As seen in **Finding 5**, there was a general sentiment that the participants felt unprepared for life and study in the UK because they were not equipped with sufficient linguistic capital, i.e. a range of linguistic repertoires to allow effective communication in different educational and non-educational settings. As indicated before, the main reason for this springs from the ideological underpinnings of their previous formal language education which tended to

embrace and produce monolithic, rather simplistic, conceptualisations of English which ultimately contributed to a mismatch of understanding the nature of English for communication and English as communication. Consequently, promoting conscious learning and more realistic representations of how language works in discursive practices is a way of producing a more pedagogically honest way of preparing language learners instead of 'leaving them with the false hope that they will succeed in the communicative challenges out there if they master the forms and texts we drill into them' (Canagarajah, 2014, p. 784).

The research participants were made aware that the English they were taught is one kind (or two kinds) of 'Englising' (following Pennycook, 2007). They were able to name different kinds of 'Englising' such as: IELTS English, general English, academic English, and daily life English, Yorkshire English, etc. and their experience of moving across time and space was a major factor that opened their eyes to see beyond the Standard English repertoire they were taught in their countries. Although it can be argued that this awareness is beneficial, it left them bewildered and voice-deprived. On the one hand, their initial self-assessments of language capacity were important to encourage them to study in UK HE. On the other, being exposed to experiences which devalued their language capital and their previous education had acute implications on their perception of themselves and on their social interactions as seen in **Findings 3** and **4**.

'There has never been a greater tension between what is taught in the classroom and what the students will need in the real world once they have left the classroom', said Kramsch (2014, p. 296). This tension is far exacerbated by the emphasis on language learning as exchange value rather than use value (Heller, 2003). That is to say, English is increasingly associated with learners' economic and symbolic capital. This spirit was prevalent in the interviews with the eight participants who valued the 'exchange value' of their English in their local job markets in spite of their ambivalent attitudes towards its actual future benefits. By taking all these aspects together, it becomes evident that the provision of English language education needs to fulfil its ethical duty towards its target audience. Gone are the days when language teachers aspired to teach a range of utterances to be used for all social contexts which is an impossible task. Instead, what is required in an age of increasing globalisation, uncertainty, and unpredictability, is empowering language learners through undertaking rigorous conscious learning

that trains them how to be conscious to the socio-pragmatic conditions of their interactions, and how different occasions call for different English repertoires. This knowledge should not only be preserved in scholarly publications because language learners have the right to understand how the language they have learnt interacts with the situations, interlocutors, and discourses they will encounter in order to give them the opportunity to decide on what sociolinguistic support they need depending on where they want to go next. By doing this, English language education can go beyond the current reductionist approaches to social interactions (which prevail in ELT textbooks), and achieve its moral responsibility of preparing language learners to be active, conscious agents amid the unpredictable encounters in the hybrid, heteroglossic reality of life outside the classroom.

Although Kramsch (2015) indicates that the task of language education becomes complicated if different conceptualisations of English are embraced, she insists that language educators are responsible for making their classrooms representative of real life and this denotes resisting powerful ideologies and the machineries that produce them. In a similar vein, Canagarajah (2014, p. 768) maintains that ‘changes in pedagogy don’t always mean that teaching practice is made difficult. Teaching can actually become more creative, interesting, and fulfilling, if we only had the patience and tolerance for change’. However, this is a thorny task with various hurdles and unexplored lands, as will be further elaborated in **Chapter 7**.

## **6.6 Revisiting the research questions**

As seen in **Chapter 3**, the main research question was:

***Does Arab academic sojourners’ relationship with English change after moving from their Arabic contexts to study in the UK HE? And if so, how?***

Here, the research interest was in exploring the impact of mobility on Arab academic sojourners’ relationship with English. The word ‘relationship’ was carefully chosen as an umbrella to cover several sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects such as sojourners’ conceptualisations of English, their perceptions of their language capacity, what English means in their lives and the implications it has on the (re)construction of their identities. It also includes sojourners’

reflections on their English language education, on how English affects their social encounters, and on the changes in the exchange value of their linguistic capital. Because language is at the heart of everything, one's relationship with any named language can be manifested in various cognitive and social manners. Therefore, it has been indicated, in **Chapter 3**, that the main research question will be addressed through answering the research sub-questions which were as follows:

1. How do Arab academic sojourners value their investment in English on arrival in the UK and over a period of eight months? (**Finding 1+ Finding 3**)
2. What is the impact of mobility and sociocultural heterogeneity on sojourners' conceptualisation of English? (**Finding 3+ Finding 5**)
3. How do sojourners' sociolinguistic encounters affect their social and friendship networks in the UK? (**Finding 4**)
4. To what extent are sojourners' journey to UK HE driven by economic purposes? (**Finding 2**)

The research sub-questions were designed to investigate the sociolinguistic trajectories of academic sojourners in the UK by looking at different, still intertwined, areas of their UK academic sojourn experience. It has been repeatedly indicated throughout this thesis that this project embraces a holistic approach which views academic sojourners as 'whole people with whole lives' (Coleman, 2013).

With respect to the first research question, and based on the research findings presented in **Findings 1** and **Finding 3**), participants' perceptions of their investment in English were profoundly affected by their mobility, and they changed considerably over time. Earlier interviews featured the influence of familial and institutional habituses on the participants' educational choices and showed how all the participants were made to believe that they needed to learn English in order to have successful future academic and professional paths. They were also aware that the value of a UK degree is much higher than that of a local university, so they understood that they required a lot of English linguistic capital in order to achieve their dream of studying at a UK HE institution. Moreover, the findings revealed that the participants valued their investment in English because



it was the main reason that enabled them to access UK HE and reaching this destination entails a successful completion of a long gatekeeping process which encompasses winning a scholarship (Reem is an exception), getting the IELTS required score, obtaining a UK visa whose issuing is based on the result of an English proficiency test, and being admitted to a Russell group university. However, participants' experiences of shifts in language value by virtue of movement and encountering new educational and non-educational situations (as featured in **Finding 3** and discussed in Section 6.3 above) made the participants aware of the limitations of their linguistic, social, and cultural capital, thereby affecting their perceptions of their investment in English and contributing to the emergence of new conceptualisations of English. These insights bear on the second research question which addresses the impact of mobility and sociocultural heterogeneity on sojourners' conceptualisations of English.

Overall, the findings showed that the chasm between being a learner of English in an EFL context and a user of English in an ENL context, which is also multilingual and multicultural, brought to the picture more dynamic conceptualisations of English. It was through their experiences of shifts in their language value that the participants understood that the English they were taught did not equip them with the repertoires they needed in their new context. As elaborated in **Finding 5**, the participants blamed their previous formal language education for not providing the necessary linguistic, social, and psychological preparation for life and study abroad. It is worth mentioning that the participants started to view English in terms of different registers and repertoires, i.e. IELTS English, Standard English, academic English, Yorkshire English, etc., and this understanding does not necessarily promote the idea of World Englishes or English as a Lingua Franca (See Jenkins, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2009; Bamgbose, 1998; Kachru, 1990, 1992). We have seen how Mahmoud, Amjad and Reem avoided talking to other non-native speakers of English because (a) they had difficult 'foreign accents', and (b) because their English was not 'good'. On the other hand, Asma, Dalal, Hassan, Kholoud and Ameen explained that interacting with non-native speakers of English was much easier and less frustrating. Therefore, it is apparent that participants' mobility did not necessarily promote linguistic tolerance and awareness of ELF varieties, but it did reinforce the understanding that English is not a 'monolithic' entity and that the educational

focus on Standard English is misleading and misrepresentative of the linguistic scenes beyond classroom spaces. Hence, it can be argued that foregrounding the different repertoires of English can fit under the umbrella of 'plurilithic views of English' (Hall, 2013; Pennycook, 2007) because it accentuates the fact that English, and any named language, has different repertoires, registers, and usages and that Standard English is just one kind of 'Englishing' (Hall, 2014; Pennycook, 2007).

Not only did these realisations destabilise participants' perceptions of themselves as speakers of English, but also they impacted on their socio-cultural encounters in the UK. The emergence of these insights in the data addressed the third research question which looks at the social life of Arab academic sojourners in the UK. We are reminded by Collins, Slembrouck and Baynham (2009) that it is imperative to bring in socio-cultural dimensions in order to aim for realistic sociolinguistics. **Finding 4** looked at the social circles of the participants and presented some factors that contributed to their grouping and friendship patterns. **Finding 4** explains that socialising with co-nationals, other Arabic-speakers, and other international students goes in line with Coleman's (2013) 'concentric circles of study abroad social networks'. After that, **Finding 4** discussed how language anxiety, participants' religious identities, their perceptions of university policies, social tensions and stereotypes led to a preference of some sort of ghettoisation which significantly impacted their willingness to be involved in more open social networks.

The last research question scrutinises the role of instrumentality as a driving force for academic sojourning in UK HE. The question was proposed based on the belief that understanding sojourners' motivation contributes to framing detailed accounts of their trajectories, and can provide substantial insights into the value of the sojourn experience in their lives. As evident in **Finding 2**, all research participants embraced the sojourn experience as an invaluable episode of their lives, which exceeds the notion of 'investment' in language (Norton Peirce, 1995) to touch upon aspects of 'consumption' embodied in cultural tourism, personal empowerment, and temporary escape (among other personal goals). As discussed in 6.4 above, this finding conforms to the findings of other studies which showed that personal reasons for study abroad can outweigh economic, instrumental aspirations (Coleman, 2003).

A more detailed and elaborate discussion of the research questions can be approached through the thorough thematic discussion of the findings which was presented in **Chapter 5**, and was theoretically addressed in the previous sections of this chapter. What emerges from investigating the sociolinguistic trajectories of Arab academic sojourners in the UK is that they are idiosyncratic, diverse, dynamic, and complex. Therefore, they go beyond the boundaries of the research questions and call for more holistic approaches that provide a ‘satellite’s view of the land’ instead of the conventional ‘bird’s view of the land’, as the following section argues.

## **6.7 Towards a holistic understanding:**

*Ask any applied linguist confidentially, in the corner of a bar, about their own time abroad as a student, and the emphasis will never be on enhanced TL lexis and mean length of utterance, but rather on romance, on discovery of self and others, on people and places.*

(Coleman, 2013, p. 28)

Although academic sojourners should not be perceived as fragmented individuals, they are treated as such in different discourses (see 1.2). Unfortunately, these academic sojourners who aspire to social mobility and personal growth (among other instrumental and non-instrumental goals), are not prepared for the absence of hospitality which attaches different labels to them (international students, language learners, customers, etc.) to remind them that they are not and will never be at home. Yet, they are at the same time expected to meet a wide range of academic and social expectations.

In response to Kramsch’s (2009, p. 15) question: ‘how do we document the subjective effects of language on the embodied perceptions, memories and emotions of speakers?’, this study is an attempt to embrace a holistic approach. That is to say, to live in the world of academic sojourning is to go through and beyond languages, cultures, fragments of memories, imaginations of the self, and anticipations of the other. In order to achieve this, the current study taps into Block’s (2012) call for embracing ‘interdisciplinarity’ in applied linguistics research by addressing a web of closely intertwined themes including learner motivation, study abroad, intercultural communication, international student

experience, sociolinguistics, and teaching foreign languages in the era of globalisation.

I add my voice to Coleman's (2013, p. 29) when he said 'we need to focus on individuals and their trajectories, identifying patterns but not adopting a determinist perspective'. This study is an academic endeavour to focus on individuals' trajectories without the intention to drag them into patterns. As expressed in **Chapter 1**, the study started by acknowledging the ontological and epistemological differences that exist in individuals' idiosyncratic trajectories, study abroad journeys, and sociocultural and sociolinguistic encounters. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that in spite of the remarkable and striking commonalities, which can lead to some sort of universality in the group as featured in the thematic discussion of the research findings (**Chapter 5**), it is important to embrace both commonalities and discrepancies if a holistic understanding of the sociolinguistic trajectories of Arab academic sojourners in the UK is to be developed.

To conclude, the meaning of moving across time and space to embark on an academic sojourn is amorphous, dynamic, idiosyncratic and multidimensional. The plethora of theoretical constructs and arguments presented in this chapter suggest the minute details that need to be attended to in order to conduct a rigorous, realistic sociolinguistic investigation (following Collins, Slembrouck and Baynham, 2009). That is to say, attending to participants' conceptualisations of English, the personal value of their sojourn in their lives, the impact of mobility on the exchange value of their linguistic resources, their sociocultural encounters and their deep reflections on their previous language education are various threads in a dynamic sociolinguistic fabric whose topography and multiplicity can be further noticed by attending to its detail.

Next, **Chapter 7** aims to stretch the practical and pedagogical dimensions of this discussion (implications for practice). In addition, it outlines the main contributions of this inquiry, as well as directions for future research, limitations, research reflections, and final remarks.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

### 7.1 Thesis summary

This longitudinal, qualitative study has explored the sociolinguistic trajectories of eight Arab academic sojourners in the UK through engaging with their responses and reflections. This thesis knits together three long stories: the story of the theory, the story of the research, and the story of the research participants. The first three chapters mainly present the story of the theory, **Chapter 4** narrates the story of how the research evolved, and **Chapter 5** presents the story of the research participants. Finally, **Chapter 6** comments on, interprets and evaluates these intertwined stories. Evidently, I, the researcher, am the persona that has affected and been affected by this research throughout the journey of its development.

Guided by my understanding of the study's context and the theoretical discussion outlined in **Chapters 1, 2 and 3**, I articulated my main research question as:

***Does Arab academic sojourners' relationship with English change after moving from their Arabic contexts to study in the UK HE? And if so, how?***

In **Chapter 4**, I presented the main methodological decisions, procedures, and challenges and traced the evolution of the study. **Chapter 5** constructs an engaging narrative of the study's main findings which were theoretically interpreted in **Chapter 6**. This concluding chapter now comments on the study's contributions, implications, limitations and directions for future research. After that it concludes with brief research reflections and final remarks.

### 7.2 Contributions of the study

This study represents a three-fold contribution: theoretical, political, and methodological. To start with, the theoretical contributions of the study spring from its holistic approach that departs from traditional approaches in study abroad literature. Instead of focusing on language gain and adaptation, integration or acculturation models, the study responds to Coleman's (2013) 'whole people, whole lives' approach in that its participants were invited to talk about, engage with and reflect on personal, academic, and social aspects of their sojourn in the UK. Whereas language remains at the heart of all of this, attempts were made

not to reduce these individuals to language learners. During the study period, participants' interviews highlighted the extent to which they exhibited agentive, reflective and reflexive characteristics which indicate that they have not been passive sufferers. Rather, they were active and critical agents who attempted to decipher and interpret the situations they encountered during life-altering experiences such as the ones they undertook.

In addition, the study contributes to the theoretical discussions it has engaged with. Whereas the overarching economic metaphor of 'negotiating rates of exchange' responds to the commodification of language in the contemporary neoliberal order, it also problematises current scalar approaches to the sociolinguistics of globalisation. Having done that, the study endeavours to add both complexity and mobility into the mix in order to understand the impact of mobility and heterogeneity on individuals' conceptualisations of their languages, themselves, and others. By foregrounding the complex subjectivities and trajectories of the mobile individuals featured in this study, it departs from essentialist approaches to language, sociolinguistics of mobility, and intercultural communication.

Politically, the study attempts to deconstruct the institutional discourses surrounding study abroad by creating and (co)constructing new discourses. In so doing, the study uncovers the tensions and paradoxes that lie within and emerge from internationalisation in UK HE. It brings up the other side of the picture which is usually hidden for marketing and branding purposes. As seen throughout this thesis, participants' experiences did not fully resonate with those happy, 'integrated' students photographed on university websites. Unfortunately, participants' positive expectations of the academic and social life in the UK clashed with the manifestations of an inhospitable system that labelled them as 'international' yet expected them to 'integrate' and 'celebrate' their difference on campus.

Another political contribution of the study springs from its population focus. As seen in **Chapter 1**, the current study abroad literature features the experiences of American, European, and Asian students and overlooks the trajectories of many other ethnic minorities (Kinging, 2015; Block, 2007). Consequently, this study responds to this by focusing on Arab academic sojourners who are

underrepresented in study abroad research. The study attends to experiences of grappling with language, othering, and xenophobic discourses which are worthy of research attention if a clear UK HE internationalisation agenda is to be put in place.

Methodologically, the study addresses the complexity of researching where more than one language/variety is involved and contributes to current attempts of documenting the possibilities and complexities of researching multilingually (Holmes, Fay, Andrews and Attia, 2013). As articulated in **Chapter 4**, the study was enriched by the multiple linguistic repertoires deployed by the participants during the interviews and this also helped build a rapport with the participants who felt that I was not only a researcher but also a fellow academic sojourner, a friend and even a co-national (to Asma and Amjad). Participants' responses and narratives were enriched by and framed around these multiple subjectivities that were facilitated by and through researching multilingually. On the other hand, these translanguaging practices complicated and affected the processes of transcription, analysis, and dissemination which have to abide by the Anglo-centric academic culture in the institution where the study was conducted. As a result, I was not able to include an Arabic abstract due to the University of Leeds thesis format and structure regulations which allow a maximum of 300 words for the abstract, nor was I able to include the original quotes due to word count restrictions. Yet, the study problematises issues pertinent to linguistic representation and the power to 'impose reception' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 649) and calls for the need to articulate clear institutional guidelines that take into account the importance of and the advantages brought by researching multilingually.

In addition, the study dwells on Stelma, Fay and Zhou's (2013) notions of 'research as intentional activity' and 'researcher's intentionality' in that I have made both overt and covert statements during the development of the study about my intentions. This practice has enhanced my ability to be both reflective and reflexive in order to comment on what I have done and to think of what would have happened if different approaches were to be adopted.

## 7.3 Research implications

### 7.3.1 Implications for language educators

This study carries several implications for language educators in Arab countries and in the UK. As seen in 5.5 sojourners' previous language education contributed to lowering the exchange rates of their linguistic capital and to their sense of destabilisation and frustration. To this Mahmoud responded by saying, 'I feel my education in my country deceived me' [3<sup>rd</sup>]. Therefore, the study emphasises the importance of cultivating 'conscious learning' in the language classroom to help students cope with the linguistic messiness outside the classroom. I explained in 3.2 that 'conscious learning' is a term I borrowed from Holmes and Riddiford (2011) but I have used in a more general sense to refer to raising ideological and sociolinguistic awareness about how language functions in heterogeneous societies. To this end, I list here inspiring small-scale projects conducted to help language teachers and students see beyond the 'monolithic' view of English (Hall, 2012, 2014; Pennycook, 2007). These projects are:

1. The 'Do you speak American?' project (2005),
2. The 'Changing Englishes' project (Hall and Wicaksono, 2013),
3. The IEREST (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers) project (2012-2015)

The 'Do you speak American?' project is a 'three-hour sociolinguistic travelogue... on language variation in the United States' (Reaser, 2010, p. 93). It attempts to introduce language variations and the negative effects of common incorrect assumptions about these variations to school students in the USA. Reaser and Adger (2007) explain that there were many challenges facing this project such as lack of training in developing outreach projects, and the difficulties of mediating complex linguistic content so that it becomes accessible to school teachers and students.

The 'Changing Englishes' project is another attempt to raise ideological and sociolinguistic awareness amongst those 'who are open to new ways of thinking about their profession and are interested in English as it is used around the world, especially as a lingua franca' (Hall and Wicaksono, 2013). Because of its perceived importance for language teachers, the project's homepage introduces it as 'an urgent issue for teachers'.



The IEREST project involves 17 academic collaborators from different universities across Europe. It offers a set of teaching modules to support Erasmus students before, during, and after their sojourn. It also targets teachers in HE, as well as past, current, and potential Erasmus students. The main aim of the project is to help mobile students develop an intercultural path which can allow them to benefit from their international experience to achieve personal growth.

These three projects are mentioned here for two main reasons. First, they relate to my understanding of developing 'conscious learning' inside the language classroom which is one of the main implications of this study. Second, they indicate that effective preparation for study abroad should incorporate efforts exerted by sending and receiving institutions. That is to say, English language education in the Arab countries need to depart from essentialist, monolithic conceptualisations of English in order to prepare learners to shift from being 'learners' of English into 'users' of English. Language learners need to be given the option to choose the varieties they want to learn depending on where they want to be next and language teachers need to be trained to help these learners become independent agents who can learn by themselves using various online and offline sources. My own study does not attempt to add an extra burden on language teachers who are already burdened with a long list of expectations. Rather, it stresses the importance of raising ideological and sociolinguistic awareness among language teachers and learners alike. This awareness offers more flexibility in the outcome of learning (Hall, 2012).

In addition, current pre-sessional and in-sessional language support practices in many UK HE institutions perpetuate the 'monolithic' myth and continue to create a big divide between language use inside and outside the classroom. That is to say, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses continue to focus on Standard English and on academic literacies to help students communicate academically. Mostly, academic literacies are introduced as homogenous practices that students should master irrespective of their disciplines and institutions. Since EAP classes are the initial academic encounters for many students, they should include aspects of raising ideological and sociolinguistic awareness. Their role should not be restricted to helping students academically. Instead, they need to contribute to developing learners' awareness of the plurality of language variations and academic literacies.

### 7.3.2 Implications for Higher Education policy

The 'internationalisation' agenda in UK HE needs to have clearer visions for what it means and what it seeks to achieve. One of the main challenges facing this agenda is the marketisation of HE whose principles clash with principles of ethics, care, and hospitality. Another challenge is to compromise between the current clash between the UK anti-immigration political spectrum and the UK HE international pursuit.

In addition, students' 'integration' into academic life on campus continues to be a persisting issue. One crucial step to achieve a better integration is to help 'home' students develop communication and negotiation strategies for international communication. As seen in 5.4, academic sojourners are willing to have British friends but are also hesitant to approach them because they worry about their ability to communicate with native speakers who speak 'different' and/or 'difficult' varieties. If language learners need to develop ideological and sociolinguistic awareness prior to their arrival in the UK, British 'home' students need to develop intercultural and international awareness to help them communicate internationally.

Teachers and staff in UK HE also need to be trained to communicate with students from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds. If the UK HE macro-level is dominated by a neoliberal, marketisation discourse, the micro-level can play a crucial role in supporting academic sojourners. Because academic sojourners interact with various institutional bodies on campus, there should be a direct liaison between international student offices, student unions, and academic departments.

Last but not least, I agree with Chowdhury and Phan Le Ha (2014) when they explain that higher education institutions in many parts of the world have failed to benefit from the presence of 'international students' because of the current reductionist approaches of perceiving these individuals. Therefore, the introduction of new discourses and discursive positionings is a crucial step towards deviating from current discourses of marketisation and exploitation which squeeze revenue from what has become an increasingly less globally dominant UK HE system. Unfortunately, the current picture in the UK features a weak and pessimistic internationalisation agenda which is based around exploiting short-

term convenience rather than long term planning. As seen in this study and in other studies such as the work of Chowdhury and Phan Le Ha (2014), many academic sojourners are reflexive and reflective agents who are aware of the market abuse and of their uncomfortable positionings. Finally, I hope this study has provided a strong and convincing argument for why a dramatic change in UK HE policy is essential.

### **7.3.3 Implications for future academic sojourners in UK HE**

The study has indicated that viewing academic sojourners as whole people with whole lives (Coleman, 2013) essentially implies that the meaning of study abroad is amorphous, idiosyncratic and multidimensional. While this study sheds light on the sociolinguistic trajectories of Arab academic sojourners in the UK and the challenges thereof, it does not attempt to generalise its findings because different individuals will continue to have different trajectories. Whereas this study challenges contemporary promotional discourses in the UK educational marketplace, it has also highlighted the importance of study abroad in the lives of the research participants and how they continued to perceive it as a valuable episode in their lives and multilingual being. Therefore, future academic sojourners are equally encouraged to critically engage with their experience abroad to uncover valuable information about themselves and others. Indeed, study abroad will continue to be a journey to the unfamiliar which could ultimately lead to more realistic understandings of the world.

### **7.3.4 Implications for future Study Abroad research**

There is still more to learn from and about the individual trajectories of academic sojourners in study abroad contexts and there is still a need for continuing to depart from current theoretical and population foci in study abroad research. Many ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in this research and further ethnographic inquiries are required. More needs to be done to understand the idiosyncratic trajectories of mobile individuals whose testimonies are crucial to conceptualise the relationship between the local and the global, the self and the other, and crossing and carrying borders.

## 7.4 Limitations

Although this study has invited eight academic sojourners from five different Arab countries, the study would have benefitted from including participants from other Arab countries such as Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia where the linguistic scenes are far more complex. Participants from these countries would bring further insights into the relationship between various languages such as Arabic varieties, English, French and Berber languages and dialects.

In addition, all the participants came from one religious background which is not representative of the religious pluralism in the Arab World. Including participants from different religious backgrounds would add more perspectives on sojourners' networks and the role of their religions in their sociocultural encounters in the UK.

As stated in **Chapter 4**, I tried to cast the net as wide as possible within my parameters to invite participants from varied backgrounds. Eventually, I had to conduct the study with the available, willing participants whose insights and valuable contributions taught me a lot about them, their sociolinguistic trajectories in the UK, and about myself.

## 7.5 Directions for future research

This study opens various doors for future research. To start with, the rich dataset can be revisited with new analysis approaches and research foci. The translanguaging practices featured during the interviews deserve further attention. They can be approached through critical discourse analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis to look at aspects of positioning, alignment, and identity in interaction. Such an inquiry would shed some light on my own role, position, and identity and how I may have affected participants' choices of language or was affected by them. In addition, the dataset can be approached through narrative analysis to revisit participants' small stories to look at aspects of agency, voice and footing in discursive spaces.

Furthermore, the study abroad research will benefit from future research on the impact of social class on the trajectories of academic sojourners. I agree with Block (2015) that more research needs to address whether or not individuals maintain their home class position as they move across time and space and

whether they continue to perceive themselves as well-educated, and confident elites in their new contexts. It will also be important to investigate the intersection between class and individual's command of the language of the host community by attending to trajectories of possible declassing (Simpson and Cooke, 2010) and/or reclassing (Bourdieu, 1978).

Finally, study abroad research can benefit from longitudinal ethnographic inquiries which involve direct observations, authentic recordings, and (auto)biographies. Yet, it is important to acknowledge the methodological challenges and complexities of conducting research through these tools.

## **7.6 Research reflections**

Like the research participants, I too was unfolding my life through this PhD. Most of the theoretical constructs presented in this study are lived encounters for me as an academic sojourner, foreigner, non-native speaker of English, speaker of an ELF variety, and language educator. Through my interaction with the literature and the participants, I rediscovered myself and was able to theoretically interpret various critical moments in my own life trajectories.

Towards the end of my PhD, I also realised that I have been using two terms which are no longer as accurate as I used to think of them. The terms are 'English as a Foreign Language (EFL)' and 'social integration'. I usually refer to my participants as learners of EFL or people coming from EFL contexts. Whereas English performs a restricted range of functions in the participants' countries, I realised that the degrees of its foreignness differ from one person to another. That is to say, the extent to which English was a foreign language to Hassan who spoke it most of the time at his academy in Qatar differs from that to Dalal who needed to use very little English for her administrative role in a university in Saudi Arabia. Could English be equally 'foreign' to both? Similarly, the term 'social integration' is also problematic. I used this term to talk about participants' integration in the English or British society. However, the term raises the question of integrate into what in contemporary, super-diverse, urban Britain (Simpson, 2015)?

Between March 2015 and September 2015, I gave 11 presentations in conferences, workshops, and postgraduate seminars and engaged with a wider

community of practice. These presentations were used to disseminate my findings and to discuss aspects of my methodology. Many individuals who chose to attend my presentations commented that they were curious to know more about Arab students in the UK because their voices seem to be underrepresented in research. Others were interested in finding out more about the other side of internationalisation in UK HE. The questions I received and the informal comments I exchanged with the wider community of practice have also contributed to the development of this project.

## **7.7 Epilogue**

This doctoral thesis captures an emerging narrative of the orientations featured in the sociolinguistic trajectories of eight Arab academic sojourners in the UK. These stories will never finish (I hope), as they entail a continual negotiation of power, and episodes of hope and aspiration at the background of trajectories of frustration, destabilisation and isolation. Amid all of that comes English which occupies the core of the multilingual experiences of these mobile individuals who set out to unfamiliar lands with various dreams, one of which was to speak 'perfect' English.

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## **Appendix (1): Interview guide for focus group interview (Pilot)**

### **Theme 1: Language history**

1. How did you start learning English?
2. Did you attend any private language schools to improve your English?
3. What language test did you do when you applied to study in the UK?
4. Do you think the language test was a true representation of your language level?
5. Did you have to take any pre-sessional or in-sessional courses?

### **Theme 2: English opportunities and obstacles**

1. Tell me about your English before coming to the UK, what opportunities did English offer to you?
2. Tell me about situations when English caused any obstacles to you in your country?
3. Do you feel that your English was more appreciated when you were in your country where less people speak English fluently? Can you give an example?
4. Do you think your efforts to learn English, before coming to the UK, have paid off?
5. Let's talk about coming to the UK, what opportunities does English offer you?
6. Can you think of situations when English was an obstacle?
7. Do you feel that your English is less appreciated in the UK and that you are more challenged? Can you give examples of your opinion? Have you done anything to change this?
8. How is the English you use in academic settings different from the English used in non-academic settings? Can you think of examples?
9. Do you think English can be a major challenge for you if you decide to work in the UK?

### **Theme 3: English and identity**

1. Who are you when you speak English? Do you feel you are still the same person?
2. Do you think your English tells something about who you are and where you are from? How?
3. Has it been easy for you to make friends with British colleagues/neighbours?
4. Do you want to speak English like your British friends? Or are you happy with your current English?

### **Theme 4: Attitudes to Different Englishes**

1. What is your idea of "best" English?
2. What are the different English (accents) you encountered in the UK?
3. What do you think of the English spoken by other learners from China, Pakistan, India, and the Arab world?
4. Before coming to the UK, what was your goal to learn English?

5. Has your goal changed now after coming to the UK?

### **Theme 5: Membership of the Arabic Culture**

1. Does the language of your colleagues play a role in your decision to be friends with them? How?
2. Do you have Arabic friends?
3. How did you meet them?
4. Do your Arabic friends help you settle in the UK? Or do you feel that you don't have enough English input when you are with fellow Arabs?
5. Are you a member of any Arabic societies in the UK? If so, what are the advantages and disadvantages of being a member?

### **Appendix (2): Invitation to participate in my study (posted on University of Leeds Portal and relevant Facebook groups)**

Are you a new Arab student studying at the University of Leeds?

Have you received an unconditional offer to start a course in October 2013?

If so, I would like to invite you to take part in the following study:

#### **Moving Across Exchange Rates: A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Arab Academic Sojourners' Relationship with English in the UK [Provisional title]**

What is the purpose of the project?

The study looks into the social and linguistic experiences of Arab students in UK Higher Education Institutions. It aims at investigating your relationship with English, how it develops since you arrived in the UK, and whether it is a factor that affects your choice of making friends. This study addresses the need to highlight the sociolinguistic experiences of Arab students in UK universities in an attempt to document their encounters and trace the development of their attitudes towards life in the UK. If you are ready to partake, you will be invited for an initial group interview followed by monthly individual interviews over a period of 6 months.

Once deciding to participate in this study, you will be given a detailed information sheet and you will be asked to sign a consent form of which you will have a copy.

Please contact the researcher, Khawla Badwan, at (edkmb@leeds.ac.uk or 07450050443).

### Appendix (3): Ethical approval letter (Copy)

Performance, Governance and Operations  
 Research & Innovation Service  
 Charles Thackrah Building  
 101 Clarendon Road  
 Leeds LS2 9LJ Tel: 0113 343 4873  
 Email: [ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk)



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

Khawla M. Badwan  
 School of Education  
 University of Leeds  
 Leeds, LS2 9JT

**AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee  
 University of Leeds**

11 February 2016

Dear Khawla

**Title of study:** Moving Across Exchange Rates: A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Arab Academic Sojourners' Relationship with English in the UK (Provisional)  
**Ethics reference:** LTEDUC-042

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for light touch ethical review has been reviewed by a School Ethics Representative of the ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee. I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion on the basis of the application form as of the date of this letter.

The following documentation was considered:

| Document                            | Version | Date     |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| LTEDUC-042 response1.txt (by email) | 1       | 17/06/13 |
| LTEDUC-042 LightTouchEthicsForm.doc | 1       | 13/06/13 |
| LTEDUC-042 Information sheet.doc    | 1       | 13/06/13 |
| LTEDUC-042 Consent Form.doc         | 1       | 13/06/13 |

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at [http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/info/71/good\\_research\\_practice/105/managing\\_your\\_approved\\_project/3](http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/info/71/good_research_practice/105/managing_your_approved_project/3).

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at [http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/info/71/good\\_research\\_practice/105/managing\\_your\\_approved\\_project/4](http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/info/71/good_research_practice/105/managing_your_approved_project/4).

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie

Senior Research Ethics Administrator, Research & Innovation Service

On behalf of Dr Emma Cave, Chair, [AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee](#)

CC: Student's supervisor(s)

**Appendix (4): Information sheet<sup>17</sup>****Moving Across Exchange Rates: A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Arab Academic Sojourners' Relationship with English in the UK [Provisional title]**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

**What is the purpose of the project?**

The study looks into the social and linguistic experiences of Arab students in UK Higher Education Institutions. It aims at investigating your relationship with English, how it develops since you arrived in the UK, and whether it is a factor that affects your choice of making friends. This study addresses the need to highlight the sociolinguistic experiences of Arab students in the UK universities in an attempt to document their encounters and trace the development of their attitudes towards the sociolinguistic life in the UK. If you are ready to partake, you will be invited for a group interview followed by monthly individual interviews over a period of six months.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you fit the criteria for participation in this research. All recruited participants should be Arab students who arrived in the UK recently and are about to undertake a higher education degree in October 2013. Your availability in Leeds during the time of study is also considered.

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form at the onset of the first group interview) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

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<sup>17</sup> This information sheet was attached to the ethical review application form for approval



**What do I have to do? / What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will take part in a focus group interview (a group of 4 members) that is expected to last up to 90 minutes to discuss open-ended questions about your sociolinguistic experiences since you arrived in the UK. After that, you are invited for monthly individual interviews to discuss some of the themes of the focus group interview in more detail. Individual interviews are expected to last for 40 to 60 minutes.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no possible risks or disadvantages of taking part in this study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will be a means of giving voice to Arab students in the UK and a way of documenting their socio-linguistic encounters. Also, this work is expected to encourage Arab students to reflect on their academic, linguistic, and social trajectories while in the UK. In addition, it is hoped that the study provide a platform for understanding the aspirations, motivation, expectations, and learning and adjustment difficulties of Arab students in the UK. Current Arab students in the UK can better reflect on their trajectories, and future Arab students are offered more realistic expectations of the sociolinguistic complexities of life in the UK.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential? / What will happen to the results of the research project?**

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

**What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?**

All information sought from you will be based on your experiences of life and study in the UK. You will be encouraged to talk about your language history, the opportunities and obstacles your English causes, who you are as a speaker of both English and Arabic, how you define your identity, how you react to the different English accents you might have encountered, and how you maintain membership of the Arabic community. All data are used to investigate the development of your relationship with English after coming to study in the UK. Keeping in mind that little attention has been given to the sociolinguistic

trajectories of Arab students in the UK, your participation contributes to developing this area of research.

**Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

Yes, audio recordings will be used. The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations, lectures and in my PhD thesis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

**Contact for further information**

Should you need further information, please contact me, Khawla Badwan at: [edkmb@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:edkmb@leeds.ac.uk) and 07450050443.

This doctoral study is supervised by

Dr. James Simpson [j.e.b.simpson@education.leeds.ac.uk](mailto:j.e.b.simpson@education.leeds.ac.uk) and

Prof. Mike Baynham [M.Baynham@education.leeds.ac.uk](mailto:M.Baynham@education.leeds.ac.uk) .

**Finally ...**

Once deciding to participate in this study, you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep. Moreover, you will be asked to sign a consent form that you will also have a copy of.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read through this information sheet and I look forward to working with you on this research project.

### Appendix (5): Consent form<sup>18</sup>

**Consent to take part in a study entitled:**

**[Negotiating rates of exchange: Arab academic sojourners' sociolinguistic trajectories in the UK]**

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | Add your initials next to the statements you agree with |
| I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. |   |
| I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.   |   |
| I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.   |   |

|                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Name of participant     |                        |
| Participant's signature |                        |
| Date                    |                        |
| Name of lead researcher | Khawla Mohammed Badwan |
| Signature               |                        |
| Date*                   |                        |

\*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/ pre-written script/ information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

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<sup>18</sup> This form was attached to the ethical review application for approval.

## **Appendix (6): Interview guides**

### **6.1 Initial pair group questions**

#### **Theme 1: Language history**

1. How did you start learning English?
2. Did you attend any private language schools to improve your English?
3. What language test did you do when you applied to study in the UK?
4. During your school life, which language, English or Arabic received more attention?
5. Were your parents keen on sending you to the best places to learn English?

#### **Theme 2: English: opportunities and obstacles**

1. Tell me about your English before coming to the UK, what opportunities did English offer to you.
2. Do you feel that your English was more appreciated when you were in your country where less people speak English fluently? Can you give an example?

#### **Theme 3: English and identity**

1. Who are you when you speak English? Do you feel you are still the same person?
2. Is the English taught in your country different from the kind of English you use here?

#### **Theme 4: Investment in learning English**

1. Before arriving in the UK, did you expect any language problems?

#### **Theme 5: Attitudes to different Englishes**

1. What is your idea of “best” English?
2. Were you aware of the presence of different Englishes here? If so, how did you know that?

#### **Theme 6: Membership of the Arabic community**

1. Have you made friends with other non-Arab friends?
2. Has it been easy for you to make friends with British students?

## 6.2 First individual interview questions

### Theme 1: Your English in the UK

1. To what extent are you satisfied with your current level of English?
2. Do you think your efforts to learn English in your country were enough? Would you change anything?
3. Have you had any situations when you faced problems because of English in the UK?
4. Tell me about your English inside the classroom. Do you face any problems communicating your ideas or understanding someone else's ideas?
5. Tell me about your English outside the classroom. Does the communication become easier?
6. Before coming to the UK, did you expect to speak more English in the UK?
7. Did you expect to have a wider circle of friends?
8. Were there any other expectations of life in the UK?

### Theme 2: Language and identity

1. Did you speak English in your country? How did that make you feel about yourself? Modern, Western, etc? Do you have the same self-perception when you speak English in the UK? How?
2. Does your English tell something about who you are and where you are from? How? Is this an advantage?
3. Have you ever felt that your English puts you in a lower position when you speak to native speakers? If so, how did you react?

### Theme 3: Your language in the market

1. Do you think it will be easy for you to get a job in the UK?
2. How easy will it be for you to find a prestigious job in your country?
3. Does this tell you anything about the relationship between language and the job market?
4. Does this tell you anything about the value of language? Is it fixed? Can you explain?

### Theme 4: Upon arrival and now

You have been the UK for around two months now

1. Can you compare between yourself upon arrival and now?
2. Are you more confident now? If so, what has helped you?
3. Is there anything that you know now about life in the UK that you were not aware of upon arrival?
4. Do you still face difficulties with the British accents?

## **6.3 Second individual interview questions**

### **Theme 1: Obstacles caused by English**

1. We spoke earlier about opportunities offered by English, let's talk today about obstacles caused by English:
2. Tell me about any academic obstacles that you currently face while writing assignments, working on presentations, or dealing with group work.
3. Did you expect these obstacles before arriving?
4. Have you had any results yet? Do they indicate any language-related issues that worry you?
5. Tell me about your daily situations when you need to use English outside the classroom. What worries you the most? The least? Do you have any examples?

### **Theme 2: The role of language in grouping and friendship making**

1. Who do you go to the following places with: masjid, gym, Café, shopping centre, cultural event, academic lecture, and restaurant?
2. How does the place you plan to go to affect the choice of your company?
3. Does the language of the other person play a role in your decision to be friends with? Can you give an example?
4. What factors affect your choice of friends in the UK?
5. To what extent are you willing to expand your current circle of friends? What do you do to know more people?
6. What restrictions affect your friendship-making?

### **Theme 3: The role of governments in preparing you for life abroad**

1. To what extent did your government prepare you for life in the UK? Can you give examples?
2. What else could your government have done to make your experience in the UK better?
3. Do you have any suggestions that could make the life of future students easier?

### **Theme 4: Reflecting on your linguistic repertoires in different UK settings: masjid, gym, classroom, Arabic restaurant, international event, etc.**

1. Do you speak English in the masjid? If so, with whom? And do you worry about your English in this space?
2. What seems to have a higher value in the masjid: your English or your Arabic?

3. I am going to mention a list of places that you might have been to by now. I want you to tell me if you think you worry more or less about making mistakes when you speak English there:
  - a. a classroom, b. a gym, c. an Arabic restaurant, d. an international event where all are learners of English, e. a cultural event where the majority are British, f. a masjid.
4. Can you think of any stories you've had in any of those places?

#### **Theme 5: English and success in the UK (assignments)**

1. How are you doing with your current courses?
2. To what extent has your English contributed to your success in completing your academic assignments? Can you mention some examples?
3. If you would like to be offered any language support with your assignments, what would it be?

#### **Theme 6: Attitudes towards 'excuse me? Can you say that again?'**

1. Do you feel irritated when someone asks you to repeat what you have said in English? Do you have the same feeling if you were speaking in Arabic? Why is that?
2. Can you give examples?
3. For you, does asking for repetition imply that your English is strange? How do you look at this? (when you ask for repetition and when you are asked to repeat?)

### **6.4 Third individual interview questions**

#### **Theme 1: for participants who went home during Christmas:**

1. How does it feel to be home?
2. Did you feel any changes in the way you look at yourself and others after your short stay in the UK?
3. How do your parents look at you now?
4. How do your friends look at you now?
5. Do you feel that your friends and family have higher expectations of your stay in the UK?
6. Did going home make you reflect on your short stay in the UK?
7. Were you open about the challenges you faced in the UK?

#### **Theme 2: Human capital**

1. How do you value the education you receive in the UK?
2. Why did you choose to study in the UK and not in another Arab country?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of studying in the UK?
4. What opportunities will your UK degree and English offer you when you go home?

5. Would you still have the same opportunities if you studied in another country? How?
6. Do you think if you spoke English and another European language instead of Arabic, would that give you more advantages? How?

### **Theme 3: Linguistic goals after finishing their current degrees**

1. How do you think your English will develop by the end of your study in the UK?
2. What is your linguistic goal by the end of this academic year?
3. What have you done to reach this goal?
4. Is your goal in line with family and friends' expectations?
5. Are you looking for a more realistic goal now?

### **Theme 4: Family and friends expectations**

1. Do friends and family's expectations affect your goals in the UK?
2. How realistic are these expectations?
3. Are you trying to meet such expectations or do you have your own way of looking at your future?
4. What are your plans to make your UK experience better?

## **6.5 Fourth individual interview questions**

1. Do you want to speak better English because:
  - a. you want to be like the native speakers of English;
  - b. you want to enhance your employability chances in your country;
  - c. of other personal reasons?
2. Which statement describes your academic journey to the UK:
  - a. I came to study here to meet the expectations of family and friends;
  - b. I came to study here because I believe I will be a better person with more responsibilities and richer experiences;
  - c. I came to study here because I know my UoL degree will offer me a better future.
  - d. other reasons (explain)
3. When you try to make the most of your stay in the UK, you are:
  - a. trying your best to become a better learner who has high potentials in the market after graduating;
  - b. trying your best in order not to fail and not to let yourself, your parents and your friends down;
  - c. Both (explain).
4. Who provides you with moral support in the UK:
  - a. your teachers;



- b. your group;
- c. your positive experiences;
- d. the curriculum that you enjoy studying;
- e. your family and friends back home.

5. Where and how do you see yourself after graduating from UoL and returning to your country?
6. What motivates you to study and work hard?
7. What worries you as a student?
8. How did you imagine your life in the UK? Did your family have the same vision? To what extent is your imagined vision compatible with the lived reality of studying in the UK?
9. Does speaking English and living in the UK liberate you from the constraints of your culture and society? How?
10. Do you see your academic journey as an escape from your old context in your country? How?
11. Have you ever used English as a way to rebel against social traditions?
12. When you speak English, do you see it as an act of giving new labels to things while preserving your sense of identity, or does it change or threaten your sense of identity?
13. What does speaking English in the UK mean to you? Has this been always the same?
14. What does your academic stay in the UK mean to you? Has this been always the same?
15. Does speaking better English offer you (a.) economic empowerment (in your local job market), or (b.) personal fulfilment? both? Can you explain that?

## **6.6 Fifth individual interview questions**

### **Asma's questions:**

#### **Questions from initial pair interview**

1. You told me about your passion for learning English and how your parents wanted you to speak good English. Now that you are in the UK, do you feel that your efforts to learn English were enough? Was your parents' support justified?
2. You told me that people with good English have a lot of chances in your local job market. Is that an over-statement (considering that a lot of people speak English worldwide)?
3. You mentioned that you would not have had the same chances and jobs without your English and that your English made you feel that you are distinguished and successful. Do you still feel the same about your English here? How?

4. You drew a distinction between the kind of English you learned at school and the kind of English you use here. Does this make you less appreciative of language education in your country?

**Questions from first individual interview**

1. You told me about your attempts to be friends with people from different countries. How has that worked? Are you satisfied with your current circle of friends? Any challenges?

**Questions from second individual interview**

1. You told me before that you are more active in classrooms if compared with social events where you tend to be a listener most of the time. Has this changed?

**Questions from third individual interview**

1. You complained that your course does not require group work and that most of the academic work is done individually. Is it the university's responsibility to nurture social interaction among classmates?
2. You expected that your listening skills will improve as you go. Has that happened?

**Questions from fourth individual interview**

1. You were worried that it might not be easy for you to find a job related to the degree you are currently doing here. Does this lower the value of your UK degree?
2. You told me that you worked in your local job market before and that you are confident that you are competitive enough. Do you still feel the same about your skills/knowledge?

**Dalal's Questions:**

**Questions from initial pair interview**

1. You mentioned that you attended private schools where you were taught English from grade (1). Do you feel that focusing on English contradicts with being an 'Arab'? Has this made you feel that English is more important than Arabic?
2. You described the English you studied in Saudi Arabia as 'general English'. Where has it helped you the most in the UK? Where has it failed you?
3. You told me that your father and brothers studied in the US and they speak perfect English and that they always talk to you in English. Why do you use English to talk to your brothers? Do you feel English represent who you and your brothers are? Are there particular uses for using Arabic?
4. You explained that the number of those who speak English in Saudi Arabia is huge in comparison with the past, has this made English more important or less important in the job market? What kind of English is required in the job market? What else do you need besides English to compete in your local job market?

5. You complained that the English you studied in SA was formal and that you did not have an idea about life in the UK and how people interact outside academic settings. How has this made you feel about the quality/value of education you received in SA? Will you change anything when you go back to teaching?

#### **Questions from first individual interview**

1. You mentioned that English is taught in KSA as if it were mathematics (- meaning: it is taught in a rigid way and it does not consider the flexible side of the language). How has this affected your life and studying in the UK? What more do you know about English as a language now? How can English be taught in a better way?
2. You explained that the way you were taught English did not prepare you for the psychological and social aspect of life abroad. You said that 'you can get the highest marks in your country but when you travel to study abroad you might remain silent for a long time and feel shocked'. What can be done to prepare Arab students for the psychological and social aspect of life abroad?

#### **Questions from second individual interview**

1. You mentioned that you are most comfortable with people who come from the same culture as you are, and for that reason you don't have non-Arab friends. Do you still feel the same about social relations? If you do, isn't this restricting your chances of knowing more about other cultures and lifestyles?
2. If you were to give a presentation about your academic and linguistic experiences in the UK in front of Saudi students who are planning to study in the UK, what would the main points be?

#### **Questions from third individual interview**

1. You told me that you knew a lot about life in the UK through other Saudi families in Leeds. Can you give me examples of how they helped you settle in the UK? What could have the UoL done to make your life in the UK easier?

#### **Questions from fourth individual interview**

1. You mentioned that you want to go back to SA with a particular level of English proficiency that matches the expectations of others. Can you describe this level of English?

### **Reem's Questions**

#### **Questions from initial pair interview**

1. You explained that your mother wanted you to speak English since you were a child. What do you think of this now? Does it contradict with being an 'Arab'? Has this affected your attitudes towards Arabic?
2. You mentioned that in your school life, the focus was on teaching English because it was a private school. What does this tell about the way the Saudi society view English as opposed to Arabic?

3. You explained that without your English you would not have managed to find a job in Saudi Arabia and that you ended up working in a bank even though you have a degree in English literature, only because of your English. Does this make you aware of the economic value of your English? Can you consider this policy as a main drive for why many are willing to improve their English in your country?
4. You mentioned several times that you feel that the value of your English in the UK is less than that in SA because you are dealing with native speakers here and sometimes you don't understand the accent. How has this made you feel about your English? Has this feeling changed over time?

#### **Questions from first individual interview**

1. You mentioned before that one of the main communication problems that you face here is that your interlocutors expect you to know the system, to understand their English, and to speak like them. Does this suggest that there is a problem with linguistic awareness in public? Or do you see this as your responsibility i.e. to meet the expectations of the others? What is the role of 'language education' here?
2. You told me that wearing hijab in the gym attracts strange looks and people do not talk to you. Do you think your life in the UK would have been different if you didn't wear hijab? How?

#### **Questions from second individual interview**

1. You explained that in the presence of native speakers you tend to be silent most of the time. Is still the case or has this changed over time?

#### **Questions from third individual interview**

1. You were frustrated that your English in the UK is not as good as you expected it to be and you even wondered why they accepted you on the translation course. Was that a reaction to a low mark that you were given? Or has it become something you believe in?
2. You told me that you needed to know a native speaker of English who can read your translations and comment on them. Has this motivated you to be introduced to home students?
3. You noticed that most of your Arab classmates are grouped according to their nationalities (i.e. Saudis together, Egyptian together, etc). Do you think these social circles might change as people adapt to the new lifestyle in the UK? Do you notice any changes in your social circle now?
4. You were not sure how your UK degree will help you when you go back to your job in the XX Bank of Development, still you are not willing to change your job to be a teacher or a translator. Does this mean that the economic value of your UK degree is not the main drive for your academic journey?
5. You said that you don't feel that you are equipped with enough knowledge to be a translator. Is this because you had higher expectations of your current course? or because you believe you did not work hard? Is this feeling still there?

**No questions from the fourth round.**

**Amjad's Questions****Questions from initial pair interview**

1. You explained that your parents taught you that English as a language is better and more civilised and offers jobs and travels. Now that you are in the UK, do you still agree with this belief?
2. You also said that your English made you feel that you are a successful person and other people were looking up to you. Do you still have the same feeling here?
3. You told me that when you speak English here, you feel weak and pressurised. Has this changed over time? How?
4. You wanted to sound like a native speaker and to speak 'London accent'. Have you done anything to achieve this goal? Is it attainable?
5. You were worried that it is not easy to be friends with home students. What have you done to expand your circle of friends? Why has it been difficult to have British friends?

**Questions from first individual interview**

1. When you compared your English in your country and in the UK, you said that you felt that your English in the UK is weaker and is no longer perfect. Do you still have the same feeling now after almost seven months?
2. You previously told me that you feel in a lower position when you speak to a British speaker and said that 'his/her language proficiency makes him/her strong in everything'. Do you still feel the same now?
3. You said that your exposure to a new culture and a new lifestyle have offered you more awareness. How do you describe yourself today?

**No questions from the second individual interview****Questions from third individual interview**

1. You told me that you now feel that you have enough English and this has made any linguistic progress you make very slow. Do you still feel the same? What do you mean by saying 'I now have enough English'?
2. You described your English as a 'weapon that you can carry all the time in case you need it'. Can you explain that?

**Questions from fourth individual interview**

1. You told me that you expected your life in the UK to be easier than your lived reality. Can you explain that?

**Mahmoud's Questions****Questions from initial pair interview**

1. Do you still feel that your pronunciation and accent are 'wrong'?
2. (I use English because it facilitates many things in our lives, but am I really satisfied with using it? No. We are obliged). Do you still feel the same?
3. Are there any particular situations when you feel more confident and fluent when you speak English?
4. You mentioned that you are more confident when you speak with non-native speakers. Is it still the same now?

5. You mentioned earlier that the non-native speakers are more likely to understand you and that the native speakers don't try to lower their linguistic level to attempt to understand you. Do you still feel the same?
6. Do you still find the British accent difficult to understand? Or do you still find the American accent easier?

**Questions from first individual interview**

1. You mentioned earlier that you are not satisfied with your level of English and that you are afraid of the other person's reaction? Is this still the case?
2. You mentioned earlier that when you came here you realised the difference between IELTS English, academic English and the English spoken in the street. Were you disappointed that the difference was not made clear to you when you were taught English in your country? What advice would you like to give to other Arab students who were taught in a similar way?
3. You said that you don't like people to ask you to repeat. Do you still feel irritated when asked to repeat?

**Questions from second individual interview**

1. Do you see any difference in your academic writing skills?

**Questions from third individual interview**

1. You said that it irritates you when a friend tries to correct your pronunciation or use of a certain word. Is this still the same? How? Why?
2. You said that when you went back during Christmas, you felt that your family treated you in a special way. Did that happen again when you returned during Easter?
3. What happened to the new identity you developed in the UK (being flexible, tolerant, more relaxed, etc). Were you able to maintain this identity this time when you went during Easter?

**Questions from fourth individual interview**

1. You told me about your sponsor who also sponsors many other engineering students here. Tell me about the sponsor. Is it an individual or a company?
2. You told me that when you speak English, you feel modern but when you are surrounded by British people, you feel that your English is zero. What are the places where you feel that you are modern because you speak English?

**Hassan's Questions:**

**Questions from initial pair interview**

1. When I saw you for the first time, you said that you came from a country where you already had many foreigners and that you feel that this made you understand the British system. To what extent was that true? Do you still believe that the diversity in Qatar has prepared you for life in the UK?

2. You told me that your family wanted you to learn English since you were a child. Are they happy with your English now or do they want you to learn more? Explain.
3. Two of your sisters studied in the UK before. Has this been a source of inspiration and information about life in the UK? Do you think your UK experience is similar to theirs? How?
4. You described English as 'the language of jobs'. Which is more important in the Qatari job market: One's English skills or one's qualifications?
5. In 'XX Academy', your English made you join many projects and you were active there. You are now a student in the UK. Does this make you feel less appreciated?
6. You told me that in Qatar the young generation speaks English. What made you feel that your English was different when you were in Qatar? Do you think the English skills you've acquired here will make you stand out more when you return back?
7. Do you think the UoL has offered you enough chances to learn about life in the UK? What could have been done better?
8. You told me that you feel different when you lose fluency or when you are nervous. Can you give me an example of when this happens?
9. You told me that your British trainers in Qatar used to speak 'Simple English'. Did this make you have 'inaccurate' expectations of language issues in the UK?

#### **Questions from first Individual Interview**

1. You told me that you try to interact with your non-Arab classmates because you have more chances to use your English with them. Does this make you willing to expand your circle of friends? Do you think the situation will be different next year? How?
2. You told me that when you spoke English with foreigners in Qatar, you felt modern and different. Do you still have the same feeling when you use your English here?
3. You told me that you look at yourself differently now. Can you explain that to me?

#### **Questions from second individual interview**

1. You told me that you expected essays and reports here to be similar to the ones you used to write at home, but they were not similar. What is different in the way you are asked to write here?

#### **Questions from third individual interview**

1. You told me that you did not want to go home during Easter because you had a bad mark in one of your courses. What made you decide to go home after all? Was your family supportive when they knew about your academic worries?
2. Does your sponsor currently sponsor other Qatari engineering students in the UK? How do you seek distinction among them?

### **Questions from fourth individual interview**

1. How competitive is your current English in Qatar?
2. You complained that some teachers here assume that you already studied their course in your country and they don't explain things for you. Does this make you a less satisfied student?
3. You told me that your life in the UK has changed something in your lifestyle like your new passion for reading and expanding your general knowledge. To what extent has this affected the way you look at yourself now? Do you feel you've become different?
4. Tell me about the time you spent with your family during Easter. Did you go home with the new Hassan? How did you feel to be home this time? Was anything different from the time when you went during Christmas?

### **Kholoud's Questions**

#### **Questions from initial pair interview**

1. You explained to me that your parents spoke to you in English since you were a child. Do you perceive yourself as an 'Arab'?
2. You told me that you receive comments on your accent and that you don't know how to respond to that. Do you still face the same thing? Have you developed a particular response to that? Does this make you feel that you are an outsider?
3. You told me that you spoke perfect English in Oman but here it is 'normal'. Do you still think your English here is 'normal'? Have you done anything to improve it?
4. You told me that the British students don't want to be friends with international students and they don't even try. Do you still think it is the case?

#### **Questions from first individual interview**

1. You told me before that when you wear a headscarf, people treat you differently. Can you explain that? And is this why you chose not to wear a headscarf?

#### **Questions from second individual interview**

1. You told me that you've tried to meet people from different countries and religions but some people were intimidated by the fact that you are an Arab and you don't drink. How often do you experience this? Has this restricted your circle of friends/acquaintances?
2. You told me that when you applied the writing skills that you learned in Oman in your first essay here, your mark was low. Did that make you question the quality of the education you received there?

#### **Questions from third individual interview**

1. You mentioned that when you went home you noticed that your friends who were studying in Oman have a different mentality. Can you explain what you mean by that? How is their mentality different from yours now? What has caused this difference?



2. You told me that you speak English most of the time even when you speak to your Arabic friends. Does this affect your sense of being an 'Arab'? What does being an 'Arab' mean to you?

**Questions from fourth individual interview**

1. You explained that you don't like to be responsible but this is one of the things you have to do in the UK. How do you perceive being responsible now? Is it a burden or a plus?
2. You mentioned that your UK experiences can be a factor that makes you distinguished in the Omani job market. Can you explain that? What types of experiences were you referring to?

**Ameen's Questions:**

**Questions from initial pair interview**

1. You explained to me that you had non-Arab teachers who contributed to improving your English at school. Does focusing on English affect being an 'Arab'?
2. You told me that your goal is to be a native speaker of English. Is it still your goal? What have you done to achieve it?
3. You told me that you spoke better English in Oman because not too many people have a high level of English proficiency. Does this make you feel less confident when you speak English here?

**Questions from first individual interview**

1. You told me that your Arab teachers at school spoke to you in English. Was that part of your private school policy? Did that make you feel that your school was 'modern'?
2. You explained that you were taught 'general English' and 'IELTS English' in Oman whereas here you are required to use 'Academic English'. Does this make you feel that the language preparation you had in Oman was not sufficient?
3. You told that you are with your Omani group and when others on your course see that you are all from Oman, they don't try to get into the group. Do you see this as a problem?
4. You said that your Omani group makes you feel that you have your own 'Oman in the UK'. Do you see this as an advantage? Or does this restrict your chances of knowing more about life in the UK?

**Questions from second individual interview**

1. You told me that when you applied the writing skills what you learned in Oman in your first essay here your mark was low. Did that make you question the quality of the education you received there?

**Questions from third individual interview**

1. You complained that the English course you are doing as part of your foundation year is random and the topics are not related to your engineering degree. In spite of that, did you learn anything new or useful here? What suggestions do you have to improve the English course?
2. You told me that one of the reasons you didn't study in Oman is that life there is 'boring'. What is interesting about studying in the UK?

**Questions from fourth individual interview**

1. How did it feel to be back during April? Was it any different from when you returned in December?
2. You told me that developed a sense of independence and responsibility here, did that feeling remain when you went back? Did you feel that you had to shift to your 'old= Pre-the UK' self?

**Questions for all participants as part of their last individual interview**

1. And now that you are approaching the end of your first academic year in the UK, what would you have done differently if you were given the chance to start over?
2. How has participating in this research affected you? Has it made you reflect on your academic journey in the UK? Has it opened your eyes to see things you were not aware of?
3. Are there any questions that you wanted to be asked about but I did not?
4. Will your course be more interesting if you had (more) British students?
5. Issues of positioning: dealing with native speakers in the UK and in your home country?
6. Do you think going back home twice a year was a good step to make? Don't you think that you missed out on some opportunities to learn more about the English culture?
7. You have been here for almost a whole academic year. I want you to think of the English you were taught in your country. Where has it helped you the most: passing IELTS, daily-life situations, academic English, other? Explain.
8. Does your appearance or style of clothing perform as identity marker? is this positive or negative? How?
9. When you speak English in the UK, do you feel that you are acting as a different person or do you feel that English can still represent who you are as an Arab?
10. How has your English changed since you arrived in the UK? How do you describe yourself today?
11. To what extent do you avoid speaking Arabic in public?

Appendix (7): Example showing a handwritten transcript

2

طريقة البحث عن المفاهيم الخاصة في عبارة سايطرين القادمة على بريطانيا  
أهمية: مهم  
عقد: 1973

المعنى المتسلسل من المفاهيم المعنية عن الطريقة التي يتبعها الناس وهذه الطريقة في تفاعل الناس  
التي تتصل عن طريقها، فنتيجه، أولاً هي التناقضات كالتي هي طبيعة علمياتنا  
صانعها كالتي لا يتبعها إلا من يكتفي بالأساليب Research بالأساليب  
وتعريفها أو ما يعرف بال Copy و Paste و ما تسمى من The Internet  
منطقة العلوم ونظمها، ثم إننا نعطيها مفهومها هذا في  
ذاتها شيئاً مهم جداً والمفروض تكون عارضة من قبل لأنه استناداً إلى  
Mark و Copied إليه أو Commitment وهو الآخر، هذه هي الماكينات  
عندي، أنا أرى مفهومه أن كل planning لا يحدده تتبعه في العالم  
أصلها في كل شيء المقام على علم الوقت ببريدنا، أنا أرى أن كل شيء  
التي لها معنى منها هي علم، أنا أعتبر على الرغم من أن كل شيء عن الازدحام  
من حيث الرؤية لا أفهم في الآونة الأخيرة من Research على  
لوحة من رسم الطريقة المعقدة لها  
مفرداً: طب، تأتبع الأبحاث التي أنت تفتتحها وتكتبها أصبح طريقة لها  
الشيء: كرسي أليس كذلك ما يفتتحه من قبله إننا لم نكتب له  
مفرداً: سيقوم على موعده في ذلك  
أهمها: التحدث كأنه لا يستطيع أن يكون له  
هولندا: هو ما يمكن القول لكم من كل شيء يمكنه بريطانيا نفسه  
أسهل: أنه 51-8 كما أنه يمكنه بعض الأوقات يمكنه أن يكون في  
استراتيجية خاصة في فهمه ونتمنى في Listening للأخبار Global  
التي هي من أهمها يتقدمون ويقابلون مع الأهل، لديهم من يتفاعل مع  
different to listening من استأثرون يتفاعل مع الأهل، لديهم من يتفاعل مع  
خاصة في برنامجي الـ 100 X. بالأسلوب على طريقة E Lab قد يكون  
لأنه يكون مع خصم، بالنسبة للـ Academic الولاية المفروض يتصوروا بالأمه  
أكثر: فهم الكلمة الرئيسية سواء بالإنجليزية أو الفرنسية لأنه أكله  
مفرداً: من اقتناعه بالتحديد في طلبه من قبله من ذلك لا يمكنه في بعض الأحيان  
أهمها: ليس عليه قراءة كثيراً شيئاً على الطريقة هنا من الطلاب في بعض الأحيان  
كذلك في أحد أعينهم في كل ما كان كثيراً في طريقة الترجمة والمفاهيم التي هي في  
ليكن لهم عن أهمها الوقت، الجو، الرئيسة، أهمها تفاعل في نفس الشيء  
مختلفين وكان المثل مع شرح الازدحام مختلفين من الطلاب، بهدرك تكون كالمثل

### Appendix (8): Examples of tidying the mess with manual coding

K: Where has your English failed you? *Where has previous LE failed you?*

Ab: It failed me in things related to culture and academic writing. I did not expect that I have problems in writing. I thought I had problems in reading? but I was shocked to know that I have serious issues in academic writing. I don't know how to structure my writing or how to elaborate my ideas or synthesise arguments or paraphrase. I still struggle with these things. *ENAP*

<Internals\Fifth Individual Interview Scripts\Arneq\Fifth Individual Interview> - § 2 references coded [2.88% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.20% Coverage *previous*  
 A: It helped me in my daily life, communication, and in getting my IELTS score. It helped me with writing skills but not that much. *Benefit of education*

Reference 2 - 1.66% Coverage *Suggestions for LE*  
 A: To focus on academic English even if it is just one course. They should teach us how to write in academic argument and what the difference between academic and non-academic words is. *ENAP*

<Internals\Fifth Individual Interview Scripts\Fifth Individual Interview with Arneq> - § 6 references coded [11.31% Coverage] *Suggestions/implication for LE*

Reference 1 - 2.71% Coverage *Focus on standard*  
 A: For example, in 'Yorkshire' English they have their own expressions like you've got. They use it for everything. It means you achieved, you found, you saw, you got a mark. For everything they use 'I've got'. Expressions like these facilitate communication and reassure the person and make him closer to their interlocutors. Therefore, it is not only about language but also about style and more common expressions. These make the communication more effective and makes me comfortable. *ENAP*

Reference 2 - 3.60% Coverage *critique previous by Education*  
 A: For us, this is the 'standard' but honestly now it does not matter. I no longer care about 'standard' because I feel that I am more involved in the English society and any English I am used to has become 'standard' for me. Why did I make a difference at the beginning? Because when we were taught we were used to 'standard' English which I called 'London' accent when I first arrived. Now I don't care about this accent and 'Yorkshire English' has become the 'standard' and the 'normal' accent for me. Those who taught us did not tell us that there are other accents rather than the 'standard' and that is why I was shocked when I first arrived. *Did they know?*

Reference 3 - 0.80% Coverage *Suggestions for education*  
 A: academic writing, 'critical reading', how to write a scientific essay, how to search in the library, I could also study in the library.

Reference 4 - 1.90% Coverage *Suggestions by education (comment on previous)*

*2*

### Appendix (8): Examples of tidying the mess with manual coding

