

Language and Power: The Saudi Tertiary English Language Classroom

By

Hanan Alotaibi

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Technology Sydney

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

2019

Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Hanan Alotaibi, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of doctor of philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney. This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program.

Signature: Hanan Alotaibi

Production Note:
Signature removed prior to publication.

Date: 10/12/2018

Acknowledgment

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and guidance of many people. First of all, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr Jacquie Widin, my principal supervisor, for her continuous assistance and encouragement. I am grateful to her endless patience and productive feedback at every stage of my research process. Second, I would like to thank Dr Ross Forman and Dr Terry Royce, my alternate supervisors, for their instructive comments and support. I am also indebted to Dr Cherry Russell for her professional editorial assistance in the preparation of the thesis. My deepest thanks also go to the University of Technology Sydney and the staff of the Graduate Research School for their invaluable academic support for all the PhD students. I also would like to express my sincere gratitude to my home university, for allowing me the time to undertake my research, and to the Saudi Cultural Mission in Australia for the ongoing support throughout the process of this research. Special thanks go to the English teachers and students who participated in this study, enriching the data with their appreciated insights. Finally, I am grateful to my parents whose prayers accompanied me throughout my journey. My gratitude extends to my husband, Khaled, and children, Meshari, Meshal, Hatun, and Seba. Without their understanding and encouragement, this thesis would not have been possible.

Table of Contents

Certificate of Original Authorship.....	i
Acknowledgment.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Abstract.....	viii
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 The Researcher’s Position.....	2
1.3 The Research Problem.....	3
1.4 Objectives of the Research.....	4
1.5 Research Questions.....	4
1.6 Significance of the Research.....	4
1.7 Thesis Structure.....	5
Chapter 2.....	8
Research Context.....	8
2.1 Introduction.....	8
2.2 Overview.....	8
2.3 The Promotion of ELT in the KSA.....	10
2.3.1 Economic Factors.....	11
2.3.2 ELT in the Saudi Educational System.....	12
2.3.3 ELT in Saudi Tertiary Education.....	13
2.3.4 Critiques of Language Policy.....	14
2.3.5 The English Classroom in the KAS.....	16
2.4 Resistance to ELT in KSA.....	18
2.4.1 Official Response to the Ideology of Resistance.....	20
2.5 Power Relations in the Saudi Educational Context.....	22
2.6 Conclusion.....	26
Chapter 3.....	28
Conceptual Framework.....	28
3.1 Introduction.....	28
3.2 Analytical Frameworks.....	29
3.2.1 Power Relations.....	30
3.2.2 Language, Power and Ideologies.....	36

3.3 Classroom Practices	55
3.3.1 Studies on the Use of Arabic in EFL Classrooms	56
3.3.2 Studies on other Languages.....	58
3.3.3 Teachers and Students' Attitudes towards L1 Use in the English Classroom	63
3.4 Conclusion.....	66
Chapter 4	67
Methodology and Research Design	67
4.1 Introduction	67
4.2 Research Questions	67
4.3 Insider Research.....	68
4.4 Research Methodology.....	70
4.4.1 Case Study Approach	71
4.4.2 Rationale for choice.....	72
4.4.3 Research Site	73
4.5 Sampling and Recruitment	74
4.5.1 Teachers.....	74
4.5.2 Students	75
4.6 Data Collection Methods	76
4.6.1 Classroom Observations	76
4.6.2 Teachers' Interviews.....	78
4.6.3 Students' Focus Groups	79
4.7 Data Analysis.....	81
4.7.1 Transcription.....	81
4.7.2 Translation	82
4.7.3 Thematic Analysis	82
4.7.4 Language Issues	83
4.8 Ethical Considerations	83
4.9 Limitations of the Study.....	84
4.10 Conclusion and Overview of Findings Chapters	85
Chapter 5	87
Language Ideologies Underpinning Perceptions of the Use of Arabic	87
5.1 Introduction	87
5.2 Arguments for the Use of Arabic	88
5.3 Arguments for the English-only Approach	92
5.3.1 Language Interference.....	93

5.3.2 Maximum Exposure to English	96
5.3.3 Nativespeakerism	99
5.4 Informal Language Policy.....	102
5.4.1 Implications of Language Policy	105
5.5 Conclusion.....	108
Chapter 6	110
Power Practices in Saudi EL Classrooms.....	110
6.1 Introduction	110
6.2 Disciplinary Strategies.....	111
6.2.1 Traditional Physical Arrangement of Classrooms.....	111
6.2.2 Grouping	113
6.2.3 Speaking Examinations	116
6.2.4 Punishment.....	120
6.2.5 Teacher-centred Classes.....	124
6.2.6 Arabic: A Tool of Maintaining Discipline	129
6.3 English-Only Approach.....	131
6.3.1 English-only Approach as a Power Practice.....	131
6.3.2 English-only Approach as Knowledge Power	134
6.4 Conclusion.....	140
Chapter 7	142
Resistance Strategies.....	142
7.1 Introduction	142
7.2 Teachers' Resistance to Language Policy	142
7.3 Students' Resistance to Power Practices.....	143
7.3.1 Verbal Resistance.....	143
7.3.2 Nonverbal Resistance	151
7.4 Conclusion.....	157
Chapter 8	158
Roles of Arabic in Saudi Tertiary EL Classroom	158
8.1 Introduction	158
8.2 Cognitive Roles	159
8.2.1 Explaining English Vocabulary	159
8.2.2 Explaining Grammar	168
8.3 Affective Roles	171
8.3.1 Reducing Anxiety	171

8.3.2 Enhancing Solidarity	173
8.3.3 Facilitating Collaboration.....	178
8.4 Pedagogical Roles	181
8.4.1 Effective use of Time	181
8.4.2 Comprehensibility.....	182
8.4.3 Exam Instructions	184
8.4.4 Inclusivity	185
8.5 Conclusion.....	188
Chapter 9	189
Conclusion.....	189
9.1 Overview of the Chapter	189
9.2 Summary of Key Findings.....	189
9.3 Limitations of the Study.....	198
9.4 Implications for Policy	198
9.5 Recommendations	199
9.5.1 Policy.....	199
9.5.2 L1/L2 Teaching Methodology	200
9.5.3 Future Research.....	201
9.6 Contributions	201
9.7 Conclusion.....	202
Appendixes	203
Appendix A: Teachers' Interview Questions.....	203
Appendix B: Students' Focus Group Questions	204
Appendix C: Observation Checklists	205
Appendix D: Official Permission from the Research Site to Conduct the Research.....	207
Appendix E: Invitation Letter for Teachers to Participate in the Research.....	208
Appendix F: Information Sheets	209
Appendix G: Consent Forms	211
Bibliography.....	213

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Analytical Framework of L1 Roles.....	55
Table 4.1: Characteristics of Teacher Participants	75

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Map of the Arabian Peninsula.	10
Figure 2.2. The institutional pedagogies practised at universities in KSA.....	26

Abstract

Many studies confirm the positive role of the student's first language (L1) in the English language (EL) classroom. However, the English Language at the Future University (a pseudonym) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) adopts an English-only approach in tertiary EL classrooms and this approach has proved to be problematic for teachers and students alike. This research, using a qualitative approach, investigates the role of L1 in EL teaching in a tertiary EL institution. Data were collected from teacher interviews, focus groups with students, and classroom observations. The purpose of the study was to contribute to research in the field of L1 use in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts by: exposing the language ideologies underpinning the informal but effective ban on L1 in L2 classrooms; exploring the roles of L1 in the English classroom; and examining the relation between language choice and power practices in the English classroom.

Analysis of the data showed that the Arabic language existed in the EFL classrooms as a visible or invisible resource and played a variety of cognitive, pedagogic, and affective roles. The participants' perceptions towards the use of Arabic in Saudi EFL classrooms indicated that certain language ideologies included or excluded Arabic. The findings also revealed the exercise of power in the verbal and nonverbal practices of both teachers and students in these classrooms. Teachers disciplined students either through surveillance (Foucault 1977) or through their choice of language. Power is exercised differently in different contexts; in the Saudi classroom, the teacher's role is shaped by particular cultural understandings of knowledge and authority. This study argues that the English-only approach enhances the teacher's powerful status and marginalises students.

Since "there are no relations of power without resistance" (Foucault 1980, p. 142), participating students responded to the power exercised by teachers through language choice and by resisting certain practices and classroom regimes. It was also found that the judicious utilisation of the Arabic language contributed to a more equal distribution of power in the Saudi English classroom. The students used Arabic to negotiate power with their teachers and, when they were not allowed to use Arabic, they were less engaged in and more resistant to the learning of English. Therefore, this research argues that the inclusion of the Arabic language in the Saudi EL classroom allows students to negotiate power with the teacher.