Diverging Identities: A ‘Contextualised’ Exploration of the Interplay of Competing Discourses in Two Saudi University Classrooms

by

Tariq Elyas

BA. English Literature and Linguistics (King Abdul Aziz University, KSA), 1995
Grad Dip. TESOL (Old Dominion University, USA), 1999
MA. English Literature (Old Dominion University, USA), 2001
Grad Dip. International Law & Human Rights (University of Nottingham, UK), 2005

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Linguistics, Arts & Humanities
The University of Adelaide,
Adelaide, Australia
February 2011
Abstract

There has been considerable debate in recent years and criticism levelled both from inside and outside sources at the English curriculum in Saudi Arabia (Al-Ahaydib, 1996; Al-Eid, 2000; Al-Hazmi, 2003; Al-Khazim, 2003; Al-Qahatani, 2003; Al-Asmari, 2008; Alamri, 2008; Elyas, 2009a, 2009b). As the future English school teachers, Saudi University students studying English in Saudi higher institutions and the pedagogies employed by their lecturers are of particular interest in this regard. Some work has been done on Arabic students studying English in other Gulf countries (Al-Balushi, 1999; Al-Brashi, 2003; Syed, 2003; Al-Issa, 2005, Clarke, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009, 2010), on the social-cultural aspects of attitudes towards learning English as a language and the effect of English culture(s) on Saudi Arabian students and teachers (Al-Ahaydib, 1996; Al-Jarf, 2004, Al-Hag & Samdi, 1996; Al-Qahatani, 2003; Al-Asmari, 2008, Elyas, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). However, a detailed unpacking of the different cultural influences (both Islamic and Western), and how they are evidenced in policy documents, curriculum, textbooks and pedagogy, remains relatively unexplored (Elyas, 2009b). In addition, the effect of the various influences on the teachers’ professional identities, and the students’ learning identities has not been dealt with prior to this thesis.

The thesis employs a multi-faceted approach drawing on the areas of identity theory, narrative theory, motivation theory and Critical Discourse Analysis in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the target and sensitive topic. The design of this research is based on a case study of two university English classes (including both teachers and students) of a particular university in Saudi Arabia. The data include transcription of focus groups
discussions, in-depth interviews with the teachers, policy documents, curriculum and textbooks, surveys of students’ attitude towards the English language and culture, classroom observations and student’s written narrative of their ESL stories. Data analysis methods include Critical Discourse Analysis, narrative theory, thematic analysis according to axes of identity and power (Foucault, 1997a, 1997d, 1980, 1983b, 1984, 1997; Gee, 1996, 2002, May, 2005; O’Leary, 2002), motivation theories, and statistical analysis of the quantitative data.

This thesis shows that, although the characterization of English teaching as operating with a “clash of civilization” (Huntington, 1993, 1997, Ratnawati, 2005) is perhaps too simplistic, a clear distinction can be made between opposing cultural forces which cause conflict in the Saudi Arabian University teaching and learning environment. This thesis provides a unique insight into the interplay of competing “Discourses” (Gee, 1999, p.7) within this context.
Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary to Tariq Elyas and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. The author acknowledges that copyright of published works contained within this thesis (as listed below*) resides with the copyright holder(s) of those works. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University’s digital research repository, the Library catalogue and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.


________________________________________

Tariq Elyas
Dedication

This thesis, and all the achievement throughout the years of my PhD candidature, is dedicated to my loving memory of my mother Nawal Murad who always wished me to do my best to achieve the highest possible level of education. Her memory has inspired me throughout the years to strive for my goals. Also, I dedicate this thesis to my dear loving father who has always been there to support me in my journey in every way possible. Without his encouraging words, this thesis wouldn’t be complete.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I am truly indebted to my co-supervisor, Dr. Michelle Picard, who has been there for me step by step in terms of my intellectual achievements and my critical thinking. Without her indefinite support and undying dedication guiding me to finish my thesis, my efforts would have been futile. I owe Dr. Michelle Picard the whole completion of this thesis. She is the backbone that made this project come to life.

I am also in great debt to my principal supervisor Dr. John Walsh who, despite his critical health issues, supported me all the way. His critical eye for details has filled the gaps to identify the discontinuity in my research and to link my thinking throughout the thesis.

I am also grateful to Dr. Peter White who with his patient and understanding of the sensitivity of this topic made it come alive.

I must also acknowledge my friends who helped me feel at home and supported me throughout the years of my candidature: Shay Singh, Simmee Opura, Gisele Rampersad, and Daniel Wells. They made a great difference in my life and helped me feel that I was not alone with my struggle in completing this thesis.

And last not least, is my brother Majdi Elyas who with his brotherly love was always there for me through the difficult times in my life. His pride in me and constant words of encouragement has made quite an impact in my studies. I am truly indebted to him for all the things he did.
Table of Contents

Title Page .......................................................................................................................... 1
Abstract .............................................................................................................................. 2
Declaration ......................................................................................................................... 4
Dedication .......................................................................................................................... 6
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................. 7
List of Tables .................................................................................................................... 13
List of Figures .................................................................................................................. 16
Definition of Terms .......................................................................................................... 18
Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................... 22
  1. Introduction ................................................................................................................ 22
    1.1. An Overview of the Saudi Arabia-Context ............................................................ 22
    1.2. The Statement of the problem .............................................................................. 27
    1.3. Summary of the Main Trends in Research and Gaps in the Research ................ 29
    1.4. Study Questions and Objectives ........................................................................... 33
    1.5. Organisation of the research ............................................................................... 33
Chapter Two: Historical Overview of Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ........... 35
  2.1. Education in the Pre-Saudi Era .............................................................................. 36
    2.1.2. The Golden Age (750-1400) .......................................................................... 36
    2.1.3. The Wahhabi Period (1740-1900) .................................................................. 40
    2.1.4. The Unification Period (1900-1926) ................................................................ 42
  2.2. Education in the Saudi Era .................................................................................... 44
    2.2.1. Establishment of Formalized Education System (1926-1953) ......................... 44
    2.2.2. Oil and Education: Demand for Increased Education (1954-1970) ............... 47
    2.2.3. Emphasis on Quality of Teacher Education (1971-1984) ............................ 50
    2.2.4. Debates on the Curricula in KSA (1985-2001) .............................................. 53
    2.2.4.1. Questioning the Adequacy of the Saudi Education .................................... 59
    2.2.5.1. Saudi Officials Respond to the White House Demands ............................ 61
    2.2.5.2. Saudi Arabia Promises to Reform its Educational Policy ............................ 62
    2.2.5.3. Internal Voices Support Curriculum Reform .............................................. 63
  2.3. Education and Embracing Neoliberalism Needs (2004-Present) ......................... 64
Chapter Three. Literature Review: Historical and Ideological Underpinnings of English in KSA

3.1. Introduction ........................................... 69
   3.1.1. Introduction of Foreign Language Instruction to KSA ......................... 69
   3.1.2. The Scholarship Preparation School ............................................. 70
   3.1.3. Universal Foreign Language Instruction .......................................... 71
   3.1.4. English as an Economic Imperative ............................................. 72
   3.1.5. Demand for and Growth in English Teacher Training ......................... 74
   3.1.6. Increase in EFL Allocation ......................................................... 77
3.2. ‘More English less Islam’ Debate ..................................................... 84
   3.2.1. The “Strong Islamization” View of English Teaching ......................... 88
   3.2.2. ‘Weaker Islamization’ /Centred in World English Debate .................... 90
   3.2.3. Post-colonial/ Hybridization Debates ........................................... 92
3.3. Language Teaching and Learning and Identity ...................................... 96
3.4. English in Universities in KSA ....................................................... 100

Chapter 4: Methodology and Theoretical Framework ...................................... 101

4.1. Ontology: ....................................................... 101
   4.1.1. Social Constructionist Position of Researcher .................................. 104
4.2. Theoretical framework(s): ............................................................. 104
   4.2.1. Motivational theory and English Language teaching .......................... 105
   4.2.2. Identity theory ............................................................................. 108
   4.2.3. Narrative theory ........................................................................ 110
4.3. Research Design: ............................................................................. 112
   4.3.1. Context ..................................................................................... 115
   4.3.2. Participants ................................................................................. 116
   4.3.3. The teachers ............................................................................... 116
   4.3.4. The Students ............................................................................. 120
4.4. Data Types ....................................................................................... 120
   4.4.1. Data Collection methods ............................................................... 121
   4.4.2. Interviews with the Teachers .......................................................... 121
   4.4.3. Students’ Written Narratives ......................................................... 124
   4.4.4. Survey questionnaire ................................................................. 127
Chapter Seven: KSA Students’ Narratives

7.1. Introduction

7.1.1. The Structure of the Success Story Narratives

7.1.2. Beginnings: 

7.1.2.1. The Media as a Vehicle to Improve Students’ English

7.1.2.2. The Myth of English as an International Language

7.1.2.3. The Ends

7.2. Middle of the Success Stories:

7.2.2.1. The Value of Individual Action

7.2.2.2. Family Influence and Autonomy

7.2.2.3. Educational Factors

7.2.2.4. External Influences on Success

7.2.2.5. Valuing of English

7.2.3. The Ends

7.3. The Structure of the Failure Story Narratives

7.3.1. Beginnings of Failure Stories

7.3.2. The Middle part of the Narratives

7.3.2.1. The Blame Game

7.3.2.2. Global English

7.3.3. Ends of failure stories

7.4. Learning as a Journey

7.4.1. Beginnings

7.4.2. Middle

7.4.3. Ends

7.4.4. Summary
Chapter 8: Student Surveys and Focus Groups ................................................................. 275
8.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................. 275
8.2 Survey questionnaires ............................................................................................... 276
  8.2.1. Attitude towards learning English and willingness to integrate ....................... 277
  8.2.2. Perceptions of Learning Environment ............................................................... 279
  8.2.3 Perceptions on the Textbooks and other Classroom Materials ......................... 280
  8.2.4. Students Perception about Teaching at ELD ..................................................... 281
  8.2.5. Other Factors Affecting the Students’ motivation at ELD ............................... 282
  8.2.6. The informants’ Experience of Learning EFL prior to Entering ELD ............... 282
  8.2.7. The informants’ Attitude towards their own Language Achievement .............. 283
8.3. Focus Group Analysis .............................................................................................. 284
8.4. Classroom Observations ......................................................................................... 291
  8.4.1. Classroom Observations- Nunan’s Tally Sheets (Ali) ...................................... 291
  8.4.2. Classroom Observations- Nunan’s Tally Sheets (Kamal) ................................. 299
8.5. Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 301
Chapter 9: Summary and Conclusion ............................................................................. 302
  9.1. Teaching and Moral Tradition: A Paradigm of Struggle .................................... 307
  9.2. Policy Reform in ELT in the case of KSA ............................................................... 308
  9.3. Traditional Pedagogy versus Contemporary Pedagogy: Toward a Global Paradigm ............................................................................................................................. 310
  9.4. EFL Students as ‘Globalized learners’ ................................................................. 312
  9.5. Conclusion: Developing Frameworks for EFL teaching ..................................... 314
References ....................................................................................................................... 317
Appendix 1: Access Letters ............................................................................................ 341
  Letter to European Department at King Abdul Aziz University ............................. 341
  Letter from the European Department at King Abdul Aziz University .................. 342
  Plain Language statement for participants ......................................................... 343
  Consent forms for individuals participating in this thesis .................................. 346
  University of Adelaide Ethics Approval Letter .................................................... 347
Appendix 2: Teachers’ Narrative and Observation Tally Sheets .................................. 350
  Selected teachers’ responses (Ali) ........................................................................ 350
  Selected teachers’ responses (Kamal) ................................................................. 352
Appendix 3: Copy of the Students Questionnaires ......................................................... 358
Appendix 4: Students’ Focus Group .......................................................................... 360
  Selected Students’ responses .............................................................................. 360
**List of Tables**

Table 1.1: Number of Pupils, schools and Teachers in the 1960s-1971

Table 1.2: Saudi and Non-Saudi teachers in the 1960s-1981

Table 1.3: Illiteracy Percentages in the Gulf Monarchies 15 years and over (1950s)

Table 2.1: Number of Pupils, schools and Teachers from 1971-1983

Table 2.2: Saudi and Non-Saudi teachers in the 1970s to 1980s

Table 2.3: Illiteracy Percentages in the Gulf Monarchies 15 years and over (1980s)

Table 3.1: Curriculum Design at Saudi Public Primary Schools (English was not taught in Public Primary schools pre 9/11)

Table 3.2: Curriculum Design at the Saudi Public Middle Schools. (English was not taught in Public Primary schools pre 9/11)

Table 4.1: Curriculum Design at the Saudi Public High Schools (Arts & Humanities). English is taught in this level.

Table 5.1: KSA Elementary Education for boys 2001: Weekly Lesson Table

Table 5.2: KSA Elementary Education for boys: Weekly time table after 9/11

Table 6.1: KSA Intermediate education for boys (Lower Secondary); Weekly Lesson Table

Table 6.2: KSA Intermediate Education for boys: Weekly timetable 2004

Table 7.1: A summary of the data collection methods, data analysis methods and epistemological influences on the various data
Table 8.1: List English Textbooks used in KSA 1970-2010

Table 9.1: Preparation Year-First Semester at ELD 2000-2008

Table 9.2: Preparation Year-Second Semester at ELD 2000-2008

Table 9.3: Second Year-Third Semester at ELD 2000-2008

Table 9.4: Second Year-Fourth Semester at ELD 2000-2008

Table 9.5: Third Year-Fifth Semester at ELD 2000-2008

Table 9.6: Third Year-Sixth Semester at ELD 2000-2008

Table 9.7: Fourth Years-Seventh Semester at ELD 2000-2008

Table 9.8: Fourth Years- Eighth Semester at ELD 2000-2008

Table 10.1: Preparation Year at ELD-First Semester 2009-current

Table 10.2: Preparation Year-Second Semester at ELD 2009-current

Table 10.3: Second Year-Third Semester at ELD 2009-current

Table 10.4: Second Year-Fourth Semester at ELD 2009-current

Table 10.5: Third Year-Fifth Semester at ELD 2009-current

Table 10.6: Third Year-Sixth Semester at ELD 2009-current

Table 10.7: Fourth Years-Seventh Semester at ELD 2009-current

Table 10.8: Fourth Year- Eighth Semester at ELD 2009-current

Table 11.1: Subjects/ Components, Textbooks and Levels at ELD 1995-2010
Table 12.1: Shows the student informants’ attitudes towards learning English and willingness to integrate with the target language and culture at ELD

Table 12.2: Shows the perceptions of the informants towards the learning environment in general at the ELD

Table 12.3: Demonstrates some of the informants’ perceptions on the textbooks and other classroom materials at ELD

Table 12.4: Demonstrates some of the informants’ perceptions about the teaching styles at the ELD

Table 12.5: Shows other factors influencing the informants motivation to learn English and consequent identity as language learners at ELD

Table 12.6: Explores the informants’ experiences of learning English prior to entering the ELD

Table 12.7: Presents the informants’ attitude towards their own language achievement at the time of the research at ELD

Table 13.1: Data from two Lessons’ Tally sheets (Ali)

Table 13.2: Classroom Observation Tally Sheet-1 (Ali)

Table 13.3: Classroom Observation Tally Sheet-2 (Ali)

Table 13.4: A short extract from the lesson observed using Tally sheet and its interpretation

Table 13.5: Presents COLT Data Sheet (Ali)

Table 14.1. Data from one Lessons’ Tally sheet (Kamal)

Table 14.2. Presents COLT /TALOS Data (Kamal)
List of Figures

Figure 1. Formal education in early pre Saudi era in KSA, adapted from Nakostine, 1964

Figure 2.1. Schematic representation of the structural equation model in Dörnyei et al.’s (2006) study

Figure 2.2. Integrative motivation within Gardner’s Social-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition’ (Gardner, 2001, p. 4)

Figure 3. The questions and the objectives of the study and how they relate to the different sources of data

Figure 4. A diagram for doing ethical ‘identity work’ in teacher education adopted from Clarke (2009) view of Foucault’s axis of power

Figure 5. The Ministry of Education Policy Document in 1970 (Arabic Version)

Figure 6. The Ministry of Education Policy Document [line by line translation by the author]

Figure 7. The Curriculum Department Centre for Development, ELT section (Arabic Version)

Figure 8. The Curriculum Department Centre for Development, ELT section. [line by line translation by the author]

Figure 9. Ministry of Education Ten – Year Plan (2004 – 2014)

Figure 10. Vision of Ministry of Education General Policy (Tatweer) 2007-2013

Figure 11. Perspectives and Aspirations Vision of Ministry of Education General Policy (Tatweer) 2007-2013

Figure 12. Tatweer General Objectives for Curriculum Development Program

Figure 13. Tatweer General Objectives for Curriculum Development Program

Figure 14. Policy for ELT post 9/11 for all school levels (Arabic Version)

Figure 15. Policy for ELT post 9/11 for all school levels (English Version)

Figure 16. General Objectives of Teaching English (English Version)
Figure 17. Objectives for AAFAQ 2007-2032

Figure 18: A list of the ELD goals listed on the Department website (Arabic Version)

Figure 19. A list of the ELD goals listed on the Department website (English Version)

Figure 20. The typical flow of institutional power in a Saudi institutional context

Figure 21. An interpretation of Foucault’s concepts of power/knowledge within a Saudi context

Figure 22. Ideologically upward Teacher Identity vs. Ideologically downward Teacher Identity

Figure 23. An interpretation of KSA’s students seeking an alternative knowledge outside the school sphere(s)
Definition of Terms

“AAFAQ”: Horizon- A KSA project targeted higher educational development schemes.

“Assalamu Alaikum”: The Muslim greeting which literally means ‘May the blessings of Allah be upon you.

“ALM”: Audio-lingual Method.

“ARAMCO”: The Arabian American Oil Company.

“Burkah”: A head-to-cover for women in Islam

“CDCD”: Curriculum Department Centre for Development

“CDCO”: Curriculum Department at the Central Office.

“CLT”: Communicative Language Teaching.

“COLT”: Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching.

“Dupatta”: A long scarf.

“ELD”: European Languages Department.

“EFL” English as a Foreign Language.

“ESL”: English as a Second Language.

“ELT: English Language Teaching.

“FH”: Freedom House.

“Figh”: Islamic jurisprudence.

“FLI”: Foreign language instruction.
“Jandriah”: A festival held in the capital Riyadh.

“Hadith”: Prophet Mohammed’s saying.

“Hajj”: One of the ‘five pillars’ of Islam which is required by all Muslims to be fulfilled.

“Halaqa”: A learning classroom in early Islamic period.

“Haraam”: Forbidden taboos in Islamic Culture.

“Hijab”: A head scarf worn by women in Islamic societies.

“IBE”: International Bureau of Education.

“IGA”: Institute for Gulf Affairs.

“IMPACT-SE”: The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education.

“INSHALLAH”: Allah willing.

“IVA”: Institute for American Values.

“GTM”: Grammar Translation Method.

“GCDCD”: General Director of Curriculum Department Centre for Development.

“GDP”: Gross Domestic Product.

“KAU”: King Abdulla Aziz University.

“KSA”: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

“Kuttab”: Primary school-religious classrooms held at the mosque.

“LANE”: A term is used for English courses at ELD, KAU.
“L1”: First Language.

“L2”: Second Language.

“Madrassa”: School of higher learning.

“MoE”: Ministry of Education.

“NP”: Narrative Prompt.

“Sharia”: Islamic Law.

“ST”: Student.

“Tajwid”: Conventions of Qur’anic recitation, a course taught at public schools at KSA as part of its educational system

“Tafsir”: Qur’anic Interpretation, a course taught at KSA public schools as part of its educational system.

“Takfir”: Accusations of apostasy against other Muslims.

“Tash Ma Tash”: A local Saudi comedy program usually aired during the Ramadan.

“Tatweer”: Modernization- A term used to identify the modernization movement in Education in KSA post 9/11.

“Tawhid”: The concept of monotheism in Islam.

“TESOL”: Teaching English as Second Language.

“TEFL”: Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

“TGOCDP”: General Objectives for Curriculum Development Program.
“Ramadan”: Fasting a whole month for religious reasons.

“UK”: United Kingdom.

“Ulama”: Muslim scholars

“USA”: United States of America.

“PBL”: Problem-based Learning.

“PBUH”: Prophet Mohammed-peace be upon him.

“Qur’an”: The Holy book of Muslims.