

## Exploring Saudi English Departments' Beliefs on Language Use at Department Level: When and Why?

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### ABSTRACT

In Saudi Arabia, staff members in higher educational English departments communicate with one another and with students outside the domain of the classroom on a daily basis using English (L2) and/or Arabic (L1) languages in different departmental encounters. The existence of English Language Policies (henceforth ELPs) in Saudi English departments is expected because of the nature of the work and the likelihood of the presence of non-Arabic-speaking members. The literature does not offer any account of the existing beliefs of staff members in Saudi English departments regarding the reasons for the timing and contexts in which English and/or Arabic should be used. This serves as the purpose of the current study. This study adopted a mixed method approach. The total number of participants comprised 216 staff members affiliated to the Saudi higher educational English departments. They were of different specialties, ranks, genders, ages, and from different regions. A total of 208 participants responded to an online survey, which was composed of a background section and five questions. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews comprising two questions were conducted with eight interviewees (seven male department chairpersons and one female vice chair). The main conclusions of the study include that majority of staff members prefer to use English on every possible occasion. However, they also believe Arabic should not be banned from use at department level. Other findings, implications, and recommendations for future research are provided.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, increasing attention has been noted concerning language policies worldwide. Policy makers as well as researchers have been focusing on language use in different contexts, in both educational and non-educational settings. Policy makers are concerned mainly with macro-level language policies that have impact at the national level. By contrast, micro-level policies can be made at the local level, such as at an institutional level or by a small community directly practicing a particular language (Johnson, 2013). With regard to the Saudi Arabian context, existing small communities directly practice the English language on a daily basis and are expected to follow English Language Policies (ELPs) governing its use. One example of these small communities is higher educational English language departments. Such departments commonly employ members from different nationalities and likely from non-Arabic-speaking countries. Therefore, language protocols are expected to exist and likely to change over time to accomplish their intended goals, if any.

Thorough research into ELPs in Saudi English departments has not yet been conducted. Most research in relation to ELPs in the Saudi context and other contexts has investigated this area from *within* the domain of the classroom and

has not explored policies outside the domain of the classroom and at department level (e.g., Alshammari, 2011; Alshuai-bani, 2015; Hall & Cook, 2013; Mohamed, 2007; Sipra, 2013; Song & Andrews, 2009; Tang, 2002). Exploring this area can lead to gaining profound insights into current practices and providing policy makers with an understanding of the existing beliefs of English departments on ELPs. The current study aims to investigate Saudi English departments' staff members' beliefs on the timing and contexts of when Arabic and English languages are to be used at department level and their rationale for such uses. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What beliefs do members of Saudi English departments have on the occasions on which English and Arabic should be used outside the classroom?
- 2) What reasons exist for using English and/or Arabic in Saudi English departments outside the classroom?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Speakers' beliefs on languages

Individuals in a community have their own perceptions and beliefs on languages they may or may not speak, and these

perceptions may influence policies governing their use. Recento (2013) pointed out that individuals within a community may have beliefs on a language that can guide the process of establishing a framework, which can eventually result in having an ideology accepted within a community. Language ideology can be defined as the “shared framework(s) of social beliefs that organize and coordinate the social interpretations and practices of groups and their members.” Community ideologies can play a role in shaping education. For example, they can stimulate learning and knowledge and affect the way in which identities are formed (Blommaert, 2006). The current study investigates the reasons for having ELPs within Saudi English departments to explain the existence and shaping of staff members' beliefs on ELPs, beliefs that may develop in the future to become ideologies.

### Language Policies

The literature provides numerous examples of language policies (LPs) made worldwide. LPs concerning educational as well as non-educational domains are incessantly being made. LPs can be defined as “a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in a society, group or system” (Keplan & Baldauf, 1997: xi). LPs within a community can be classified under several categories. First, they can be classified according to their genesis, which can be either Top-Down Policies (TDPs) also known as macro-level policies, or Bottom-Up Policies (BUPs), also known as micro-level policies (Johnson, 2013). TDPs are normally made by a government or a government's main agencies, which ensure LPs' processing and practice. Such policies can have an impact at the national level. By contrast, BUPs are initiated at the low level by, for example, individuals in a small community who have direct exposure to them (e.g., individuals in an educational workplace).

Second, language policies can be classified according to their means and goals in that they can be either announced to the public or kept away from them (Johnson, 2013). The announced LPs are referred to as *overt* policies, in that a government announces its policies through the media, its agencies, and so on, for the purpose of spreading them. An example would be governing language/s use within its territory. By contrast, unannounced policies are referred to as *covert* LPs, in that a government enforces its own plans regarding language/s use within its territory without raising public awareness (Schiffman, 2010; Shohamy, 2006). Moreover, they can be hidden within, such as political or educational policies. To illustrate, a government might attempt to recognize English language (considering it is being used as a *lingua franca*, c.f. Firth, 1996) as its official language. Here, part of the community might be resistant to abandoning their mother tongue and replacing the latter with a foreign language. Therefore, adopting covert policies over time may facilitate the government's desired change.

Third, LPs can be classified according to their nature or degree of formality (Johnson, 2013; Schiffman, 1996). On the one hand, *implicit* LPs exist, which are unofficial policies that are likely to have emerged spontaneously and away from

the interference of policy makers or governmental bodies. Therefore, they are seen as “non-official.” Their violation or alteration may not seem to be of concern. On the other hand, *explicit* LPs are those that have been established by policy makers or other official bodies within a certain community (Johnson, 2013). These policies are likely to be written and documented but can also be spoken. They are seen as “official” and therefore, members of a community must abide by them. Here, unlike implicit policies, these explicit policies would raise concerns on the part of superiors or policy makers if they were violated.

In relation to the current study, the above discussion suggests ELPs can be formed by high authoritative bodies (i.e., macro-level planning), such as a government or its agencies or by a local small community with direct exposure to the language (i.e., micro-level planning), such as a community in a workplace (e.g., an English department). Assuming that ELPs actually exist in a workplace, such as English departments in Saudi Arabia, and that these policies are either covert or overt or even both, their existence could influence how English and Arabic languages are used. The current study investigates the beliefs held by staff members of Saudi English departments on the rationale for using English and/or Arabic within the domain of the department and the occasions on which they should be used.

### Saudi Arabia: English language vs. the holy language

Saudi Arabia is a country founded on the Arabian Peninsula. The language in that region has been Arabic for centuries, and Arabians are known for their pride in speaking the language even before the emergence of Islam. Islam as a religion started spreading around the peninsula utilizing the language of its people (i.e., Arabic); thus, Arabic language became a holy language to Muslims worldwide (Fishman, 2002; Liddicoat, 2012; Payne & Almansour, 2014). Religious countries treating holy languages sacredly and using them are commonly observed, with a tendency for their citizens to use them on every possible occasion (Liddicoat, 2012). The Saudi constitution clearly states that Arabic language is the official language of the country, indicating the emphasis on this holy language, the language of the holy Quran, the language of the country's tribes, and the language believed by many Muslims to form the means of communication between Muslims worldwide. Although many Muslims worldwide argue for the dominance of Arabic over English, the reality has asserted itself in the dominance of English over Arabic. English is considered a *lingua franca*, a concept that suggests speakers of different languages from around the globe use a certain language as a means of communication with one another (Firth, 1996; Seidlhofer, 2005).

Despite Saudi government's recognition of Arabic as the official language, English has been accorded a high status by both the government and parts of the community in recent years. In fact, English is the only foreign language officially taught in the Saudi educational system from the fifth grade in the elementary to undergraduate level (Alasmari & Khan, 2014). The introduction of English courses in elementary schools in the past decade has raised concerns among

many educationalists as well as members of the community. Educationalists who have been arguing against the introduction of English at this stage claim the latter will have a negative effect on students' Arabic (L1), supporting their stance with evidence from the literature (e.g., Mitchell et al., 1988 and c.f. Cook, 2008). Others are concerned the introduction of English at an early stage may affect their children's cultural identity. Nevertheless, all government educational institutions will likely establish English departments, thereby reflecting the needs of the community, the job market, and encouragement by the government. All of these aspects can be linked to what researchers refer to as *acquisition planning*, which is a type of language planning that involves making all efforts to promote and teach a certain language (Bright, 1992; Ferguson, 1968; Haugen, 1983; Hornberger, 2006).

Although majority of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia are non-Arabic and non-English speakers and are speakers of other languages, such as Tagalog, Urdu, and Bengali, their foreign languages have been neglected. Only English has received the government's attention. Such attention can be clearly seen in a number of areas. For example, the country's public signs are written mostly in both languages (Arabic and English). Furthermore, the printed text (occasionally including the institution's logo) in official governmental and non-governmental documents is written in both languages. The government has also established a televised channel that broadcasts in English as well as radio channels broadcasting in English. Broadcasting channels in languages other than Arabic and English are rare. If they are established, they do not last for long. The government's language planning (either covert or overt) that has resulted in such high status for English in the country is known as *status planning* (Bright, 1992; Ferguson, 1968; Haugen, 1983; Hornberger, 2006). The Saudi government's status planning has resulted in many changes at the community level. To demonstrate, the government has facilitated the establishment of international schools that use English as a medium of communication. Given the success of acquisition and status planning over the last two decades, a considerable number of Saudi families have started transferring their children from public schools (which use Arabic for teaching) to these international schools (which use English for teaching). Moreover, a new belief is widely accepted by the community in recent years is that learning English is essential for success in life, a belief that has not been given to other languages, such as Urdu, Tagalog, or French.

### English practice in the Saudi context

Simply put, exposure to a language can result in its acquisition/learning (Bisson *et al.*, 2014; Paradis, 2010). Speakers of a language must have continuous exposure to and practice in a language to maintain or develop proficiency levels. The Saudi context is known to be an EFL context (English as a Foreign Language), which is quite different from an ESL context (English as a Second Language). Unlike in the ESL context, English in an EFL context is not a living language that provides its learners with sufficient exposure essential for language development, and most exposure situations are seen as *unauthentic*

(Parker *et al.*, 1995; Wu & Wu, 2008). For adult learners, there exists a strong need for authentic situations that expose them to the target language and therefore allow for proper language acquisition (Pèrez-Leroux *et al.*, 2004; Spolsky, 1989). Authentic situations can create a suitable learning environment that can positively affect motivation to learn and consequently affect learning outcomes (Chang & Shu, 2000). In the Saudi context, acquiring English skills can be somewhat difficult because authentic situations for practicing English are very limited. Learners of English may have insufficient opportunities to practice English language outside the classroom. English departments comprise fluent English-speaking members who can create an environment for practicing English with students or even other staff members. The ELPs developed in English departments exist for certain reasons, which form the research purpose of this study.

### Significance of the study

A survey of the literature demonstrates most research on micro-level educational LPs has been in relation to policies inside the classroom, that is, policies adopted by teachers when communicating with students during class time (e.g., Alshammari, 2011; Alsuhaibani, 2015; Mohamed, 2007; Sipra, 2013; Song & Andrews, 2009; and Tang, 2002). Several studies investigated teachers' beliefs and reasons for using English (as L2) with or without Arabic (L1) (e.g., Alshammari, 2011; Alsuhaibani, 2015) in the Saudi context. None of these studies investigated the reasons for having ELPs in Saudi English departments and outside the domain of the classroom. Given that these departments are concerned with the English language, they tend to hire non-Arabic-speaking members, which can affect the shaping of policies practiced by staff members. In addition, considering that the Saudi context as an EFL context lacks contact with English as a living language and may not offer authentic situations to practice English, this factor may also affect the way ELPs are shaped in these departments. In general, the questions of why and when English and/or Arabic should be used in English departments and outside the classroom form a gap that still awaits answers in the literature and is the focus of the current study.

### METHODOLOGY

The study aims to explore the reasons why Saudi English departments use English and/or Arabic language in departmental encounters within the domain of the department but outside the classroom. The study adopts a mixed method approach to collect data by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research tools. Participants from Saudi English departments around the country were asked to complete an online survey, apart from the eight members who participated in semi-structured interviews. The total number of participants is 216.

### English departments in Saudi Arabia

Thus far, Saudi Arabia has over 25 public and private universities, each of which is likely to have an English department.

The higher education regulations in the country require these departments to have a certain hierarchical structure. They are expected to have a chairman, vice chair for female affairs, members holding degrees in fields related to English, a council, and so on. These departments normally form committees internally for the professional management of their affairs. Committee members have different daily encounters when discussing issues concerning their department. These departments tend to employ non-Arabic-speaking members because of the nature of the department's specialty, and such staff members are likely to have frequent encounters with other members and with students outside the classroom. In general, communication can be face to face, in the form of announcements, via emails, and through formal written documents. The current study will attempt to investigate existing reasons for using English/Arabic in such communication.

### Participants

The study targeted staff members from Saudi English departments and different regions. The participants of the study ( $n = 216$ ) are of different ages, genders, academic ranks, and specialties. Their specialties were mainly in linguistics and literature. Other majors included translation, Teaching English as a Second Language, and other English-related specialties. Their ranks varied from teaching assistants to full professors. Several participants held administrative positions, such as chairman, vice chair, head of committee, and so on. In particular, the participants were 68.8% female and 31.3% male. Participants were of various nationalities, including members from Arab and from non-Arab countries, such as India, Pakistan, and Britain.

### Research Tools

#### Online survey

Survey as a tool was employed in this study and administered using Google survey tool. This online tool allows for electronic access to the survey by any staff member from anywhere simply by having access to the Internet. The survey was announced via social media and emails. The number of respondents ( $n = 208$ ) who responded to the survey is seen as representative of the whole population, considering the modest number of English department staff members around the country. The survey included five questions, and a Likert scale was adopted (i.e., *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*) to allow for accurate measurement of responses. The five questions are

- 1- *Because I am affiliated with an English department, I should use English most of the time within the department.*
- 2- *I use English to maintain my own proficiency levels.*
- 3- *Current departmental language policies have been influenced by the debate on using L1 in L2 educational contexts.*
- 4- *In certain circumstances, the use of Arabic should be allowed (e.g., to save time).*
- 5- *English language policies outside the classroom should be limited to teacher-student communication.*

Answering these five questions was mandatory for all participants, thereby eliminating the existence of missing responses. The survey also included an open-ended section that inquired on Arabic and English occasions of use, and answering them was not mandatory. This part of the survey included two questions as follows:

- 1- *When do you think English should be used at department level?*
- 2- *When do you think Arabic should be used at department level?*

### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants (see Table 1). The interviews targeted members holding a chairmanship position. Considering the nature of his/her administrative role, a chairman/vice chair is believed to be highly familiar with how language policies are developed in his/her department and the reasons for these policies. Interviewing seven male chairmen and one female vice chair was possible. Unfortunately, interviewing other female members was not possible because of cultural restrictions. Given that this study reached interviewees from different parts of the country, the interviews were conducted over the phone. The interviews included the following two questions:

- 1- *Have your department's ELPs been influenced by L2 research?*
- 2- *When do you think English should be used in your department?*

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section will present and discuss the findings obtained from the two research tools employed in this study. The survey results will be presented according to the survey items. Frequencies and percentages will be given to provide the reader with confidence in the data and their analysis. The interview results will be presented according to the interview questions, and labels will be provided for findings to allow for reader comparison between responses, if needed.

#### Survey Results

***Because I am affiliated with an English department, I should use English most of the time within the department.***

In response to this question, majority of the participants (66.9%) strongly agreed with the notion that English should be used within an English department simply because the department is concerned with English language (see Table 2). Another large proportion agreed with the notion (25.1%), forming a total of 92% of the participants who support the use of English on most occasions for this reason. This finding may suggest two possibilities: first, English is used very often in their departments, and they believe in the frequent use of English and second, English is not used very often in their departments, and they desire further utilization of English. A small number of respondents (6.1%) reported being neutral on this notion, which may suggest their desire to use

**Table 1: Interviewees' profile**

No.	Interviewee code <sup>1</sup>	Gender	Academic rank	Experience in current post
1	1A	Male	Assistant Professor	1 year
2	1B	Female	Assistant Professor	4 years
3	1C	Male	Assistant Professor	3 months
4	2A	Male	Assistant Professor	Three years
5	3A	Male	Assistant Professor	Two years
6	4A	Male	Assistant Professor	Six months
7	4B	Male	Associate Professor	Three and a half years
8	5A	Male	Assistant Professor	Two years

Arabic more often and are probably more comfortable using it. Surprisingly, only one participant (0.4%) disagreed with the notion. Thus, members of Saudi English departments may agree with the use of the English language on most occasions.

#### *I use English to maintain my own proficiency levels.*

With regard to using English language to maintain linguistic proficiency, the majority of respondents (57.9%) strongly agreed, with an additional proportion (25.1%) agreeing with it (see Table 3). The total number of participants approving of this notion is 83%. This result demonstrates the significance of participants to keep practicing English in an EFL context that lacks an English-speaking community outside the domain of the English department (see English practice in the Saudi context Section). To them, their department may be the only community that offers language practice. Without their department, their English proficiency may deteriorate. A small proportion of respondents (11.4%) reported being neutral on the notion, suggesting either they would want extra flexibility in using Arabic, or that they do not sense that using English in these situations will affect their proficiency. Finally, a very small proportion of the participants (4.2%) disagreed with the notion, suggesting a good command of English language, and possibly having frequent occasions to use English outside the department. Thus, a large number of staff members working for Saudi English departments could be concluded to use English within the department to maintain their English proficiency levels.

#### *Current departmental language policies have been influenced by the debate on using L1 in L2 educational contexts.*

In response to this statement, 21.3% of the respondents strongly agreed, with a large proportion (33.25 %) agreeing with it (forming a total of 54.55% of the participants) (see Table 4). This finding is reassuring because it indicates that language policies in several Saudi departments are being made with specific rationale and in relation to scientific research. This finding suggests language policies in these departments did not emerge spontaneously or without plan-

**Table 2: Using English because it is a department specialty**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Valid			
Strongly agree	141	66.9	66.9
Agree	53	25.1	25.1
Neutral	13	6.1	6.1
Disagree	1	0.4	0.4
Strongly disagree	0	0	0
Total	208	100.0	100.0

**Table 3: Use of English to maintain language proficiency**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Valid			
Strongly agree	122	57.9	57.9
Agree	53	25.1	25.1
Neutral	24	11.4	11.4
Disagree	6	2.8	2.8
Strongly disagree	3	1.4	1.4
Total	208	100.0	100.0

**Table 4: Influence of L2 research on ELPs**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Valid			
Strongly agree	45	21.3	21.3
Agree	70	33.2	33.2
Neutral	77	36.5	36.5
Disagree	12	5.7	5.7
Strongly disagree	4	1.9	1.9
Total	208	100.0	100.0

ning, and they are planned to serve, for example, institutional goals or other purposes. In this regard, literature offers several recommendations on the use of L1 and L2 in EFL

contexts, apart from the benefits that can be gained from allowing or banning L1 in L2 contexts (c.f. Cook, 2008).

A considerable proportion of respondents (36.5%) reported being neutral on the statement, suggesting uncertainty on how their policies were made. These respondents were possibly not involved when these policies were made in their departments, or they were enforced by a few members without other members' approval or consultation. Moreover, their policies were possibly not based on careful planning and scientific research. A very small proportion of respondents (6.6%) disagreed with the notion, suggesting that language policies in their departments emerged without careful planning or without serving specific purposes. They are possibly working for emerging departments more preoccupied with the growth of their departments than in deciding what language policies to adopt. Thus, a considerable number of Saudi English departments could be concluded to design their ELPs with careful attention to what the literature has to offer, and that other departments do not pay significant attention to how their ELPs emerge.

***In certain circumstances, the use of Arabic should be allowed (e.g., to save time)***

In response to this statement, 15.6% of the respondents strongly agreed with the notion, with an additional 44.1% of participants agreeing with it (see Table 5). In total, more than half of the participants (59.7%) reported their acceptance of this notion. Allowing for Arabic language to be used in English departments is logical on certain occasions to facilitate communication and save time, apart from other benefits. Certain members prefer to use their L1 (i.e., Arabic) in communication to ensure proper delivery of messages and avoid miscommunication. Another significant proportion of the respondents (21.8%) reported their uncertainty on this matter, which could indicate their inclination toward not allowing Arabic within the domain of the classroom. Moreover, 17% of the respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this notion, suggesting a belief that English must be used in all occasions within an English department and that Arabic should be banned. These members are possibly non-Arabic speakers and reject the idea that Arabic be used in their presence. They may feel alienated or marginalized. To conclude, a large number of staff members of Saudi English departments could be said to share the belief that Arabic should be allowed only on certain occasions, with a small number of members believing that Arabic should be banned within the domain of the department.

***English language policies outside the classroom should be limited to teacher–student communication***

In this instance, 16.2% of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement, with an additional 29% agreeing with it (see Table 6). A total of 45.2% of the participants reported their support to limit ELPs to member–student communication. This finding suggests these participants do not favor having ELPs that govern their language use with other col-

leagues or during departmental meetings or other encounters. They possibly require extra flexibility in terms of language use, or they hold the belief that such policies may not have any positive effect on them or their fellow members.

Part of the respondents (23.8%) reported their views being neutral, which suggests hesitation on whether or not ELPs should be limited to member–student communication. These members possibly hold the belief that ELPs should involve member–member interaction but not on all occasions. This belief holds probably because ELPs between members can be of importance in a way they could govern language use on, for example, when to use Arabic and/or English. Finally, a total of 30% of the respondents rejected the idea of limiting ELPs to member–student communication. This finding suggests that these participants recognize the significance of having ELPs in the English departments, and that these ELPs have a positive effect on them or their departments. To conclude, a considerable number of members of Saudi English departments believe that ELPs should be limited to occasions when communicating with students, apart from another considerable number who believe ELPs should involve staff members as well.

***Open-ended section***

In the open-ended section, participants were given the opportunity to report other reasons for using Arabic and English outside the domain of the classroom. Although responding to this section was not mandatory, a large proportion of the participants responded and provided valuable insights.

***When do you think English should be used at department level?***

Out of the total participants, 68 respondents provided valid<sup>2</sup> comments in response to this question. Twenty-six respondents reported that English should be used within an English department to improve English proficiency levels. In this regard, exposure to and practice of English language can be very limited in an EFL context as is the case of English in Saudi Arabia (see English practice in the Saudi context Section). Therefore, considering that English departments comprise a variety of members holding English-related degrees, they can provide opportunities to practice and expose themselves to English. Although members of an English department are expected to maintain high levels of proficiency, further practice can lead to even better improvement in terms of general knowledge, fluency, and performance.

The second reason reported is that English must be used in the presence of a non-Arabic-speaking member, a comment reported by 18 respondents. English departments in Saudi Arabia as well as many other countries commonly include members from other nationalities who do not speak the country's formal language, Arabic in the case of Saudi Arabia. Thus, the only language of communication is English. Given that the majority of staff members in Saudi are Arabic speakers, Arabic language tends to be used on certain occasions. However, speaking a language shared by all those present is more considerate and ethical, thereby avoiding the feeling of being left out or marginalized. In relation to this discussion, six participants have reported English should be

used exclusively in the domain of the department to allow for better communication. These comments were possibly given by those non-Arabic-speaking members, and they cannot understand their colleagues because they use languages other than the shared language, that is, English.

The other reported reasons included the following: English should be used on every possible occasion simply because it is the department's area of specialization (10 respondents); using the English language can lead to creating a suitable working environment for everyone (four respondents); and English should be used because of the high status attached to it (three respondents), such as English being an international language and the main language used in academia. Thus, these participants consider English language as a language of importance and high status because it is their specialty, and because they are likely to be aware that the Saudi government has been giving increasing attention to English language in education as well as in other domains (see Saudi Arabia: English language vs. the holy language Section). Therefore, English should be utilized more often in their departments.

Finally, one participant reported English should be the language of communication in Saudi English departments because they comprise members from different Arab countries who speak varying dialects of Arabic. Not all members may understand these dialects. Therefore, speakers may prefer to use English because it is a language shared by everyone and possibly to avoid the embarrassment of not being understood. Certain Arabic dialects have been influenced by other languages, such as Algerian Arabic, which was influenced by the French language during the occupation period in the 1830s.

#### **When do you think Arabic should be used at department level?**

In response to this item, 106 respondents reported several occasions on which Arabic should be used at department level. A total of 25 members reported that Arabic should be used when all present members are Arabic speakers. Considering that Arabic is the formal language of the country (apart from its status as a holy language to Arabs [the language of the Quran, see Saudi Arabia: English language vs. the holy language Section]), they possibly feel the necessity for its use, unless an urgency arises to switch to English. Moreover, these respondents possibly feel comfortable using Arabic because it allows for easy and fast delivery of messages because of their language being their L1.

Furthermore, Arabic should be used for administration purposes (15 respondents). In administrative work, situations where the use of English is inappropriate or could hinder the progress of the work commonly exist. For example, Arabic must be used when responding to official letters written in Arabic, communicating with administrative staff that do not specialize in English, and any other administrative communication.

Respondents also reported Arabic should be used with students of low proficiency levels (16 respondents). This rule would allow for better staff–student communication as staff members may have insufficient time to guess what students

**Table 5: Allow the use of Arabic**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Valid			
Strongly agree	33	15.6	15.6
Agree	93	44.1	44.1
Neutral	46	21.8	21.8
Disagree	21	9.9	9.9
Strongly disagree	15	7.1	
Total	208	100.0	100.0

**Table 6: Limiting ELPs to member–student interaction**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Valid			
Strongly agree	34	16.2	16.2
Agree	61	29.0	29.0
Neutral	50	23.8	23.8
Disagree	38	18.1	18.1
Strongly disagree	25	11.9	11.9
Total	208	100.0	100.0

are attempting to express or to ensure that students are clearly receiving whatever message is being delivered. Students with weak English proficiency may experience difficulty expressing themselves, which may result in communication breakdown at a certain point. Therefore, switching to a language that students have confidence to speak will result in delivering their intended messages as intended.

In relation to the previous point mentioned, Arabic can be used to maintain better communication with other members and students (26 respondents). For example, whenever a communication breakdown, misunderstanding, or even linguistic gap occurs between two speakers, switching to Arabic is better to resolve the gap in communication. In addition, Arabic should be used when translating difficult words or concepts to others (9 respondents) and when providing further explanations or explaining important information (9 respondents). This finding suggests that respondents are more interested in delivering accurate messages and knowledge than using English in contexts where English is expected to be used, such as with students, in teaching, or in departmental meetings.

Three respondents reported that Arabic should be used in formal occasions. They explained that these formal occasions could be in the academic settings, such as during workshops, seminars, academic discussions, and in public meetings. These respondents possibly reported this preference for reasons, such as the presence of non-English speakers or the importance of knowledge being discussed to members from other departments (who do not speak English); thus, a desire to share knowledge exists with all of them. Nonetheless, academic seminars and discussions held in Saudi English departments are expected to be carried out in English, and

their audience is expected to fully understand English and participate in English as well. Therefore, the use of Arabic in such situations may not be seen as appropriate by many staff members. By contrast, seven respondents reported that Arabic should be used in informal situations, such as when having parties, general talks, side conversations, and so on. Falling back to using L1 (Arabic) may seem very comfortable and suitable (assuming it is their mother tongue) on private, informal occasions because of their familiarity with and ease in using it, especially when no official requirement or academic reason is stipulated for using English.

Four respondents reported using Arabic on sensitive occasions. Certain occasions are noted where the use of English can be inappropriate in the Saudi culture; for example, in condolence-related situations, discussion of personal issues, and during religious practices. Using English is seen as unsuitable, given its possible incapacity to demonstrate the needed empathy and consequent misunderstanding between the speakers. Finally, 10 participants reported that Arabic should not be used at all and that English should be announced as the only language within the domain of the department. Their views are possibly linked to what has been reported in the previous section, that English is seen as high status and the required use is justified by their specialism. Using English could also be linked to the fact that a considerable number of staff members speak English only.

## Interview Results

### *Have ELPs been influenced by L2 research?*

Five interviewees reported their ELPs were influenced by L2 research involving the interference of L1 in L2 contexts, as well as L2 exposure theories (i.e., these interviewees are 1A, 1B, 2A, 4A, and 5A) (see Table 1 above). They explained having ELPs allows for further exposure to and practice of English language (1A, 1B, 4A, and 5A). Saudi Arabia is seen as an EFL context that may not offer adequate situations for practicing English (see English practice in the Saudi context Section), which may result in not developing linguistic skills or even causing the deterioration of their proficiency levels. One interviewee further explained the debate over allowing/banning the use of English L1 in L2 contexts influenced the creation of their ELP (4A) (c.f. Cook, 2008). The literature highlights the ongoing debate on the use of L1 in L2 contexts and that this use may have negative and positive effects on the speakers. For example, certain departments possibly consider the involvement of L1 (i.e., Arabic) in different departmental encounters to ensure accurate understanding of what has been said by Arabic speakers (see Open-ended Section).

### *When do you think English should be used in your department?*

In response to this question, six interviewees stated that English should be used on most occasions at department level (1A, 1B, 2A, 3A, 4B, and 5A). These occasions include all kinds of meetings (including department council and committee meetings), email correspondence, formal academic sessions, and so on. Interviewees reported exceptions for

using Arabic on the following contexts: a need to save time (4B), a sensitive or emotional occasion (1B), communicating with students of low proficiency levels (3A), and an urgency to switch to Arabic (1A). One interviewee (1C) stated that Arabic should be used on all occasions because it is easy and fast, and because all members of his department speak Arabic. Interviewee 4A suggested the use of English should be limited to student–staff communication and in formal academic sessions only. To conclude, these reported findings suggest majority of the interviewees prefer to use the English language as often as possible.

## Implications

Unfortunately, the literature does not seem to offer significant contributions on ELPs at the micro-level, such as in the Saudi English department context. As explained earlier, most attention has been directed toward policies within the classroom. Policies outside the classroom (and at department level) have remained unaddressed. EFL departments have regularly applied ELPs as a daily practice. Evidence of this practice was found when participants in this study reported their views on whether their department ELPs were influenced by L2 research and the majority responded to suggest the existence of ELPs in their departments. The question raised by the current study is, what beliefs do staff members have on the occasions in which the use of English and Arabic is accepted and for what reasons?

Members of Saudi English departments actually believe English should be used in most occasions. In fact, a small proportion of respondents ( $n = 10$ ) asserted these departments should adopt *English only* policies in their domains. Several justifications were given for suggesting the extensive use of English. Expecting English departments to use English as a means of communication is logical. English is the specialty of the department, and all members have the ability to communicate using English. In EFL contexts, such as Saudi Arabia, English practice can be very limited with a need for exposure to English. Here, exposure to the language can lead to linguistic improvement (Pérez-Leroux *et al.*, 2004; Spolsky, 1989), and members of Saudi departments must be exposed to English more often. Given that an English department comprises a community of staff members who are specialists in the English language, they should provide a suitable environment to practice the language and maintain it, a notion supported by evidence from the study. Departmental encounters can offer authentic situations to practice English, considering some members are native or fluent speakers of English. Exposure to authentic situations for practicing English may not be possible in the EFL contexts (Parker *et al.*, 1995; Wu & Wu, 2008), but it is feasible with the existence of such members. Although certain members might feel that no need to practice English because they have already specialized in it, their proficiency levels will possibly deteriorate after a certain period with no practice. Furthermore, a conception may exist that the practice of English inside the classroom with students is sufficient. However, the type of language used with students can be rather simplified, in that a member cannot use complicated



structures. This scenario suggests the member has no proper practice with the language.

Although majority of the participants prefer to use English in most occasions, a large proportion suggested Arabic should be used on certain occasions, such as in sensitive occasions and to maintain better communication. Better communication likely means certain members find it easier to express themselves in Arabic (L1) than in English (L2) because they are more fluent in Arabic than in English. The findings suggest a considerable number of the participants care about conveying meaning accurately, even if this goal requires the use of Arabic. For example, although staff members in English departments are teaching English and are expected to use English for communication with students, Arabic should be used with students of low proficiency levels to allow for better communication. By contrast, English was commonly reported by participants to be used whenever a non-Arabic-speaking member is present, which is logical and ethical. For example, when two members are speaking in a language in the presence of a third member who does not speak that language, such an act is seen as impolite and inconsiderate because the third member may feel alienated or simply feel their conversation pertain to him/her.

A final remark to make is on whether ELPs should be limited to member–student encounters only or cover member–member encounters as well. The findings of this study did not provide a clear-cut decision on this issue. The findings indicate 45.2% of the participants preferred to limit ELPs to member–student encounters; 30% disagreed with this preference, suggesting their preference for ELPs to include member–member encounters. Moreover, 23.8% reported being neutral, suggesting the possibility of having preference for both types of encounter. An overview of these findings demonstrates certain members may not believe in governing how languages are used with colleagues but simultaneously believe in governing language use with students. In addition, others believe in governing language use in most, if not all, departmental encounters. The concern here is what happens when members holding these two ideologies are present in one department and are involved in designing ELPs? How successful would the process of creating these policies be? Moreover, how would that process affect their practice in the future: would they abide by them? The best action is probably to alter from adopting BUPs to TDPs should they fail to reach an agreement, an action that will ensure abiding by whatever policies being passed on by higher authorities.

## CONCLUSION

Saudi English higher educational departments use English and Arabic for several reasons in different departmental encounters. This study provides English departments and their institutions with an overview of staff members' beliefs on the use of English and Arabic outside the domain of the classroom. The findings obtained in this study demonstrate that current beliefs of those staff are as follows: using English-only policies at department level is not recommended because Arabic is viewed as necessary in certain situations and can perform functions that English cannot perform. Ac-

ordingly, staff members of English departments prefer to use English on most occasions because of its positive effect on their linguistic competency, among other reasons. Staff members' beliefs investigated in this study also include preference to limit ELPs to either student–student or student–staff encounters. The findings also suggest English is used for several reasons, the most common of which are for the maintenance of linguistic proficiency and the existence of non-Arabic speaking members. By contrast, Arabic is used at department level for other reasons, mainly for better communication with students with low proficiency levels and other individuals who do not speak English. Certain beliefs also hold that Arabic should be used when there is no requirement to use English and during informal occasions.

As to the limitations of this study, interviewing other female vice chairs was not possible because of the difficulty in reaching them and because of cultural restrictions in the country. Interviewing other female members holding administrative positions may allow other insightful findings. Future research is encouraged to explore students' beliefs on member–student ELPs outside the domain of the classroom and to compare their findings with the findings of the current study.

## END NOTES

1. The numbers in these codes are to distinguish between different regions, and the letters are to distinguish between different respondents in one region.
2. Several respondents provided a few invalid comments, such as giving a symbol or a number without any comment or indication.

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