

## Generational change and language in the UAE: The desertion of the Emirati vernacular

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**Abstract:** During the last decade, the Arabian Gulf region has been moving towards an increasing use of a 'Pan Gulf vernacular', "...a homogenised form of 'Gulf' speech not identifiable with any particular Gulf community" (Holes, 2011: 130), where new words are introduced or borrowed from neighboring Gulf countries and many others have disappeared from the local lexicon. In this paper I have a special interest in investigating the Emirati vernacular in more depth to identify the words that disappeared and were replaced by what is considered to be more semantically accessible words borrowed from neighboring Gulf countries. In this paper, I report on a survey that I conducted with the purpose of identifying the words lost from the Emirati lexicon, that are rarely or never used by Emirati university students. The word lists based on the words used in two typical and extremely popular Emirati TV serials: the first is *Sh-hafan* which was broadcast in the late 1970s, and the second is a popular animation called *firi:d3*; an animated media artifact started in 2006 which presented four old female characters that represent the different vernaculars currently used within the UAE. The survey was divided into three parts; the first measured the student's understanding of these words, while the second concentrated on the students' perception on the popularity of these words use to see whether they think that these words have really disappeared from the Emirati lexicon. The survey enabled us to outline the students' insights on the reason behind this language change. Finally, focus group was created to record students' perceptions and to measure the impact of this experience. The aim of this study is to measure whether modernity, globalisation and the extensive use of English by the new generations have caused the UAE to lose its dialects and head towards what is seen as an easier and more accessible dialect shared by the speakers in the this region.

**Keywords:** Emirati vernacular, Gulf vernacular, language change, sociolinguistics

### 1. Introduction

Over the last five to ten years, the United Arab Emirates have witnessed a huge shift in its vernacular – an observation that presented itself as a reality through the televised soap operas and series. This phenomenon has had a huge impact on the Emirati youth, who seem to lose many of the Emirati words to adopt instead "...a homogenised form of 'Gulf' speech not identifiable with any particular Gulf community" (Holes 2011: 130). A new version only maintained the Emirati words that became more popular and therefore understandable in other Gulf countries.

In this study, I conducted a survey that aimed to identify the words lost from the Emirati lexicon, and rarely or never used by Emirati university students. The word lists were based on the words used in two typical and extremely popular Emirati TV serials: the first is *Sh-hafan*<sup>1</sup> which was broadcast in the late 1970s, and the second is a popular animation called *firi:d3*,<sup>2</sup> an animated media artifact, started in 2006, which featured four old female characters that represent the different vernaculars currently used within the UAE. The survey is divided to three parts: the first measured the students' understanding of these words, while the second analysed the students' perceptions of the popularity of these words' use to see whether they think that these words have really disappeared from the Emirati lexicon. The survey also enabled us to outline the students' insights on the reason behind this language change.

The aim of this study was to measure if modernity, globalisation, the economic crunch and the extensive use of English by the new generations have caused the UAE to lose its dialects and head towards what is seen as an easier and more accessible dialect shared by the speakers in this region.

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1 In Emirati the word *Sh-hafan* means 'The Stingy One'.

2 In Emirati the word *firi:d3* means 'The Neighbourhood'. It is spelled 'Fereej' in the Roman alphabet.

## 2. Language change in the UAE

Language in the UAE has gone through a generational-based shift that started with the foundation of the UAE in the early seventies and continues today. This shift can be attributed to many reasons; starting from what Holes (2011: 130) described as the "Semi- permanent population of South Asian workers and South East Asian" and contact with more than 200 nationalities that reside in the GCC countries. According to the UAE National Census, there are around 7,316,073 foreigners living in the UAE in comparison with 947,997 nationals who represent 11.5% of the overall population. The number of foreigners residing in the UAE has also witnessed an enormous growth since 2005 when they represented 4,161,220.<sup>3</sup> According to Al-Khouri (2010: 6-7) "there are serious concerns among the GCC citizens that this significant influx of foreign workers has somehow challenged and altered the national identity of the countries".

Another factor that contributed to language change in the UAE is the clear educational shift that took place over the last few years announcing the use of English as a medium of instruction in all public universities, and then extending this policy to public schools which led to the recruitment of "456 native English speakers in an effort to improve English proficiency in Abu Dhabi schools" (Boyle 2012: 323). Also, the change that took place in social perceptions among the younger generation when it comes to education is marked by parents' continuous effort to provide their kids with an internationally recognized education. Last but not least, a shift took place in Gulf drama after the global economic crisis. Although this crisis did not have a huge impact on the UAE workforce population (Al-Khouri 2010: 3), it appeared to have an impact on GCC drama. This was marked by the dramatic increase of collaborative drama production represented by media serials and soap operas which rarely occurred in this form or shape before the economic crisis.

These shows, media serials and soap operas that used to represent specific countries linguistically and socially sought refuge in the collaborative drama. The main impact of such experiments which proved to be so popular and successful was on language. This collaborative production resulted in the melt down of the different vernaculars used by the participant actors who found themselves using a vernacular other than their own. Despite the fact that this did not result in the dominance of a specific vernacular, it did have an impact on popularising some of the words used in different GCC vernaculars and the disappearance of others.

Another descriptor of language change in the UAE is the enormous amount of code switching which might not only be attributed to the educational shift I referred to earlier, but also to "a complex (that exists) about their knowledge of Arabic grammar, which they are ashamed to admit is poor. They often say they feel more at home writing English..." (Holes 2011: 140).

That is in addition to the recent but proven effect of the social media on language and language users, especially among the younger generation of men and women all around the world. Crystal (2001: 216) writes:

The web is an electronic medium, and this is seen also in its multi-linguistic inclusiveness ... It offer(s) a home to all languages – once their communities have a functioning computer technology. This has been the most notable change since the Web began. It was originally a totally English medium ... but with the Internet's globalization, the presence of other languages has steadily risen.

Despite this, Arabic is no longer used as such. The use of social media limited the verbal interaction among family members and kept it to a minimum. In fact it has even affected verbal communication, in which I started to see the young Emirati generation going beyond code switching which also had an impact on their language resulting in the use of Roman letters/script to

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<sup>3</sup> United Arab Emirates National Bureau of Statistics (2010).

write Arabic messages. According to Peel (2004: 88), "...students often write Arabic 'in English' whilst mailing and chatting – i.e. they write Arabic employing Roman characters and attempt to replicate the sounds phonetically 'in English'". As a result, I ended up with a generation that prefers using their second language, with a minimal use of Emirati/Arabic words and gradually has given up on writing in Arabic.

### 3. *Firi:d3* and *Sh-ḥafan* as drama artifacts or a representation of the national identity

According to Fallata (2012: 1), "in cultural fields, the term 'artifact' is mostly used to refer to the physical items that help the group to define itself" or help "the group thrive, or a symbolic instrument that helps the group identify itself". In this sense, I do agree with her description of the cartoon show *firi:d3* as an artifact that did not just represent the Emirati language and culture, but also extended its mission to revive the use of the Emirati vernacular and culture among the young generation among whom this show became extremely popular. *firi:d3* has been described as the "first indigenous computer animated cartoon about four elderly grandmothers ... dealing with life in the fast paced, ever-changing, modern-day Dubai" (Fallata 2012: 6). According to Hussain (2009) this show is "the UAE's answer to The Simpsons", in which they have managed "to reflect the local customs and values of Arab gulf culture and lifestyle"<sup>4</sup> through the adoption of "language and manner of dress that are particular to the cultural identity of Arabian Gulf women ... allowing individuals to integrate their own perceptions and meanings of their local society" (Fallata 2012: 10-11).

A more simplistic but similar TV serial is *Sh-ḥafan*. It was produced in 1978 and named after the main character in the serial who was known for his stinginess. The serial is currently considered as a landmark in Emirati if not in Gulf TV production. The serial portrays Sh-ḥafan as the main character and the effect of his stinginess on his family and on his neighbours in a comedic frame.

The serial was a recently adopted into a cartoon, after the massive popularity of Emirati cartoons since the creation of *firi:d3*. And the name of this main character is still used up to today to refer to stingy people.

Both shows are also considered as representations of the Emirati national identity. While *Sh-ḥafan* represented life in the UAE in the 70s with all of its different aspects including language, *firi:d3* represented the current Emirati house hold; the four old ladies who varied in their educational and their origin and how they try to fit in Dubai's modern life.

Therefore examination of the vernacular used in these two TV serials marked the transformation that took place in the United Arab Emirates, not just culturally but also linguistically.

### 4. Methodology

This paper includes a triangulation of three measures: vocabulary lists, surveys and a focus group. 40 female engineering students were provided with two sets of vocabulary items and they were asked to define or provide a synonym of each word. They were also asked to mark words that they had never heard of, and to leave the words that they had been exposed to, but were unsure about their meaning, blank.

These vocabulary lists are based on the transcriptions of ten episodes from each show. The words chosen are words which are specifically used by Emiratis only. These words are grouped in two lists and students were informed of the origin of each list. This means that they started with an assumption that the *firi:d3* list would be easier for them to answer. Each list included between 30-35 words.

Then, a survey was administered. The survey included 35 statements, and the Likert scale was used in order to measure the informants' agreement with these statements. The survey was divided

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4 Hussain (2009), as quoted in Fallata (2012: 10).

to six sections: the demographics which might establish a link between the students' Emirate or age and gender and their vernacular use. The second section is designed to measure their general perceptions, i.e., whether they think that the Emirati vernacular is disappearing as time passes, and the reasons behind such a change. It also asked about their use of their second language and whether they think that they are more fluent in F2 in comparison to F1, and whether they think that the extensive use of L2 can reflect their educational background or enhance their image. Section three measures the effect of media and their perception on the vernacular currently broadcast and whether they think that the media are pushing towards a Pan Gulf vernacular. Section four focuses on the effect of the social media on language use in general and the Emirati vernacular in particular. Section five measures the effect of the multi-cultural nature of the United Arab Emirates and students' perceptions on the impact of this diverse society on the Emirati vernacular. The last part outlines a number of recommendations to measure students' preferences. Students were also given an additional space to put any further comments, observations or reflections based on their performance in both the vocabulary list and the statements mentioned in this survey.

A focus group was created composed of ten students among those who were exposed to the vocabulary list and the survey. The discussed was left open, in order to generate some form of debate, the questions asked by the instructor were only to redirect or generate more discussion or broaden the students' understanding of the topic.

Finally, a focus group that includes ten students from the survey population was assembled. These students volunteered and suggested creating a focus group to reflect back on this topic. The reason why they were eager to sit in this focus group is their shock and what they claimed to be an unexpected performance in the vocabulary lists.

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1. *Firi:dʒ and the revival of the Emirati vernacular*

The female students expressed their shock while doing task 1: the vocabulary list. They did not anticipate what they described as 'weak performance'. In fact, by the time they reached the second set of vocabulary items, they started questioning their social identity<sup>5</sup> and sense of belonging to the Emirati culture.

They also asked whether they could use these words in a sentence, or write English synonyms or include a drawing to describe the item as an alternative of writing a synonym. Students were given total freedom to use any of the previously mentioned options.

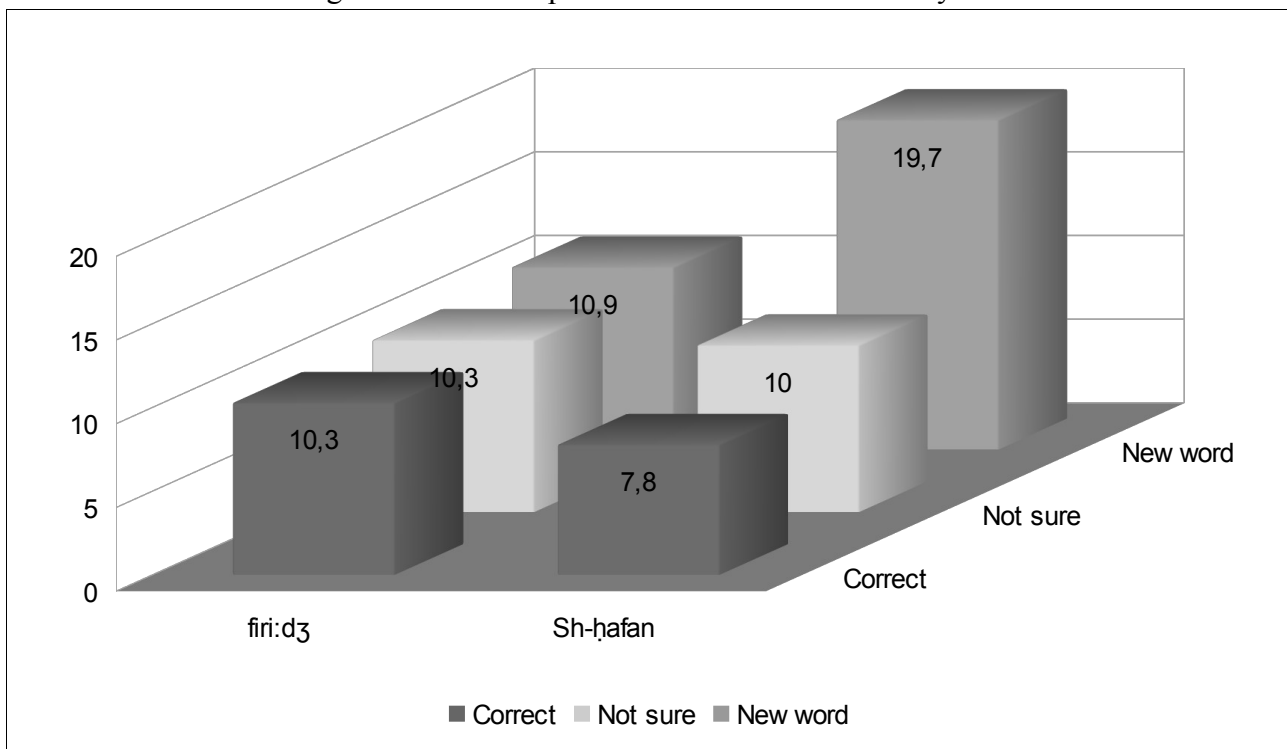
According to the results, students identified 10.3 words correctly, which represented 32.5% of the *firi:dʒ* list, and they were not sure about 10.3 words, which also represented 32.2%, and finally they identified 10.9 words as new words which represents 34.1%. In other words, students classified a third of the word list under each category (see Figure 1 on page 21).

In the *Sh-hafan* vocabulary list, there were some variations between the three categories; students identified 7.8 words correctly which represents 20.5% of this vocabulary list, while they were not sure about 10.3 words which is very much similar to the average number/percentage of words that they were not sure about in *firi:dʒ*. This represented 26.4% of the words. However, they identified 19.7 words as new words which is the highest figure among all and it represented 52% of the words which doubled in comparison to the words identified as new words in *firi:dʒ*.

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5 Social identity (or national identity) is identified as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1977, as quoted in Al-Khoury 2010: 4).

Figure 1: Students' performances in the vocabulary list



The results of task 1 were not anticipated. A significant difference in students' performance across the two vocabulary lists was predicted; students were expected to do better in *firi:d3* as it is a recent show, and the episodes chosen were broadcast in 2013, in addition to the fact that it is a very popular show among this age group. I also expected to see a significant drop in the students' performance in the *Sh-hafan* vocabulary list, since many of the words listed might not be recognized by an older age group in comparison to our population. This anticipated difference would be attributed to the time of its production – the late 70s – and the dramatic social change that occurred which would naturally lead to the disappearance of many words.

On the other hand, despite the fact that *firi:d3* aimed to revive the Emirati vernacular and culture through its four popular characters and bring them closer to the youngsters' hearts, the initial impression of an Emirati listener would be that most of the words used are too common and that the *firi:d3* production team should push more towards reviving more Emirati words.

However, the results proved that students did not recognise a third of these words and were not sure about the other third which they thought they may have heard before. This means that around 65% of the words that are specifically related to the Emirati vernacular used in this popular show were not understood by the young generation. This also means that *firi:d3* should be considered a very good attempt to expand the use of these words and make them more popular among this age group.

While the students' performance in *Sh-hafan* aligns with the initial predictions, they were also unexpected. Students did relatively well considering the fact that they struggled with the *firi:d3* word list. Students identified a total of 46.9% of the words either correctly or as words that they are familiar with but not sure what they meant, while they identified 52% of the words as new words, which is expected and would also be expected from an older person (someone in their 30s or 40s).

According to Fallata (2012: 3), the cultural codes embedded in these artifacts "are used to facilitate the communication within the group and remain decipherable to people of a specific culture while being incomprehensible to people from outside that same culture". But what if they

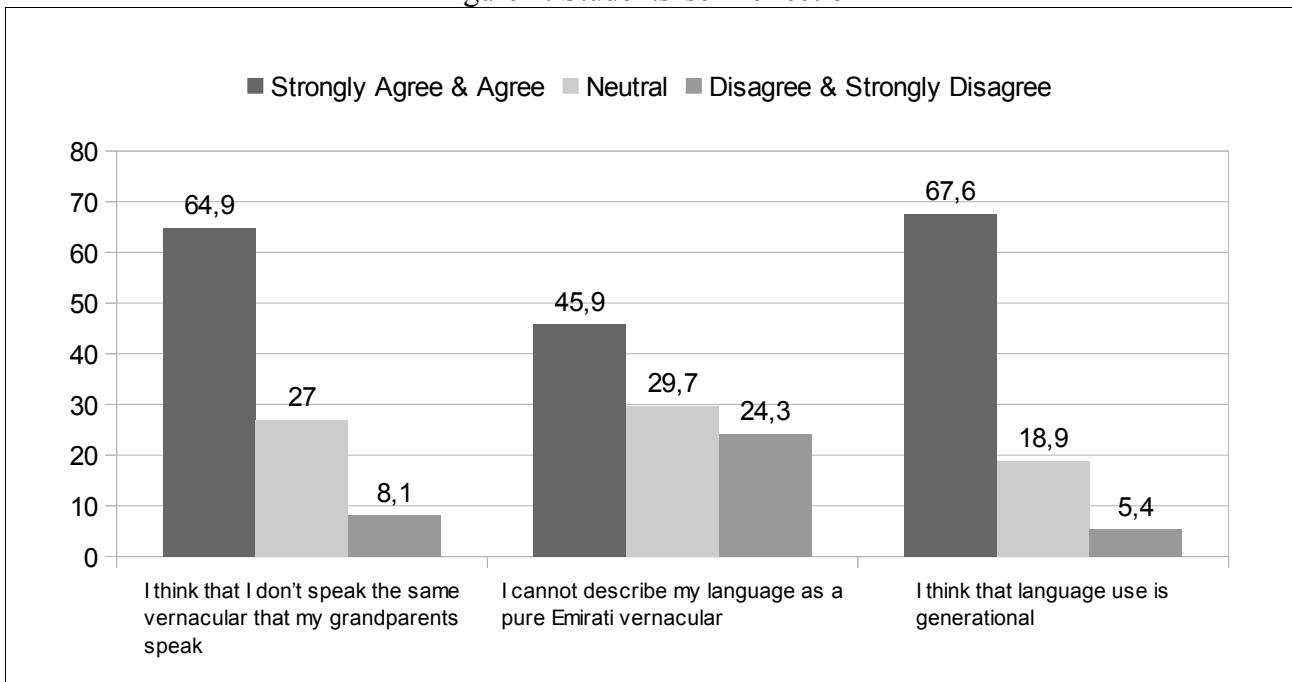
were not comprehensible by those who belong to the same culture? Such a question might not only raise questions regarding one's identity and sense of belonging as it did with our population, but it also raises questions on their understanding of what is going on around them and how they perceive themselves as being part of that community and perceive the world around them in relation to themselves.

5.2. *The survey: locating the Emirati vernacular*

The first part of the survey measured students' perceptions on their use of the Emirati vernacular and reasons that may have affected this use. The survey results indicated that 64.9% strongly agreed/agreed that they do not speak the same vernacular spoken by their grandparents, and 67.6% thought that the language use is generational or depends heavily on the context in which you live. These results reflect the students' awareness of the language change that took place in the United Arab Emirates within the same household.

The results also indicated that 45.9% of the students strongly agreed/agreed that they cannot describe their vernacular as a pure Emirati vernacular, while 29.7% were neutral, and 24.3 strongly disagreed or disagreed:

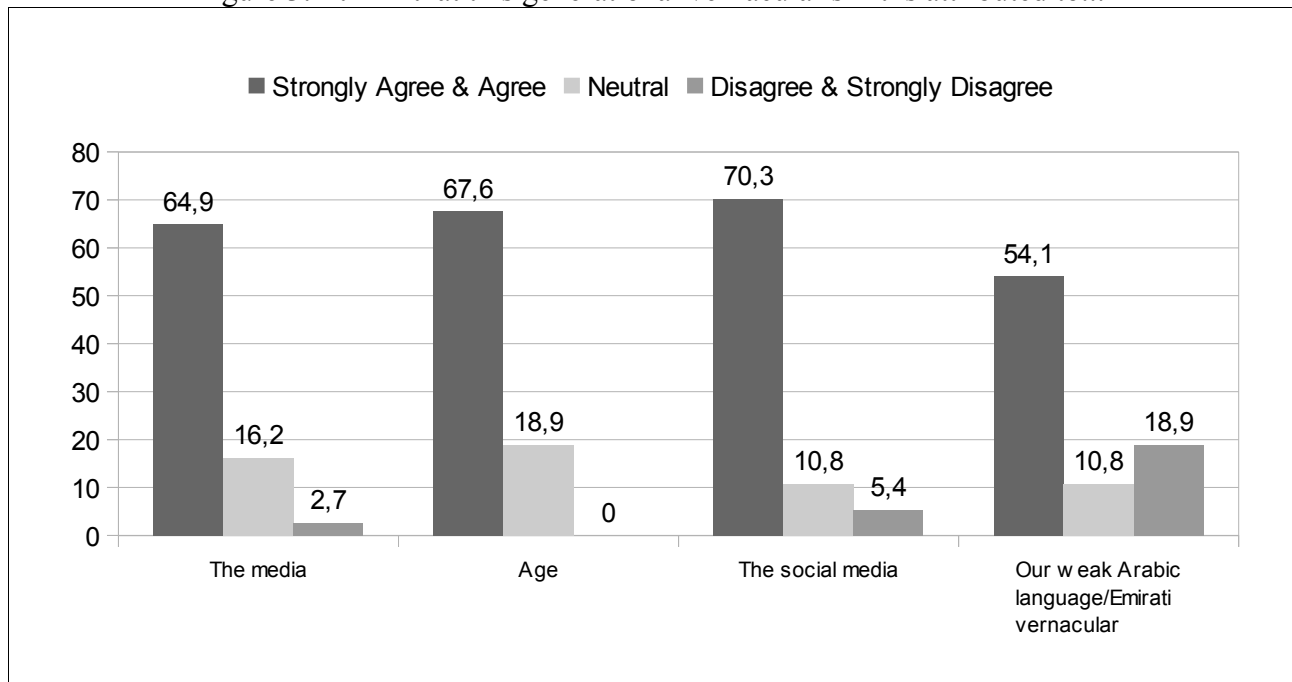
Figure 2: Students' self reflection



Students were also asked whether this shift in the Emirati vernacular could be attributed to the media, age, the use of technology and social media or their weak Arabic language/Emirati vernacular. 70.3% strongly agreed/agreed that the use of technology and social media could be a reason behind this shift, second came age differences with 67.6%, third is the effect of media with 64.9%, while 54.1% of the students strongly agreed/agreed that it can be attributed to their weak Arabic/Emirati vernacular (see Figure 3 on page 23). The fact that technology and the use of social media came first can be seen as an 'international phenomenon'. This generation does not redefine communication, but goes back to its basic meaning which in turn seems to have liberated its members and allowed them to use all sorts of forms such as emojis, Instagram pictures, video and audio short notes and any form or symbol to convey their messages much more quickly and more fluidly, at the same time making language users unable to define or specify the language they are

currently using.

Figure 3: I think that this generational vernacular shift is attributed to...



When students were asked about their perceptions on their use of English in comparison to their use of Arabic/Emirati vernacular, 54.1% of students disagreed/strongly disagreed that they use more English words than Emirati words, while 18.9% were neutral and 29.7% strongly agreed/agreed. Similarly, when they were asked to whether they find it easier to express themselves in English in comparison to Arabic/Emirati, 51.4% disagreed/strongly disagreed, 21.6% were neutral and 24.3% strongly agreed/agreed. 67.6% disagreed/strongly disagreed that that they use more English words to enhance their overall image or their education, 91.9% also disagreed/strongly disagreed that they use more English words because their Arabic language is not that good. While 64.9% disagreed/strongly disagreed that their use of English words is attributed to their fluency in English in comparison to Arabic (see Figure 4 on page 24).

On the effect of the media on the use of the Emirati vernacular, 56.8% of the students strongly agreed/agreed that they would prefer watching an American TV serial over an Emirati TV serial, while 78.4% of the students think there are very few pure Emirati TV serials. At the same time 56.8% strongly agreed/agreed that such serials might not appeal to everyone living in the UAE. 83.8% strongly agreed that *firi:dʒ* re-introduced the Emirati culture and vernacular in an entertaining way, and 59.5% strongly agreed/agreed that this serial uses many of the Emirati words that are not popular/commonly used these days which contradicted with the author's initial observation. They also strongly agreed/agreed that the Gulf media collaboration may have led to the creation of a Pan Gulf vernacular with a majority of 67.6%, and 64.9% strongly agreed/agreed that the media is heading towards a Pan Gulf vernacular (see Figure 5 on page 24)

One of the variables that I was interested in is the social media and its effect on the students' use of the Emirati vernacular. Students expressed their preference to use the Emirati vernacular instead of standard Arabic or English while using the social media represented by 62% who strongly agreed/agreed with this statement. On the other hand, when students were asked about the preference to use English, 40% strongly agreed/agreed.

Figure 4: Students' perceptions of the use of Arabic/Emirati vernacular versus English

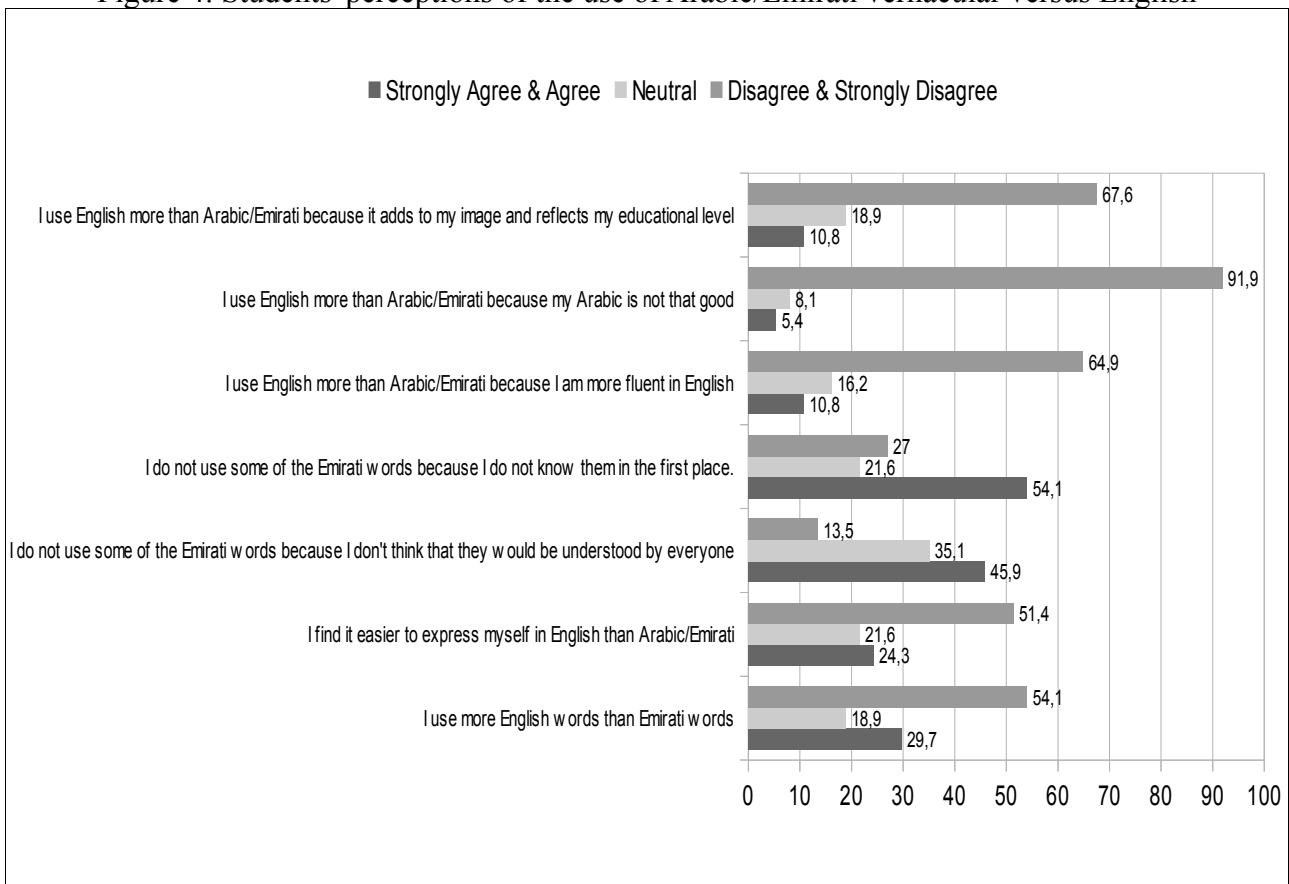
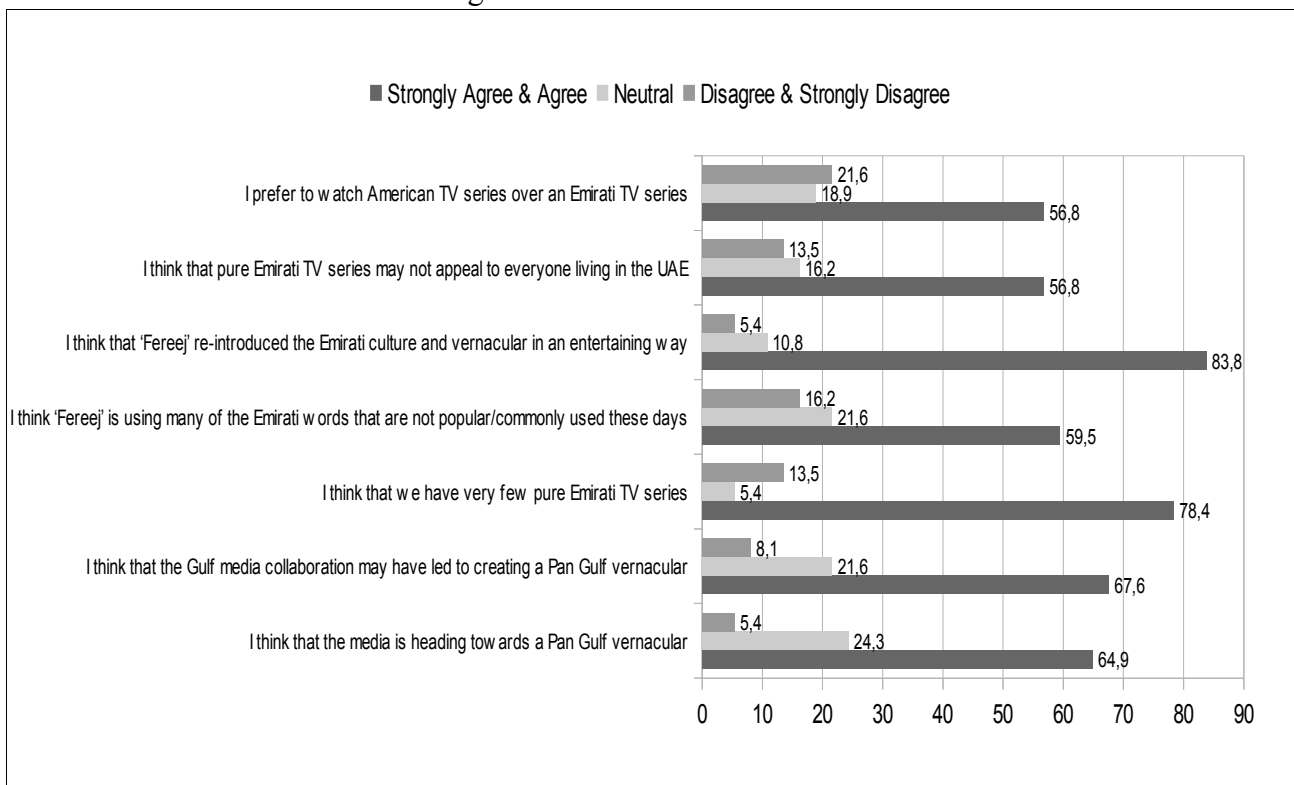


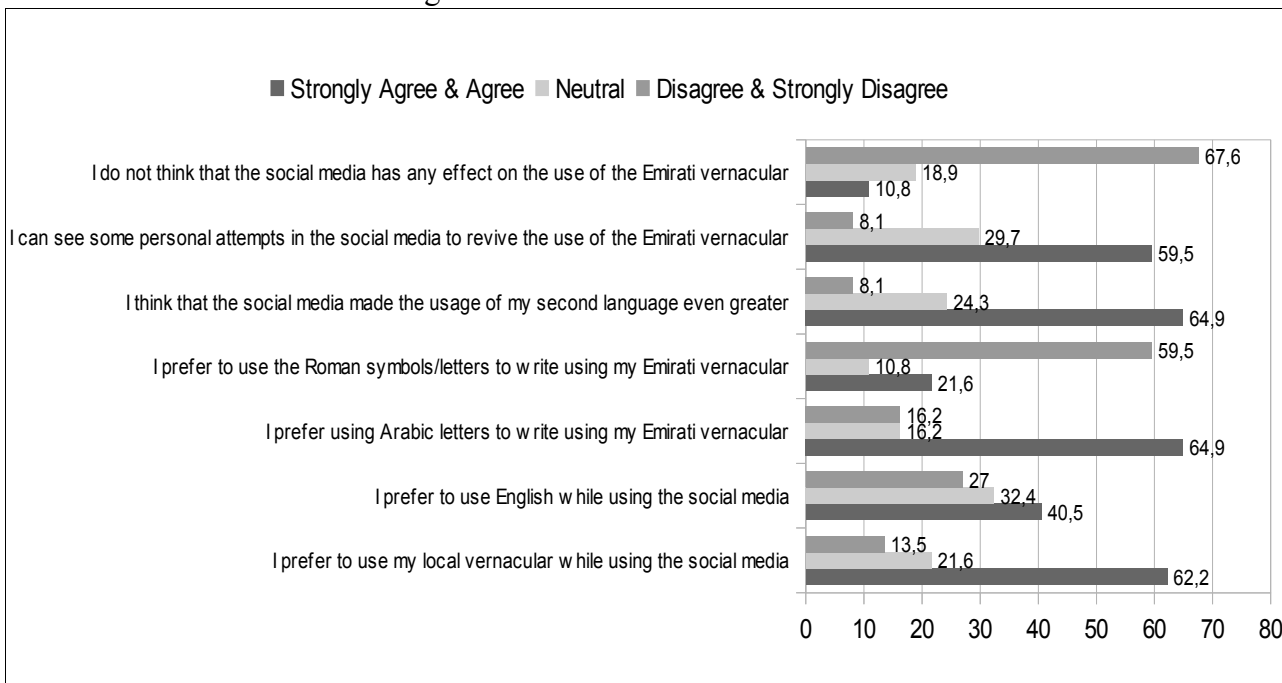
Figure 5: The effect of the media





According to the survey, students definitely preferred using Arabic letters while using the Emirati vernacular with 64.9% over the Roman symbols 21.6%. Students also confirmed that the social media affected their use of the Emirati vernacular with 67.6% and enhanced the position of their second language with 59.5% supporters of such a statement:

Figure 6: The effect of the social media



This also proves the previous argument; these answers do not correlate with the instructor's observation. After a quick look at any of the local university's student forums, an observer will immediately notice that students prefer to express themselves in English, and, although one may notice frequent code-switching, they tend to use Roman alphabets to express the Arabic words. However, the new models of language use and communication introduced through the use of technology may have led to several misconceptions when it comes to the self-awareness of our own language use.

Students attributed this language shift to the multicultural nature of the United Arab Emirates society, where a massive 91.9% strongly agreed/agreed on this statement. In addition 89.2% think that some of the Emirati words disappeared because they replaced them with English words, and 45.9% strongly agreed/agreed that they have stopped using some Emirati words because they don't think that they will be understood, which again highlights the diversity of the Emirati society (see Figure 7 on page 25).

Finally, the students were asked to express their agreement with a number of recommendations all of which they strongly agreed/agreed with (see Figure 8 on page 26). 91.9% agreed with increasing the number of TV serials that reinforce the forgotten Emirati words, while 78.4% strongly agreed/agreed that there should be some summer camps that would revive their use of these words. 86.5% of the students think that teaching the Emirati vernacular and culture should be integrated in the Emirati educational system, and they strongly agreed/agreed (83.8%) that Emirati courses should be made available for youngsters to revive the use of the Emirati vernacular.

Figure 7: Multiculturalism and its effect on the Emirati vernacular

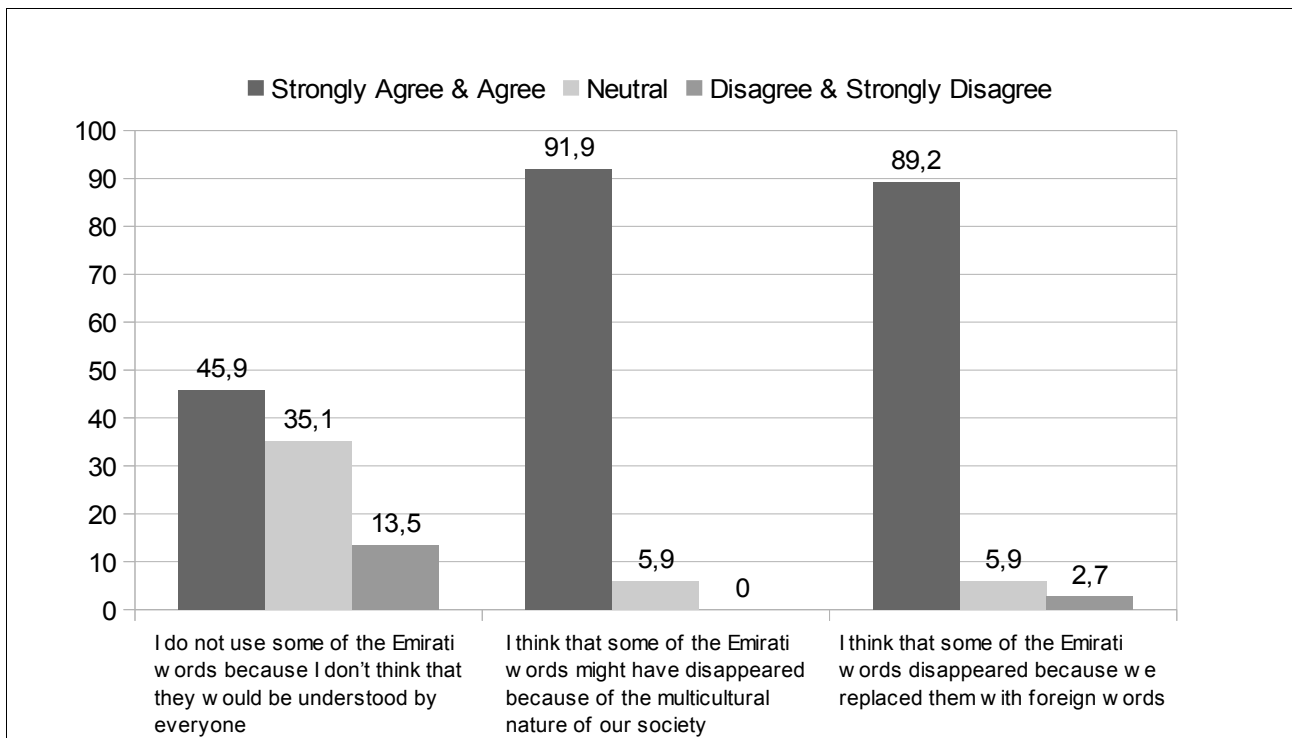
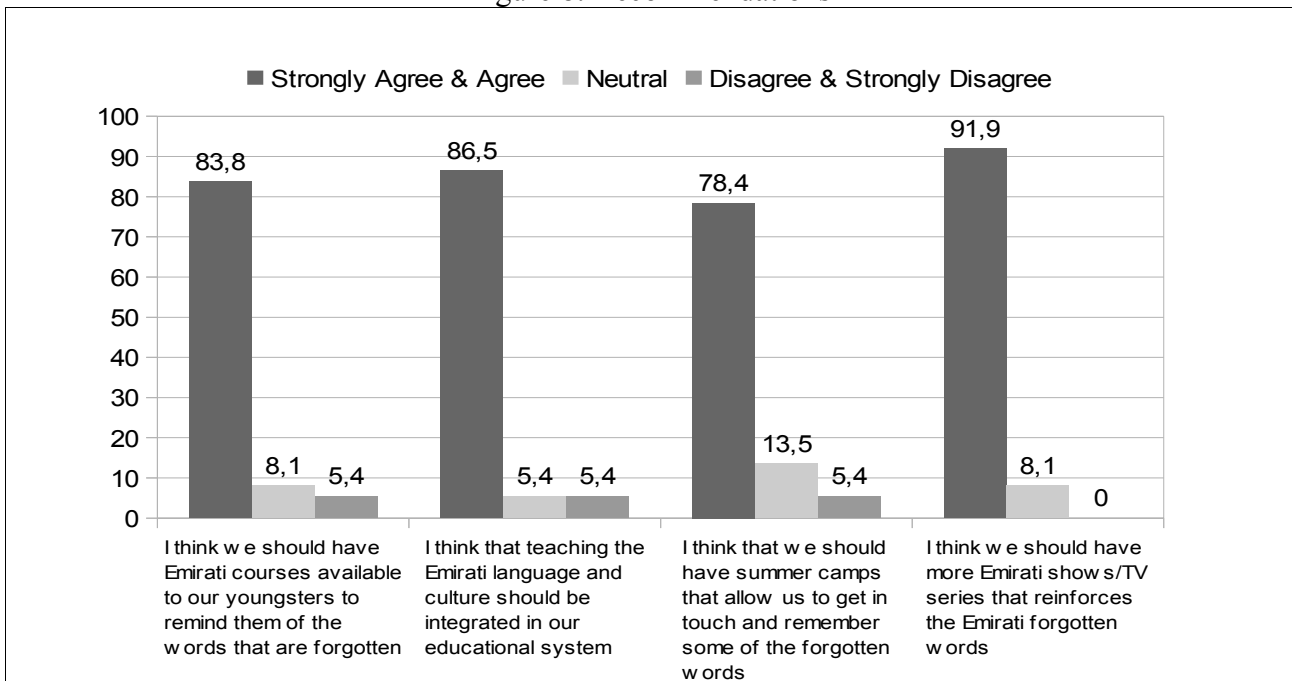


Figure 8: Recommendations



5.3. *The Emirati vernacular, a mirror of identity: focus group*

In the focus group, students expressed their shock at their own performance in the vocabulary list task. In fact, they emphasized some comments while doing that task, almost all comments were identity-related. According to them, eight of these students went back home to ask their family members about some of these words. They reported that such an activity raised their awareness, not just in terms of their actual use of these words, but also the relationship they established between

the use of the Emirati vernacular and their national identity.

One of the students suggested that it is the role of their families to reinforce such uses within their household, she referred to her family as an example and explained that they gather as a family around many Emirati Heritage Television game shows or programs to an extent that it became a 'family ritual'. According to her, that is what is expected of any Emirati family.

Some other students stated that they were not sure whether reviving the vernacular would help with the current status of English as the second official language in the UAE. Another student added that the issue is deeply rooted as it is not just related to the Emirati vernacular but to their use of the Arabic language in general. She also attributed their weak Emirati to their weak Arabic.

Students also raised questions regarding the documentation of the Emirati vernacular and the researcher reported that there are few books printed and asked them whether they would be interested to buy these books. Very few considered it a good idea.

The researcher also pointed to the individuals' attempt to revive the use of this vernacular among the younger generation by creating a number of Twitter accounts. Students were asked whether reaching them through Twitter would be more appealing and they answered positively, however, they were not sure whether they would continue to read what will be posted/tweeted on these page.

The instructor asked about the number of students who have been to any of the recently organized heritage events, and one out of the ten students had been to one of these events. Instead students suggested integrating a language component in a subject they used to take in school called 'national studies', and to redirect the curriculum towards a more practical, hands-on curriculum with a language component. So instead of learning about the agricultural or coastal communities in the UAE, they expressed their need to know the words these communities use and the names of the most essential equipment they used at that time, in an attempt to expand what might exist in museums to become more accessible.

They also suggested creating a new club and proposing a new event to be part of the Petroleum Institute's calendar to reinforce the Emirati vernacular, for example a heritage club or a heritage day.

#### 5.4. *English vs. Arabic: perceptions vs. reality*

Without doubt this research raised some prejudices among the students. Currently, there is extensive code switching practised by the Emirati youth, which went beyond the insertion of a number of English sentences with Arabic sentences to switching between both English and Arabic in the same sentence (Holes 2011: 139). In this research, I considered this phenomenon as a possible reason behind the disappearance of many words from the modern Emirati vernacular. A staggering number of students stated that they aren't more fluent in English than Arabic, and their Arabic is not weak, while, when they were asked whether they find it easier to express themselves in English in comparison to Arabic/Emirati vernacular, 24.3% strongly agreed/agreed and 21.6% were neutral, which is nearly half of the population. This might be seen as a sign of prejudice. Holes explained this by arguing that "they also often have a bit of a complex about their knowledge of Arabic Grammar, which they are ashamed to admit is poor. They often say they feel more at home writing English, but like to speak in a mixture of their native Arabic dialect, and their semi-native English" (Holes 2011: 140).

This prejudice is confirmed later when students were asked whether they use more English words in comparison to Emirati words; 29.7% strongly agreed/agreed, 18.9% were neutral and 54.1% disagreed/strongly disagreed. Their prejudice was also confirmed again when they were asked about their preference while using the social media. 40.5% strongly agree/agree, 32.4% neutral, 27% disagree/strongly disagree that they preferred to use English. While 62.2% strongly agree/agree, 21.6% neutral, 13.5% disagree/strongly disagree that they prefer to use the Emirati

vernacular. This once again indicates that there is tension between admitting something that they hold a lot of pride towards and the reality of the situation.

Students in almost all their answers were partially willing to admit or confirm reasons that may have contributed to this situation as long as it removed that blame from themselves. Moreover, since they have established a connection between Identity and their limited knowledge of many Emirati words regardless of their age and context, it became even more problematic for them to admit or approve of statements like: I do not know many Emirati words, I find it easier for me to communicate in English even if their scores in the first task proved the opposite.

However, they are comfortable enough to agree that there are very few Emirati TV serials (78.4%), that the Gulf media collaboration may have led to creating a Pan Gulf vernacular which is commonly used instead of the Emirati vernacular (67.6%), that the social media has an effect on the usage of the Emirati vernacular (67.6%), which made their usage of the second language even greater (64.9%), and finally multiculturalism might have contributed negatively to this situation (91.9%).

Their perceptions on the Emirati vernacular is that it is a vernacular which is currently not understood by everyone (45.9%), using it for a TV serial might not appeal to everyone living in the UAE (56.8%).

Consequently, all students agreed that there is a real need for a serious intervention to revive the Emirati vernacular or bring it closer to the youngsters. And although they refused to hold themselves responsible for the status quo, they were willing to take responsibility for any future step or action that may resolve this 'crisis' as they saw it. Their clear enthusiasm that appeared in both the recommendation section in the survey and focus group suggests that these students have managed to establish a clear connection between language and identity and they were more than willing to take a step after going through what they described as an "eye opening" experience to enhance or promote their identity through their Emirati vernacular.

### 5.5. *Identity construction*

The one shared aspect or reaction that witnessed while collecting the data and was not anticipated is the students' ability to establish a clear link between their use of the Emirati vernacular and their national identity. Identity is defined as "fixed and stable and is what people speak of when they talk about 'who we really are'" (Baker & Ellece 2011: 58), while others believe that can be "acquired" in that it is a conscious or internalized adoption of socially imposed or socially constructed roles" (Baker & Ellece 2011: 58).

It was clear that students saw the vocabulary lists as a representation of who they are, and their reflections in the focus group and recommendation proved that they also managed to see their social roles. In other words, while the vocabulary list questioned their self or personal identity represented by their use of the Emirati vernacular, they focused on their national identity and on identity "maintenance strategies" (Weatherall & Gallois 2005: 491).

According to Van Dijk, personal identity is divided to two parts; the mental representation of the personal self, versus the mental representation of the social self which consists of "a collection of group membership and the identification processes that are related to such representation" (Van Dijk 2000: 180-120). And according to these results, students identified language as one of these processes which manifested in their immediate reactions and verbal responses while answering the vocabulary list, and through the high level of prejudice observed in their survey answers.

## 6. **Conclusion**

Language change is inevitable, and it is what established civilizations. However, with a very young country such as the United Arab Emirates and the rapid social and economic changes taking place, students have managed to establish a direct connection between language and Identity. Therefore,

and because of the depth of this realization, they were not keen to take blame, yet they were ready to take responsibility for studying the different possibilities for future change and express a real need for solutions that may help in preserving their vernacular and therefore their identity.

Despite that, I need to emphasise what Holes (2011: 142) stated: "this does not mean that Arabic is 'dying'- far from it- but that the tectonic plates of the Arabic language as a means of communication are certainly shifting". The vernacular shift currently taking place not just in the United Arab Emirates but in all the Arabian Gulf countries is certainly not a sign of a vernacular death, as long as the so called 'tectonic shift' is still within the same household which is currently the case.<sup>6</sup>

However, I think that countries in the Arabian Gulf are facing a unique dilemma or, as Al-Allaq (2014: 118) describes it, "an awkward linguistic amalgamation". The shared impact of socio-economic changes and the ongoing globalisation might no longer matter as much as the impact of the new communication technologies which resulted in the creation of a new generation that have redefined communication. This generation liberated themselves from using a specific language, or a specific form or symbol to express themselves or convey a specific message. In this shift which can be described as an international phenomena, communicators are using a combination of Instagram pictures, selfies, appreciations, emojis, and voice notes to convey their messages. This international phenomenon explains the contradiction between the authors' and students' perceptions when it comes to language use.

In this case, and after considering all these factors, I can say that the linguistic shift that the Arabian Gulf region is experiencing puts them in a more critical and challenging situation. And despite the United Arab Emirates government's effort to revive the Emirati culture in general, there is a real need for future language planning to "interfere deliberately" (Wardhaugh 2006: 357) with the Emirati vernacular and reinforce its use among the young that would embrace the impact of the technological change and be sensitive enough to the fast pace of the regional socio-economic change and its impact on language use and language users.

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<sup>6</sup> The current shift in the use of the Emirati vernacular can still be measured and observed across the different generations within the household; where an observant may notice a marked distinction in language use between the grandparent, parent and child within the same family.

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